



Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

**ADVERTIMENT.** L'accés als continguts d'aquesta tesi queda condicionat a l'acceptació de les condicions d'ús establertes per la següent llicència Creative Commons:  [http://cat.creativecommons.org/?page\\_id=184](http://cat.creativecommons.org/?page_id=184)

**ADVERTENCIA.** El acceso a los contenidos de esta tesis queda condicionado a la aceptación de las condiciones de uso establecidas por la siguiente licencia Creative Commons:  <http://es.creativecommons.org/blog/licencias/>

**WARNING.** The access to the contents of this doctoral thesis it is limited to the acceptance of the use conditions set by the following Creative Commons license:  <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/?lang=en>

Writing the 'People's War'  
Evaluating the Myth of the Blitz in British Women's Fiction of the Second World War

Lola Serraf



**Universitat Autònoma  
de Barcelona**

Ph.D. thesis supervised by Professor Andrew Monnickendam  
Departament de Filologia Anglesa i Germanística, Facultat de Filosofia i Lletres  
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona  
July 2018



## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I am deeply grateful to my supervisor Professor Andrew Monnickendam for his generous support, wise advice and invaluable contributions to this thesis. I feel privileged to have been able to work with such an inspiring academic and dedicated teacher.

I would like to thank the members of my dissertation examining committee, Professor Debra Kelly (who kindly welcomed me at the University of Westminster), Doctor Cristina Pivadori and Professor Luis Alberto Lázaro Lafuente for taking the time to consider and evaluate this work. I also thank Doctor Christine Berberich and Doctor Jürgen Ronthaler for agreeing to read and comment on my study.

I am indebted to the many colleagues who supported me, particularly to Doctor Jordi Coral for his constant encouragement and welcome suggestions. This thesis would not have been possible without the financial support of the Universitat Autònoma, and I thank the English department for granting me a ‘Personal Investigador en Formació’ scholarship. Part of this work was also financed by the research project ‘Rewriting War: The Paradigms of Contemporary War Fiction in English’ (FFI2017-85525-P).

Thanks also to Eloi Puig-Mayenco, who embarked on this adventure with me in 2015, and has since then been the most supportive and thoughtful friend. Thank you to Christina Howes, my *compagnon de route* at university, always cheerful *dans les bons comme dans les mauvais moments*. Thanks to my dear friend Judith Hoekstra, for standing by me this past year and making our home the most enjoyable place to complete a thesis. Thank you to the Ogbonna-Marks family (Chloë, Theo, Henrietta, Andrew) in London, who warmly hosted me whilst I was conducting research at the British Library.

Last but not least, *merci infiniment à ma mère Caroline Lopez, qui a patiemment lu, relu et corrigé des centaines de pages et su apaiser de nombreux moments d’angoisse. Merci à mon père Hugues Serraf qui, lorsque j’avais à peine 14 ans, était déjà certain que je serais un jour docteur. Cette thèse est aussi un peu la vôtre.*



What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?  
Only the monstrous anger of the guns  
Wilfred Owen, 'Anthem for Doomed Youth'



## Table of Contents

<b>Thesis Outline</b> .....	1
<b>Introduction</b> .....	3
A) The ‘People’s War’ in Britain: Between Myth and Reality .....	3
1. The Blitz: September 7, 1940-May 11, 1941 .....	3
2. Collective Memory of the Bombings: The ‘Blitz Spirit’ .....	10
3. Memory and History: Deconstructing the ‘Myth of the Blitz’ .....	17
B) British Women’s Literature Of World War II .....	29
1. From World War I To World War II: A Transition From Soldier-Helper to Home Front Fighter .....	29
2. Women’s War Literature: ‘Resistance Writing’ .....	39
3. From Jenny Hartley to Kristine Miller: Women’s War Writing in Recent Studies .....	43
C) Aims and Methodology .....	48
<b>Chapter I: Patriotism at War</b> .....	57
A) <i>Anger in the Sky</i> (1943), Susan Ertz .....	68
B) <i>Miss Ranskill Comes Home</i> (1946), Barbara Bower .....	88
C) ‘Mysterious Kôr’ (1942), Elizabeth Bowen .....	112
<b>Chapter II: Class at War</b> .....	139
A) <i>Shelter</i> (1941), Marguerite Steen .....	149
B) <i>London Pride</i> (1941), Phyllis Bottome .....	168
C) <i>The Heat of the Day</i> (1948), Elizabeth Bowen .....	196
<b>Chapter III: Body at War</b> .....	219
A) <i>Account Rendered</i> (1945), Vera Brittain .....	228
B) <i>There Were No Windows</i> (1944), Norah Hoult .....	248
C) <i>Sunset Over Soho</i> (1943), Gladys Mitchell .....	272
<b>Conclusions</b> .....	303
A) General Conclusions .....	303
B) Implications .....	310
C) Further Research .....	311
<b>Works Cited</b> .....	315



## Note about Format

This thesis follows the APA referencing and formatting style, according to the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.)

## Thesis Outline

This thesis is divided into five different sections: an introduction, three chapters that each focus on three different novels, and a conclusion.

The first section outlines the historical and theoretical framework of my study. It highlights the main defining features of the 1940-41 Nazi bombings on Britain before focusing on the recent socio-historical reassessment of the Blitz period, more particularly on Angus Calder's *The Myth of the Blitz* (1991). The introduction also presents a literature review which surveys previous research on women's writing of World War II, going through some of the theories of Phyllis Lassner and Jenny Hartley in particular, leading me to establish a clear link between the social-historical study of the Blitz and the field of literary analysis. The section also exposes the main research questions of my work and introduces the literary corpus I base it on.

The first chapter of my thesis intends to reflect on women writers' representation of patriotism in relation to the public discourse of the 'People's War' through the close reading of three texts: *Anger in the Sky* (1943) by Susan Ertz, *Miss Ranskill Comes Home* (1946) by Barbara Bower and the short story 'Mysterious Kôr' (1942) by Elizabeth Bowen. The second chapter looks at the representation of social class issues in the novels *Shelter* (1941) by Marguerite Steen, *London Pride* (1941) by Phyllis Bottome and *The Heat of the Day* (1948) by Elizabeth Bowen. The third chapter focuses on the depiction of the physical and psychological consequences of the Blitz on the civilian body in another three novels: *Account Rendered* (1945) by Vera Brittain, *There Were No Windows* (1944) by Norah Hoult and *Sunset Over Soho* (1943) by Gladys Mitchell.

The conclusion of my work outlines the main findings of this study and presents directions for further research.



## Introduction

### A) The 'People's War' in Britain: Between Myth and Reality

#### 1) The Blitz: September 7, 1940-May 11, 1941

The Blitz (shortened from the German word *Blitzkrieg*, lightning war) was probably one of the most devastating attacks on civilians that Britain faced in the twentieth century. Between September 1940 and May 1941, one year into the Second World War, seventeen British cities were bombed by Nazi Germany. Over 40,000<sup>1</sup> civilians were killed (Richards, 1974, p. 217) and over two million houses were damaged or destroyed. For eight months, the night bombers of the *Luftwaffe* attacked London, Coventry, Birmingham, Liverpool, Plymouth, Bristol, Glasgow, Southampton, Portsmouth, Hull and seven other cities.

The Blitz began on September 7, now remembered as 'Black Saturday', when German bombers attacked London, killing 430 civilians and gravely wounding another 1,600. The bombing of the United Kingdom was the result of a rapid escalation of events starting on August 24, 1940 during the Battle of Britain. That night, Nazi bombers which were originally targeting docks and RAF airfields *accidentally* (as it is now assumed by Angus Calder (1969, p. 153)) raided central London. Because the German pilots went off course, the attack resulted in considerable fires in several areas of the city, serious damage to buildings in the East End, and nine people died. Winston Churchill immediately retaliated the following day by bombing Berlin. Less than two weeks later, London was the first city to become an official target of the *Luftwaffe*, marking the start of the Blitz.

The night of August 24 was a crucial turning point in a conflict where civilian deaths were previously solely the collateral damage of strategic bombing. Until then, the *Luftwaffe* did not specifically target civilian neighbourhoods, even though 'the targets they chose made it inevitable that large proportions of the population would be killed', a development that was

---

<sup>1</sup> Or even up to 43,000 (Rubinstein, 2003, p. 219), depending on the source.

however 'positively welcomed' by German leaders (Cooper, 1981, p. 165). General Walter Wever's 1935 *Conduct of the Aerial War*, adopted by the *Luftwaffe*, insisted on favouring the destruction of the enemy's armed forces and war production factories to the bombing of civilians (Luftwaffe, 1935, p. 141). Terror bombing was considered to be 'counter-productive', as it stimulated rather than destroyed the enemy's will to resist (Corum, 1997, pp. 143-144). James Corum writes:

The vital industries and transport centres that would be targeted for shutdown were valid military targets. It could be claimed civilians were not to be targeted directly, but the breakdown of production would affect their morale and will to fight. German legal scholars of the 1930s carefully worked out guidelines for what type of bombing was permissible under international law. While direct attacks against civilians were ruled out as 'terror bombing', the concept of attacking vital war industries—and probable heavy civilian casualties and breakdown of civilian morale—was ruled as acceptable. (ibid., p. 240)

Although Alexander Downes refers to Hitler's original refusal to bomb British cities as a 'moral restraint' (2008, p. 155), the Nazi leader's reticence to bomb London was perhaps more of the domain of financial caution. Alan S. Milward, a British economic historian, theorises what he defines as Adolf Hitler's 'Blitzkrieg economy' (1965, p. 11), which he states was as much an economic and political strategy as it was a military plan. The goal for the Nazi leader was to 'conquer most of continental Europe within a short space of time' whilst 'maintaining living standards', and 'thus support for the regime at home' (Lynch and Guirao, 2012, p. 4). War needed to be fought 'with the maintenance of consumption at levels necessary to retain sufficient domestic support for the Nazi regime' (ibid.). Therefore, Hitler aimed to win 'lightning victories' which 'implied a succession of rapid knock-out blows delivered against the enemy's forces from a position of strength without requiring the full-

scale and permanent mobilization of the country's economy and society' (ibid., p. 3). The Third Reich was less a 'society that found bombing of civilians abhorrent' than one that found 'the costs of fighting unacceptable' (Downes, 2008, p. 155). Hitler's disinclination to bomb civilians, which would in turn bring the war home to German cities, was intimately connected to the Reich's financial strategy and his own desire to maintain political prestige, as he strived to avoid any 'displacement to civilian economy' (ibid., p. 152) and protect his people from bombs.

Churchill's decision to bomb Berlin<sup>2</sup> put an end to Hitler's reluctance to target civilians and his conviction that 'the possession of intact cities might make the British feel that they had more to gain by peace' (Quester, 1966, p. 111). The Nazi leader had previously expected that, as in Eastern Europe,<sup>3</sup> the threat of German reprisal would force the Allies to adopt a policy of moderation and not start a dangerous and costly strategy of unrestricted bombing. Churchill's offensive on Berlin on August 25, 1940 proved this assumption wrong. Hitler, worried about the escalating costs of the *Luftwaffe*<sup>4</sup> and more importantly about his decreasing popularity, decided to mount another one of his Blitz attacks, a 'terror offensive'

---

<sup>2</sup> Some historians argue that Churchill ordered a raid on Berlin hoping that Hitler would directly attack London in retaliation, therefore giving some respite to the RAF Fighter Command, 'a rare example of a leader inviting strikes on his own *civilian* population to reduce his country's *military* losses' (Downes, 2008, p. 151). The Prime Minister later wrote that 'it was therefore with a sense of relief that Fighter Command felt the German attack turn on to London on September' (Polmar and Allen, 2012, p. 144).

<sup>3</sup> The Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, also known as the Nazi–Soviet Pact, the German–Soviet Non-aggression Pact or the Nazi German–Soviet Pact of Aggression was a neutrality pact between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union signed in Moscow on 23 August 1939 by foreign ministers Joachim von Ribbentrop and Vyacheslav Molotov. (Adolf Hitler ended the pact by launching Operation Barbarossa on 22 June 1941.)

<sup>4</sup> By this time, Germany was already weakened by the ongoing Battle of Britain. Considered one of the first battles fought nearly exclusively in the air, the Battle of Britain opposed the RAF to the *Luftwaffe* from July 10, 1940 to October 31, 1940. The objective of Nazi Germany was to intimidate Britain into negotiating for peace as it began an air and sea blockade in major ports. Yet, 'over the whole campaign the German air force lost 1,733 aircraft and the RAF 915' (Overy, 2009, para. 24). On September 15, 'Battle of Britain day', the RAF declared they had destroyed 185 German aircraft. Richard Overy explains that 'the real figure was 60, with 20 seriously damaged, but this represented 25% of the attacking bomber force, a rate of attrition the German side could no longer contemplate' (ibid.). The British managed to prevent Hitler from gaining air superiority, and the Führer eventually cancelled 'Operation Sea Lion', the planned invasion of Britain.

against Britain in order to produce a stalemate in which both sides would eventually hesitate to use bombing at all. The *Führer* ‘turned to civilian victimization as a means to manage costs and produce victory’ (Downes, 2008, p. 155). On September 5, 1940, Hitler lifted his ban on bombing London and, from then on, Germany hoped that ‘*Terrorangriffe* would bring the British to their senses’ (Overy, 1978, p. 160).

The *Luftwaffe* aimed to demoralise the British and scare them into seeking peace, a strategy that combined instructions to target residential areas as well as ‘the armaments industry (particularly air armament)’ (from General Halder’s war diary, quoted in Overy, *ibid.*). The aim was to attack ‘constantly night and day in order to destroy the city’ (*ibid.*). In a particularly aggressive speech delivered in September 1940, Hitler threatened:

If the British Air Force drops two or three or four thousand kilograms of bombs, then we will in one night drop 150,000, 230,000, 300,000 or 400,000 kilograms of bombs.

If they announce that they will attack our cities on a large scale, then we will wipe their cities out. (Moorhouse, 2010, p. 141)

In Britain, the Home Office had been thinking about the eventuality of mass bombing since as early as 1922, when Lord Balfour predicted the possibility of ‘unremitting bombardment of a kind that no other city has ever had to endure’ (quoted in Titmuss, 1950, p. 5). After experiencing the German strategic bombing campaign against England during World War I,<sup>5</sup> Britain expected the consequences of the bombing of cities to be devastating. Assuming Nazi Germany would drop around seven hundred tons of bombs a day for several weeks, as well as resorting to poison gas, and this in a considerably more accurate manner than they had done in the previous war, Churchill’s government anticipated the worst (Titmuss, 1950, pp. 4–6, 9,

---

<sup>5</sup> The air raids on England during the First World War, especially in 1915, did not have dramatic military consequences, but managed to heavily disrupt industrial production. The bombings caused widespread alarm in a population terrified of the Zeppelins, the ‘baby-killer’ airships. The Zeppelins killed 557 people (Liddell Hart, 1934, p. 76) and airplanes raids resulted in 835 deaths (Fredette, 1974, p. 266). These raids led to the creation of the RAF on April 1, 1918, after concerns were raised about Britain’s defence resources against the German bombers.

12–13). As aircraft technology rapidly improved in the 1930s, the vast majority of the British population believed that ‘the bomber will always get through’<sup>6</sup> and in 1939 military theorist Basil Liddell-Hart estimated at 250,000 the number of deaths and injuries that could occur in the first week of an air attack (Field, 2002, p. 13).

Added to the physical casualties, the government also feared mass psychological trauma and the collapse of a society collectively dreading the catastrophe portrayed in popular works of fiction. Novels like H. G. Wells’ *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933) and *The War in the Air* (1908), in which the author described New York City (which had ‘long ousted London from her pride of place as modern Babylon’ (Wells, 1924, p. 171)) being bombed by German ‘flying machines’ (p. 346), detailed the ‘panic rush’ (p. 182) of the population at the sight of the planes. In 1956, Harold Macmillan said the British in the 1930s ‘thought of air warfare in 1938 rather as people think of nuclear war today’ (1966, p. 575). Studies predicted that the number of psychiatric patients would be three times that of physically injured victims, that is to say up to three of four million traumatised civilians (Titmuss, 1950, p. 20).

Furthermore, it was expected that a large part of the British population would flee the bombed cities. Winston Churchill told Parliament in 1934: ‘We must expect that, under the pressure of continuous attack upon London, at least three or four million people would be driven out into the open country around the metropolis’ (Field, 2002, p. 13). Yet, despite all

---

<sup>6</sup> A phrase used by Stanley Baldwin in 1932, thrice Prime Minister, in his speech ‘A Fear for the Future’ to the British Parliament. He believed that despite the efforts being put in to the building of a strong defence, the bombers would always be in sufficient numbers to destroy cities:

I think it is well also for the man in the street to realise that there is no power on earth that can protect him from being bombed. Whatever people may tell him, the bomber will always get through. The only defence is in offence, which means that you have to kill more women and children more quickly than the enemy if you want to save yourselves. [...] If the conscience of the young men should ever come to feel, with regard to this one instrument [bombing] that it is evil and should go, the thing will be done; but if they do not feel like that—well, as I say, the future is in their hands. But when the next war comes, and European civilisation is wiped out, as it will be, and by no force more than that force, then do not let them lay blame on the old men. Let them remember that they, principally, or they alone, are responsible for the terrors that have fallen upon the earth. (1932, p. 7)



this and even after the tragedy of the bombing of Guernica in 1937,<sup>7</sup> considered the first aerial attack on a defenceless civil population, the British government was surprisingly unprepared to face the German bombs.

A mass evacuation was organised in the early days of September, known as ‘Operation Pied Piper’. Three million people from major British cities, mostly schoolchildren, were sent to the countryside. David Prest describes it as ‘an astonishing event, a logistical nightmare of co-ordination and control beginning with the terse order to “Evacuate forthwith”, issued at 11:07 a.m. on Thursday 31, August 1939’ (2011, para. 2). Parents were encouraged to send their children to safer places in the light of ‘grossly exaggerated’ predictions of four million civilian casualties in London alone. The evacuation plan was however ‘hopelessly flawed’ and badly prepared as hundreds of children arrived in areas where there were not enough homes to accommodate them, and insufficient rations to feed them. Prest depicts Sir John Anderson, the man in charge of evacuation, as ‘a cold, inhuman character with little understanding of the emotional upheaval that might be created by evacuation’ (para. 6).

For the civilians who stayed in the cities (the vast majority), the authorities were ill-equipped in terms of facilities to protect them from the bombs. Expecting a bomb to kill most of the civilians in the area where it was dropped, the government only offered a partial solution to the shelter problem. The Anderson shelters<sup>8</sup> that were provided to mainly middle-class families (according to Mass-Observation, only a quarter of households had a garden in which to erect the shelter (MO 1940, p. 119)) were unpopular as they proved to be very inefficient, too small and easily flooded. The government stopped producing these in 1940 and turned to supplying ‘surface’ shelters, intended to fit up to fifty people, which in turn ‘ran

---

<sup>7</sup> The bombing of Guernica was an aerial attack on the Basque town of Guernica on Monday, April 26 1937. Forty-four planes from Nazi Germany and thirteen from Fascist Italy, supporting the Nationalist coup against the government of the Second Spanish Republic bombed the town, killing 1,654 people (Brey, 1977, p. 10).

<sup>8</sup> The Anderson shelter was designed in 1938 and could protect up to six peoples in buried panels of corrugated steel. A family would receive a shelter for free as long as they earned less than £250 a year, the others had to pay. Less than a thousand shelters were actually sold (Calder, 1969, p. 180).

headlong into another shortage, that of cement' (Calder, 1969, p. 180). A shelter census of November 1940 records that 4% of the Londoners sought refuge in the underground,<sup>9</sup> 9% in public shelters (basement and trenches) and 27% in domestic shelters (O'Brien, 1955, p. 392). This means 60% of the population stayed at home, hoping for the best.

One of the most serious consequences of the bombings the government had to face was housing. In the space of a few weeks, thousands of people were made homeless. The attacks did not kill as many people as expected and 'fewer people left London during the first nine months of air attack than the numbers who went away either just before or just after the declaration of war' (Titmuss, 1950, pp. 358-360). According to Angus Calder, 1,400,000 Londoners were left without a home between September and May, meaning 1 out of 6 London residents found themselves homeless (1969, p. 188). The poorer populations were the most severely affected as most of the raids at first were concentrated on the East End, and poorer workers could not as easily seek refuge in a second home.

The bombs fell nearly every night, with few interruptions, until the spring of 1941. The week that followed the night of May 10, 1941 was quiet. Whilst at first 'the average Londoner was disposed to give the main credit for the Germans' failure to continue the blitz to unsuitable weather', 'that quickly lost credibility, and the increasing strength of London's defences was then taken to be the major factor' (Ziegler, 2015, p. 179). Thanks to radars, 'seventy German aircraft had been shot down, about the same number as in the first four months of the blitz' (pp. 180-181). The Londoners were 'slow to believe their luck' and only cautiously started to believe the Blitz was over a month later (ibid.). In the meantime, the German army had to face other matters on the Eastern front:

---

<sup>9</sup> At first, the authorities blocked the access to the platforms, as they wanted to prevent people spending time in the Tube from creating a 'deep shelter mentality', the fear that 'hordes of people would descend into the bowels of the earth and never come out' (Richards, 2011, section 'The Myth of the Blitz'), therefore not participating to the war effort. The civilians forced their way in and were later allowed to take shelter in the Tube.

In April 1941 the Germans had overrun Greece and Yugoslavia. British and Commonwealth forces had fallen back on Crete. To attack the island, the Germans would have first to launch an air offensive. On 20 May the attack began. It did not seem farfetched to see some link between this and the sudden peace over London. Only a month later, when Germany invaded Russia, did it become clear that, whatever the contributory factors, the main cause for the ending of the blitz had been Hitler's decision to postpone the invasion of the British Isles and instead launch a vast operation in the East. (p. 180)

The Blitz lasted for nine months and had devastating, unprecedented consequences on civilians who, willingly or not, became what I would label as home front soldiers. The Air Raid Precaution Wardens, the Women's Voluntary Services and thousands of humble, 'little men' were the driving force behind home front safety measures and are remembered today as the central symbols of the 'Blitz spirit'.

## 2) Collective Memory of the Bombings: the 'Blitz Spirit'

British collective memory of the Second World War recalls three main events of the years 1940 and 1941 as heroic: Dunkirk (May 26—June 4, 1940), the Battle of Britain (July 10—October 31, 1940) and the Blitz (September 7, 1940—May 11, 1941). From the night when the first bombs fell on Britain up until today, the Blitz has been remembered as Britain's 'finest hour', as Winston Churchill predicted in his June 1940 speech.<sup>10</sup>

During the first years of the war, the country was marked by the overwhelming political presence of Churchill, whose speeches described a future that could not be dissociated from complete victory. The heroic union of all the British behind their Prime Minister, the royal family and their Empire was established as a *sine qua non* of the victory of

---

<sup>10</sup> Winston Churchill told the House of Commons of the Parliament on 18 June 1940, a month after he took over as Prime Minister: 'Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves, that if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, "This was their finest hour"' (1940b).

civilisation over cruelty and inhumanity. The image of a ‘lonely’—between July 1940 and the beginning of Operation Barbarossa in June 1941, Great Britain was the only European state still resisting Hitler—but strong and united country is one that has since then constantly been reused in political speeches and speaks to a vast majority of the population.

Margaret Thatcher in 1982<sup>11</sup> or Tony Blair<sup>12</sup> and members of the royal family<sup>13</sup> in 2005 after the terrorist attacks in London referred to the typical ‘Blitz spirit’ to seek support from and stir feelings of unity in the people. The nation’s resistance during World War II has forged the idea of a ‘People’s War’, of victorious civilians. The following subsection aims to highlight what specific values were promoted during the Blitz months in Britain: courage and resilience, unity and solidarity in the fight against evil.

The main word that keeps coming back when one reads political or historical accounts of the Blitz published before the late 20th century is ‘high morale’. The consensus seems to be

---

<sup>11</sup> In her speech on the Falklands war to the Conservative Rally at Cheltenham on July 3, 1982, Thatcher reminds us of the British people’s legendary courage and patriotism:

This generation can match their fathers and grandfathers in ability, in courage, and in resolution. We have not changed. When the demands of war and the dangers to our own people call us to arms—then we British are as we have always been: competent, courageous and resolute’. In her words just as in Churchill’s, Britain ‘fought alone’ to ‘show that aggression does not pay and that the robber cannot be allowed to get away with his swag’. (Thatcher, 1982, para. 8).

<sup>12</sup> In his first Commons speech after the attack of July 7, 2005, Blair refers to the civilians’ resilience during the Blitz:

As for Londoners themselves, their stoicism, resilience, and sheer undaunted spirit were an inspiration and an example. At the moment of terror striking, when the eyes of the world were upon them, they responded and continue to respond with a defiance and a strength that are universally admired. [...]

Yesterday we celebrated the heroism of world war two including the civilian heroes of London’s blitz. Today what a different city London is—a city of many cultures, faiths and races, hardly recognisable from the London of 1945. So different and yet, in the face of this attack, there is something wonderfully familiar in the confident spirit which moves through the city, enabling it to take the blow but still not flinch from re-asserting its will to triumph over adversity. Britain may be different today but the coming together is the same. (2005, para. 3, 23)

<sup>13</sup> Prince Andrew said: ‘The way that Londoners pulled together was quite extraordinary’, and the Duchess of Cornwall remarked ‘it was very sort of British, wasn’t it?’, whilst the Queen explained that ‘sadly we in Britain have been all too familiar with acts of terror and members of my generation especially at this end of London, know that we have been here before’ (all quoted in Hamilton, 2005, p. 7).

that, during the war, British citizens constantly remained calm, even cheerful, when facing the German bombs every night.

Churchill's reassuring and encouraging words reinforced this idea, as he stated on April 27, 1941 on the BBC that 'it is where the ordeal of the men, women and children has been most severe' that he found their morale 'most high and splendid', adding he felt 'encompassed by an exaltation of spirit' and 'joyous serenity' (1941a). In the post-war period, Richard Titmuss highlighted in *Problems of Social Policy* (1950) that there was next to no panic during the air raids, and that morale was sustained throughout the nine months of the Blitz (p. 343). Angus Calder, in his first book, *The People's War* (1969), also claimed that morale 'did not collapse', and refers to those brave civilians who 'preferred to stay', 'night by night', setting 'an example of calm and courage which others, in their turn, felt constrained to follow' (pp. 166-167). In his chapter on the Blitz, Calder chose to describe the Londoners' high spirits by using the personal account of a man from Hampshire visiting the capital, who is surprised by 'an indefinable light-heartedness' (p. 174). People are 'taking it'—a phrase that Terence O'Brien argues undoubtedly 'reflected the reality of the situation' (1955, p. 401)—carrying out their daily task in a particularly joyful mood:

Shops became a favourite symbol of defiance. Big and small, they had their windows blown out. The West End stores would erect painted wooden fronts with only tiny panes of glass to replace them; the little fruiterers and grocers would often do without any glass at all. The impromptu signs became favourite blitz jokes. 'MORE OPEN THAN USUAL' was a common one. 'BLAST!' was the most laconic. One pub advertised, 'OUR WINDOWS ARE GONE BUT OUR SPIRITS ARE EXCELLENT. COME IN AND TRY THEM'. (Calder, 1969, p. 174)

Cartoons published in newspapers in 1940 and 1941, especially Joseph Lee's 'Smiling Through' series for the *Evening Standard*, also capture the 'merry' spirit of the period:



Smiling Through: Blitz Birds.  
 'I give you my word, Martha, I've never seen such worms'.  
 Joseph Lee, Evening Standard. (no date available)  
 The British Cartoon Archive ©.

Hose pipes became a familiar sight in London during 1940-1941, as they were used to put out fires of burning houses. Lee's 'Blitz Birds' were probably designed to foster optimism.



Smiling Through: Warden's Despair.  
 'Yes, quite blitzy tonight. I'm glad I came out with my umbrella'.  
 Joseph Lee, Evening Standard. (no date available)  
 The British Cartoon Archive ©.

To some extent, cartoons such as this one act to suppress a horrifying reality. Perhaps they also reprimand what was seen as selfish behaviour, supporting the famous 'Careless Talk Costs Lives' campaign.<sup>14</sup> The cartoon could also be understood as encouraging Londoners to continue living their lives as normal.

Regular weekly morale reports were produced by the Intelligence branch of the Ministry of Home Security. In October 1940, R. H. Parker, head of the Home Publicity Division, recorded that 'there is little appearance of nervous or physical overstrain [...]. Nothing has affected the

<sup>14</sup> Careless talk propaganda discouraged discussing sensitive material where it could potentially be overheard by enemy spies. It also aimed to avoid the rapid spreading of morale-sapping rumours.

unconquerable optimism of the cockney, nor has anything restricted his ready, if graveyard, humour' (PRO, HO199/444, 1940).<sup>15</sup>

It is this image of the 'People's War' that has become the staple of documentaries and feature films, literature and museums exhibits, heritage tourism, and all forms of popular history. Even in more recent accounts of the Blitz, the memory of it has not changed. John Boorman's 1987 film *Hope and Glory*,<sup>16</sup> based on the director's own personal memories, narrates the Blitz through the eyes of a nine-year old Londoner. The scenes, at times funny and at others sad, highlight the resilience and the humour of the British on the home front. In a similar vein, the Channel 4 reality TV show 2001 *The 1940s' House* follows the adventures of an English family who volunteer to live under wartime conditions for a set period of time. This means food rationing, sewing black-out curtains, trying to grow vegetables in the backyard, and digging the ground to set up an Anderson shelter. Several historians and 'experts' formed a 'War cabinet' to direct the show and push the family through six years of war in a few weeks. The episodes emphasise the courage of wartime civilians who survived in drastic conditions and never gave in to panic of fear.

Where does this high morale come from? What was the main drive behind the people's apparent insouciance? Titmuss, who goes as far as claiming 'the mental health of the nation *improved*' during the war, attributes it to a universal will to work under the stress of national necessity (quoted in Jones et al., 2004, p. 463, my italics). The idea that all civilians (and soldiers) were united in the fight against the enemy, against fascism and against Hitler is another of the essential traits of what can be what can be regarded today as 'Blitz culture'.

---

<sup>15</sup> Since the sources for these reports were not revealed, it is easy to imagine how likely it was to 'succumb' to what was most probably 'institutional bias' (Jones et al., 2004, pp. 468-469).

<sup>16</sup> The title of the movie is a reference to the song 'Land of Hope and Glory', a British patriotic song written by Edward Elgar and lyrics by Arthur Christopher Benson in 1902:

Land of Hope and Glory, Mother of the Free,  
How shall we extol thee, who are born of thee?  
Wider still and wider shall thy bounds be set;  
God, who made thee mighty, make thee mightier yet,  
God, who made thee mighty, make thee mightier yet.

The generally accepted opinion is that the vast majority of British citizens were supportive of Churchill's military plans and felt a strong allegiance to Britain and its war objectives.

The notion of belonging to a 'nation' was constantly reinforced in everyday life during the war, and the citizens' resilience was seen as a direct contribution to the British war effort. Civilians were directly linked to and made responsible for the wellbeing of the nation, as they read on street posters: 'Your Courage, Your Cheerfulness, Your Resolution will Bring Us Victory'. Their values of solidarity contrasted strongly with that of the enemy, constantly demonised as ugly and cruel.<sup>17</sup>

This is at the core of what Billig (1995) defines as 'banal nationalism', the idea that national identity is anchored in daily routine, recreated and asserted in the customs and traditions of a community:

The established nations are those states that have confidence in their own continuity, and that, particularly, are part of what is conventionally described as 'the West'. The political leaders of such nations—whether France, the USA, the United Kingdom or New Zealand—are not typically termed 'nationalists'. However, [...] nationhood provides a continual background for their political discourses, for cultural products, and even for the structuring of newspapers. In so many little ways, *the citizenry are daily reminded of their national place in a world of nations*. However, this reminding is so familiar, so continual, that it is not consciously registered as reminding. The metonymic image of banal nationalism is not a flag which is being consciously waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building. (my italics, p. 8)

In wartime Britain, 'banal nationalism' is no longer subconscious as civilians are explicitly asked to join in the fight for the nation's victory, but the government is cautious not to

---

<sup>17</sup> See Cécile Vallée's 2012 study 'Monsters and Clowns Incorporated: the Representations of Adolf Hitler in British and American World War II Propaganda Posters'.



promote an aggressive, threatening nationalism, especially considering the horrors of the First World War were still a vivid memory for most of the population.

In a perfectly natural, almost instinctive manner according to today's collective memory of the event, the combination of Britain's 'symbolic capital'—'the acquisition of a reputation for competence and an image of respectability and honourability' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 291)—and the citizens' 'habitus' led the citizens to abide by the government's injunctions to 'keep their chin up'.

The home front therefore became populated by heroic civilians—the media and the people themselves attesting the image of the 'perfect' wartime citizen in a classless and fearless environment. To Philip Ziegler, 'Londoners manufactured their own myth', and 'it is striking how many spoke and wrote in clichés' and 'acted out their clichés, too', constantly making 'a deliberate effort to seem nonchalant and unafraid' (2015, pp. 163-164). Londoners became the heroes they thought they were as, in Orwell's words, 'myths which are believed in tend to become true, because they set up a type, or "persona", which the average person will do his best to resemble' (1970, p. 21). This is the image of the Londoners during the Blitz that still lives on today. The current (2018) Blitz section of the Imperial War Museum website describes the event as follows:

The British were the most totally mobilised of all the major belligerents and there was a great and genuine community of spirit in wartime Britain which often transcended class and other barriers. (Charman, IWM website)<sup>18</sup>

The construction of the collective memory of the Blitz is a good example of what Michel Bouchard (2013) defines as the 'curation' of the nation (p. 117). This neologism describes the process through which the state, governmental institutions, civilian society and individuals themselves negotiate and define the parameters of the nation. The verb 'curate' is derived

---

<sup>18</sup> The blog section of the IWM website does feature an article by Jane McArthur which addresses the question of the 'myth of the Blitz', see <http://blogs.iwm.org.uk/research/2017/08/addressing-the-myth-of-the-blitz/>.

from the Latin word *curates*, which refers to the person responsible for the wellbeing of souls, the curate (leading then to *curé*, priest in French)—to ‘curate’ a nation would thus in theory imply the desire to look after its people. The curation of the nation is similar to the process employed in a museum, where pre-existing artefacts are chosen and inscribed into a narration which presents a certain interpretation to the visitors. Should this narration completely oppose the visitors’ own preconceptions, the museum would alienate its audience (*ibid.*).<sup>19</sup> Similarly, the state constructs a collective memory underlining the essential fact that the nation is a sacred community which, as Smith states, reinforces in the people a strong sense of patriotic belonging (2003, p. 32).

In the specific case of Britain, the Blitz is ever more present in the public memory of war, because the event itself allows the opportunity to narrate the story of a nation united against the enemy: ‘public images and memories of [the Blitz] overwhelmingly present a unified picture of Britain at war, a time when “we” were all soldiers at the front line’ (Noakes, 1997, p. 90). The curation of the nation does not necessarily involve covering up facts or distorting the truth, but a strategic narration of historical events. Collective memory needs to be, up to a certain extent, in line with individual memory, and has to be coherent. Churchill forged the ‘Blitz spirit’ in such a way that the bombing of Britain can be considered as a key event in the ‘curation of the British nation’, given it is remembered today as years of great achievement rather than a period of immense trauma.

### 3) Memory and History: Deconstructing the ‘Myth of the Blitz’

Pierre Nora, in his study *Lieux de mémoire*, highlights the clear difference between the concepts of memory and history. In the line of Maurice Halbwachs’ work on collective

---

<sup>19</sup> The first real ‘museum’ was the Louvre, built in Paris in 1793. Its prime purpose was to reinforce French national identity. Through its universal and encyclopaedic enterprise, the museum was primarily founded on the basis of patriotic values, aiming to tell the story of the grandeur of the French nation. See Camille Doutremépuich 2017’s ‘L’appropriation du modèle du Louvre par les musées de province au tournant du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle’ for more information.

memory,<sup>20</sup> the historian explains that memory is lived, in constant evolution, ‘open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting [...] vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation’, whereas history is a scientific and abstract reconstruction of facts, aiming to shape durable knowledge. Memory is ‘blind to all but the group it binds’, history claims ‘universal authority’ (1989, p. 8). Memory is also emotional, whilst history strives to be rational, unbiased. Thus, ‘at the heart of history is a critical discourse that is antithetical to spontaneous memory, [h]istory is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it’ (p. 9).

This distinction between both terms is specific to the twentieth century. Before then, and Nora takes the particular example of France, history's essential function was to legitimise a growing Republic and forge a feeling of national unity. The historian calls this ‘history-memory’ (p. 18). From the chroniclers of the Middle Ages to the kings' historians and later on the reporters of the French Revolution, all historical discourses aimed to support a larger framework of ‘nationhood’ (Dosse, 1991, p. 62). This model was strongly questioned, first in the 1930s,<sup>21</sup> and then more noticeably in the 1970s, in which more and more critical and diverse visions of the past developed.<sup>22</sup> In the 1980s, as Henry Rousso suggests, the assimilation of history with memory was no longer possible (1987, pp. 10-11). The disappearance of ancestral rural traditions, coupled with the proliferation of information sources, led to the weakening of European feelings of nationalism.<sup>23</sup> After two World Wars,

---

<sup>20</sup> In *La mémoire collective* (1950), Halbwachs suggests that history and collective memory need to be distinguished. According to him, history is a ‘dead memory’, ‘a way of preserving pasts to which we no longer have an “organic” experiential relation’ (quoted in Olicks and Robbins, 1998, p. 110), that does not hold any influence on a community’s identity. On the contrary, collective memory defines a group’s feeling of belonging.

<sup>21</sup> L'École des Annales was founded in 1929 by Lucien Febvre and March Bloch. It emphasised a global history, more holistic both in terms of time and space. The school has been highly influential in setting the agenda for historiography, particularly because of its use of social scientific methods.

<sup>22</sup> Henri Mendras refers to this as the '*seconde Révolution française*' (1967).

<sup>23</sup> Twenty-first century Europe is currently experiencing a revival of nationalist feelings, particularly since the 2008 financial crisis.

internal fractures in countries where the sense of belonging to a nation was previously well-established, history and memory took on different paths:

With the advent of society in place of the nation, legitimation by the past and therefore by history yields to legitimation by the future. One can only acknowledge and venerate the past and serve the nation; the future, however, can be prepared for: thus the three terms regain their autonomy. No longer a cause, the nation has become a given; history is now a social science, memory a purely private phenomenon. The memory-nation was thus the last incarnation of the unification of memory and history. (Nora, 1989, p. 11.)

This split between memory and history led to the emergence of two new strands of history as a social science. The first is factual history, where historians focus on concrete data and events, producing analyses devoid of any nationalist projections. The second, which will be our primary focus here, concerns the ‘history of history’, which has led to the birth of ‘historiographical consciousness’. From this results the new task of the historian: the study of the evolution of different social practices, their shape and content, analysing the representation of the past and the maintenance of its memory, either within a specific group or within the whole of society. Nora explains that ‘by questioning its own traditional structure, its own conceptual and material resources, its operating procedures and social means of distribution, the entire discipline of history has entered its historiographical age, consummating its dissociation from memory—which in turn has become a possible object of history’ (p. 10). This critical study of history triggers anxiety when ‘history assigns itself and discovers that it is the victim of memories which it has sought to master’ (ibid.).

Questioning the history-memory of a whole population, analysing the construction of the collective memory of the French Revolution for example, leads to challenging essential social structures and values. Since the 1970s in France, more and more works have been

published on the ‘zones d’ombres’ of national history. *Le syndrome de Vichy 1944-198...* by Henry Rousso (1978) is a particularly good example of the emerging reflective history.<sup>24</sup> In his work, the historian does not focus on the actual historical events that took place during the Vichy regime; in fact his study starts from 1944, after the fall of the Vichy government. Rousso analyses the fractures in national consciousness that the period gave birth to. More specifically, he questions the ‘*mythe du résistancialisme*’.<sup>25</sup>

Questioning the ‘myths and interpretations’ of a society implies ‘we no longer unquestionably identify with its heritage’ (Nora, 1989, p. 10). This renders the work of the historian difficult and sensitive, especially when focusing on wartime periods. Tzvetan Todorov also explains that ‘to receive a brutal revelation about one’s past, to be forced to radically reinterpret the image we had of our peers and ourselves is a dangerous situation that can be unbearable and that we will vehemently refuse’,<sup>26</sup> and this both individually and collectively (1995, p. 25).

Taking the French case of the ‘*mythe du résistancialisme*’ as an illustration of the idea of historical deconstruction (or reconstruction) is relevant here because, although France and Britain were in radically different situations during the war, both ‘myths’ of the *résistancialisme* and of the Blitz were inscribed into similar cultural and political frameworks, and for many years functioned as fundamental events in the construction of a strong feeling of

---

<sup>24</sup> On the same topic, so is Robert Paxton’s *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944* (1973).

<sup>25</sup> This term refers to the myth, developed primarily by the supporters of Charles De Gaulle and communist parties after the Second World War, according to which the French unanimously and actively resisted the Nazi from the first day of the conflict. According to Pierre Laborie, Rousso’s concept of *résistancialisme* refers to memory reconstructions that have built a reassuring vision of the dark years of French history: the downplaying of the Vichy regime’s influence over society and a very lenient vision of a nationalist resistance which was in reality a minor movement (2006, p. 103). (my translation of: ‘*La référence de Rousso au résistancialisme renvoie aux reconstructions mémorielles qui auraient installé une vision rassurante des années noires : minoration de l’emprise de Vichy sur la société et vision complaisante de la résistance assimilée à la nation alors qu’elle n’était qu’un phénomène minoritaire*’.)

<sup>26</sup> (my translation of: ‘*recevoir une révélation brutale sur son passé, être obligé de réinterpréter radicalement l’image qu’on se faisait de ses proches et de soi est une situation dangereuse qui peut se révéler insupportable et qu’on refusera avec véhémence*’.)

national allegiance in both countries. Nevertheless, to transpose the process of historical reassessment from the French situation to the British one in the case of Second World War raises several difficulties. There is less risk of creating major political confrontations when challenging the cultural memory of the war in Britain than in France, where discussion on the Vichy regime is still a delicate matter. In Britain, the work of twentieth-century historians has not been to 'judge' the stakeholders of the past or to uncover what has been hidden, but rather to understand the mechanisms behind the construction of a mythical national memory. The question is not as much about deciding between competing memories as understanding the construction of the dominant one.

Recent British historiography of the Second World War is mainly focused on, on the one hand, the ways in which the war was experienced by civilians and, on the other hand, the ways in which its memory has shaped part of British identity. The history of the Blitz is built from memories, from archives, but paradoxically it has recently become a critique of this memory. More than a study of war events, the case of the Blitz on Britain invites us to focus on how the collective memory itself was constructed. Historians aim to qualify or correct the memory of the event (inasmuch as it can prove to have been very simplified), as 'every history is by nature critical and all historians have sought to denounce the hypocritical mythologies of their predecessors' (Nora, 1989, p. 10).

Several historians<sup>27</sup> have attempted to qualify the 'myth of the Blitz'. Angus Calder, in his 1991 pioneer study *The Myth of the Blitz*, argues that the image of a nation united in adversity and resisting hardship was almost entirely constructed by the political propaganda of the late 1930s-1940s. Calder aims to debunk the myth by analysing the political purpose of its creation and use by leading figures such as Winston Churchill. He believes it necessary to

---

<sup>27</sup> See *1940: Myth and Reality* (1990) by Clive Ponting, *War and the Cultural Construction of Identities in Britain* (2002) edited by Barbara Korte and Ralf Schneider, *Which People's War? National identity and Citizenship in Britain, 1939-1945* (2003) by Sonya Rose or *Wartime Britain 1939-1945* (2005) by Juliet Gardiner.

critically rethink the collective memory of the Blitz (our ‘history-memory’ as Nora would say), stating that the general population as well as researchers have been ignoring ‘how frightening and confusing the period from April 1940 through to June 1941 was for the British people’ since ‘the Myth stands in our way, asserting itself, abiding no questions’ (p. 18). Calder’s work questions the image of a nation who stood united at all times, as he particularly insists on class inequalities and the lack of solidarity between the better-off and the rest. He highlights how unprepared the British government was to face the Blitz and uncovers the previously ‘left-aside’ Mass-Observation reports on incidents of hysteria and panic during raids. Referring to precise factual examples, he also points out the existence of concentration camps for ‘enemy aliens’<sup>28</sup> and that of Oswald Mosley’s British Union of Fascists (BUF) to challenge the supposed ideals of a war for ‘democracy and freedom’. Most importantly, he questions the legitimacy of the persistence of the ‘myth of the Blitz’ in collective and official memory today.

Calder starts his work by establishing the notion of ‘myth’, reminding the reader of the word’s primary definition: ‘an ancient traditional story of Gods or heroes, especially one offering an explanation of some fact or phenomenon’ (*Chambers Dictionary* in Calder, 1991, p. 2). He suggests that the Blitz, or the account of it, is to a large extent a myth since it ‘has assumed a “traditional character”, involves heroes, suggests the victory of a good God over satanic evil, and has been used to explain a fact: the defeat of Nazism’ (p. 2). A myth in the

---

<sup>28</sup> In 1939, the British government had classified 80,000 potential enemy aliens who could potentially be spies or supporting the enemy. All that were over 16 years old were called up in front of a tribunal and classified into three groups, ‘high-security risks’, ‘doubtful cases’ and ‘no security risks’. Thousands of them, mostly Germans, Austrians and Italians, were sent to camps. The fact many of them were Jewish refugees and thus unlikely to be willing to help the Nazi regime did not seem to complicate the logic behind the procedure. In 1940, François Lafitte strongly denounced this situation in *The Internment of Aliens*. His ‘account of the often appalling living conditions of their internment provoked widespread comment and shame’ (Saville, 2002, para. 2):

We [should] discriminate not between Britons and aliens or ‘enemy aliens’ and ‘friendly aliens’ but between those who stand for freedom and those who stand for tyranny in every country. This division cuts right across all nationalities. The real ‘aliens’ are the ‘Nazis of the soul’ of all countries including our own. (Lafitte, 1988, p. 35)

way Calder understands it is not a lie, but rather the specific retelling of a fact in such a way that it reinforces the nation's aura. In the case of the Blitz, collective memory supports a myth of 'British or English moral pre-eminence, buttressed by British unity' (ibid.). Roland Barthes, in his work *Mythologies* (1957), defines the key characteristics of the concept:

Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact. [...] In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organises a world which is [...] without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves. (Barthes, 1973, pp. 142-143)

Britain in particular holds a long tradition of national myths. A myth, a legend, a sense of heroism, is what brings together a community around specific values. In *On Living in an Old Country*, Patrick Wright considers that in times of peace, people's everyday lives offer them little connection with these concepts. Working and normal daily routine do not offer the possibility of gathering around national symbols. This results in 'nostalgia', which becomes focused on 'objects and places that offer this possibility of outlet for people's 'subjective surplus', the 'subjective experience which finds no realisation in the constrained and rationalised activities of much modern everyday life' (Wright, 2009, p. 23). However, in times of war, the 'old country' is raised on a pedestal and the people are made to constantly look back to the glorious past of a precious nation. Thus, during a conflict, whilst the nation is threatened, 'personal actions can count in a different way; routine can have a greater sense of meaning and necessity' (ibid., p. 24). For example, Tom Wintringham, responsible for



training civilians on how to respond to a Nazi attack in case of a Nazi invasion, encourages the people to join in the war effort by referring to seventeenth-century revolutionaries:

As soldiers, or as civilians who from now on count themselves soldiers, we shall give in the common disciplined effort all our initiative and abilities, including our ability to hang on as our soldiers hung on at Calais and Dunkirk. We will stick by whatever we find to do or are told to do in spite of invasion, bombardment wounds, hunger or whatever may be the price of victory. [...] in this country freedom, made real in new forms, is still as powerful and heartening as it was in the days when Milton wrote that liberty 'hath enfranchis'd, enlarg'd and lifted up our apprehensions degrees above themselves'. [...] Men of the past made our nation by conquering tyranny; like them we shall conquer. (1944, pp. 125, 127-128.)

Calder (1991) indicates that war 'sharpens within everyday historical consciousness a sense of Absolute National Spirit' (p. 10). This is, according to him, one of the main objectives of the constant political and cultural propaganda of 1940-41. Added to this, the historian also highlights Churchill's aim to secure the United States' involvement in the war, his desire to maintain his political support and his intention to divert the people's attention from other economic problems. The 'Blitz spirit', in Calder's eyes, was constructed by two experts in communication (or in home front propaganda), Churchill and J. B. Priestley. Listening to the BBC, the British people were reassured (Calder would most likely write *lied to*) through the speeches of the first and the *Sunday Postscripts* of the second. Calder strives to shed light on the extent to which propaganda was carefully planned by the media. The BBC programmes were to follow the radio's primary goal, as one of Lindsay Wellington's memos shows, Head of the BBC's Home Service:

The objective is to capture the attention of the listening public in the periods between news bulletins by programmes with a virile, dynamic appeal to the attention and

emotions. Their primary value is their heartening content. Their second is that they will occupy the attention of people and so lessen the time and inclination for a morale-weakening and rumour-breeding speculation. (quoted in Vallée, 2012, p. 48)

A myth cannot be deconstructed by solely pointing out concrete historical facts. For example, highlighting the existence of the *Parti Populaire Français* (PPF) and *Rassemblement National Populaire* (RNP), both openly fascist and inclined to collaborate with the Nazis, does not suffice to bring down the popular idea that each and every French citizen actively resisted against Germany. A myth is 'invulnerable to mere facts' (Calder, 1991, p. 4), it 'essentially aims at causing an immediate impression—it does not matter if one is later allowed to see through the myth, its action is assumed to be stronger than the rational explanations which may later belie it' (Barthes, 1973, p. 130). It is important to point out once again that national collective memory, as constructed and artificial as it might be, is not necessarily built on lies. Todorov, in *Les abus de la mémoire*, explains that memory is not an opposition to oblivion, but is the intersection between effacement and conservation: 'Memory is essentially a selection: certain traits of an event are conserved, others immediately or progressively set aside and forgotten' (1995, p. 14).<sup>29</sup> It is therefore Calder's objective to understand how the collective memory of the Blitz was so well constructed by Churchill's government and the larger cultural mediums that it has successfully persisted throughout the years.

The appearance of a new historiographical consciousness in the 1970s, rendering difficult the reconstruction of 'togetherness' and 'community harmony' (*le vivre ensemble*) at a time where national landmarks were collapsing, during an identity crisis, led to what Nora defines as the 'tyranny of memory' (1993, p. 1012). He explains that 'the passage from memory to history has required every social group to redefine its identity through the

---

<sup>29</sup> (my translation of: '*La mémoire, elle, est forcément un sélection : certains traits de l'événement seront conservés, d'autres immédiatement ou progressivement laissés de côté et oubliés*'.)

revitalisation of its own history' and that 'the task of remembering makes everyone his own historian' (1989, p. 15). To the lack of memory succeeded an overflow, an outpour of memories, to the point where Henry Rousso, for example, felt the need to publish in 1994 *Vichy, un passé qui ne passe pas*,<sup>30</sup> which warned against the excess, the abuse or misuses of memory (*'l'abus de la mémoire'*). We are now in a society that is perhaps too propitious to the incessant recycling of the past. This reaction, legitimate in principle, can nevertheless have a negative effect: 'the constant valorisation of the past prevents the acquisition of a real knowledge of the past, of a sense of time, and it weighs upon our capacity to envisage the future' (Rousso, 1998, p. 36).<sup>31</sup> It is difficult to find the right balance between fleeing a community's past, its wounds and traumas, and an unhealthy obsession with what has been, a constant suspicion of the veracity of what is told. Nietzsche already defined the search for this equilibrium in *The Use and Abuse of History* (1874):

Thus even a happy life is possible without remembrance, as the beast shows: but life in any true sense is absolutely impossible without forgetfulness. Or, to put my conclusion better, there is a degree of sleeplessness, of rumination, of 'historical sense', that injures and finally destroys the living thing, be it a man or a people or a system of culture. (2010, p. 7)

To this Ernest Renan (1992) adds the necessity of forgetting, in a progressive perspective: 'forgetting, I would even say historical error, is an essential factor in the creation of a nation and it is for this reason that the progress of historical studies often poses a threat to nationality' (1992, p. 3).

The other risk of any study aiming at deconstructing national myths is to in turn build a 'counter-myth'. As Ziegler writes:

---

<sup>30</sup> 'A past that does not pass'.

<sup>31</sup> (my translation of: '*Cette valorisation empêche un réel apprentissage du passé, de la durée, du temps écoulé, et elle pèse sur notre capacité à envisager l'avenir*'.)

Some revisionist historians, however, have interpreted Calder's title as a green light for seeking out every instance of greed, panic, cowardice, snobbishness, prejudice, and to deduce from them that the authorities were callous and inefficient the people shiftless and uncertain. (2015, p. 163)

Calder, in *The Myth of the Blitz*, provides a very careful analysis of the construction of collective memory in a war that was 'fought with an eye on posterity's memory' (Rawlinson, 2000, p. 2). However, focusing on how the myth was present in all aspects of society, the historian may, at times, illegitimately project a theoretical conception of history on real memory and real archives of the past. In the preface, Calder explains that what motivated him to write it was '[his] anger over the sentimentalisation of 1940 by Labour apologists, then over the abuse of "Churchillism" by Mrs. Thatcher during the Falklands War, led me to seek, every which way, to undermine the credibility of the mythical narrative' (1991, p. xiv). This may have led him to replacing at times a caricatured myth by equally inaccurate statements about the Blitz period in Britain.

In light of this, there is indeed one point that Calder makes in *The Myth of the Blitz* that I, from a literary perspective, find particularly interesting, and to a large extent questionable. More specifically, the writer puts forward tenuous arguments on the subject of war writers. Calder explains that the wartime writer is in theory 'in a position to defy the Myth status as an adequate and convincing account of human feeling and behaviour' (p. 143). Yet, he also states that, despite this, most writers unfortunately proved unable to 'step outside conventional discourses and paradigms' (ibid.). To him, 'very few writers during the war, or in nearly half a century since, have come close to the radicalism of Bacon or even matched the side-step of Louis MacNeice', who both succeeded to 'work outside the Myth's paradigm' as they 'express with both eloquence and caution the challenge and hope involved for citizens as they tried to order their war experiences' (pp. 143-144).

These ideas were later on shared by Mark Rawlinson in *British Writing of the Second World War* (2000), in which he suggests ‘that all of the wartime texts that he examined contributed—often unintentionally—to what he assumes to be the national mythology of a just People’s War’ (Miller, 2008, p. 11). Rawlinson argues that the literature translates ‘the material reality of wartime death and destruction of the home front and front line into the abstract idealism of political discourse’ (ibid).

It is indeed undeniable that literature is an important element of the perpetuation of a country’s traditions. Literary references are constantly used to confirm and consolidate a parallel between the past and the present, even more particularly in wartime. In 1940, Thomas Hardy’s ‘In Time of the Breaking of Nations’ was used to celebrate the permanence of British values, whilst Dickens and Shakespeare were anchored in national and historical literature. On June 30, Priestley gave a good example of this idea:

The other day in that bit of Old London that Shakespeare and Dickens knew—the Borough—a man was fined fifteen shillings for being drunk and disorderly. [...] It seems that after the air-raid warning went, this man insisted upon standing in the middle of the street and loudly singing ‘Rule Britannia’! (1940, p. 19)

He then continued, talking about the small boats of Dunkirk:

They liked to call themselves ‘Queens’ and ‘Belles’; and even if they were new, there was always something old-fashioned, a Dickens touch, a mid-Victorian air, about them. (p. 3)

In Priestley’s framework, history, literature and tradition are at one with national identity:

It’s often been said, and too often by our own unrepresentative men, that we Islanders are a cold-hearted and unimaginative folk, and it’s a thundering lie, for we have some of the most glorious witnesses to our warmth and heart, and height of imagination, from Shakespeare onwards, that the world can know. Always, when

we've spoken or acted, as a people, [...] that lift of the heart, that touch of the imagination, have been suddenly discovered in our speech and our affairs, giving our history a strange glow, the light that never was on sea or land. (p. 52)

Still, I find Calder's statements on wartime writers to be questionable generalisation, which might perhaps result from one of the potential pitfalls of a myth-'debunking' enterprise. In this thesis, I thus aim to consider the extent to which literature written during or just after the Blitz bombings necessarily remains within 'the Myth's paradigm' (Calder, 1991, p. 144). I hope to qualify the historian's literary analysis within his socio-historical reassessment of the period. I will focus particularly on women's literature, which Calder does not mention in his section on wartime texts, in order to perhaps manage to nuance his analysis of Second World War authors. The following section will briefly outline the theoretical framework behind the literary aspect of this thesis, before exposing the main research questions of this dissertation.

## B) British Women's Literature of World War II

### 1) From the First to the Second World War: A Transition from Soldier Helper to Home Front Fighter

In order to analyse and understand women's writing of the Second World War, it is essential to look back on how the first of these two worldwide, devastating conflicts was narrated. The First World War resulted in the death of close to eighteen million people (including 800,000 British citizens). The conflict was a turning point not only because it was catastrophic in terms of the incredibly high number of victims, but more particularly because it led to major political, social and structural changes in the first part of the twentieth century.

The Great War abruptly ended the hopes and aspirations of the nineteenth-century together with its grand expectations regarding the progress of humanity through science and technology. The four-year bloodshed highlighted the paradoxically destructive power of industrialisation and modernity. Vincent Sherry highlights the cynicism of a society in which

'the dream of the machine, the whole romance of industrial technology that enchanted the cultural imagination of the nineteenth century, [...] was concluded and grimly disproved in the awful outcomes of mass mechanised warfare' (2005, p. 1). Across the whole of Europe, this war represented a sudden break in the development of social structures—Wolfgang J. Mommsen refers to the 'beginning of the end of a bourgeois era'<sup>32</sup> (quoted in Seybert and Stauder, 2011, para. 7)—and a revolution of the aesthetics of literature and art in general, through the birth of new avant-garde movements.<sup>33</sup> Dadaism for example, initiated by Tristan Tzara (amongst others) in 1916 at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich before spreading to France and Germany, was a protest movement born out of the disillusion resulting from war's atrocities. De la Croix stated that 'Dada was born of what is hated' (1970, p. 106). André Breton, who would later become in the 1920s the leading figure of Parisian surrealists, also described the war as an experience that uprooted aspirations of a generation in order to 'hurl them in a cesspool of blood, stupidity, and mud' (1969, pp. 31-32). The massacre of European youth was perceived as a general failure, a failure of Western civilisation (a 'crisis of the mind' as defined by Paul Valéry).<sup>34</sup> The disappointment caused by 'the patriotic sermons, brainwashing and platitudes of the war'<sup>35</sup> (Louis Aragon quoted in Taillandier, 2018, p. 196) fuelled the radicalism of these avant-garde movement, which questioned and challenged all previous cultural traditions.

---

<sup>32</sup> My translation of: le '*début de la fin de l'ère bourgeoise*'.

<sup>33</sup> Some would situate the start of this 'revolution' even before the start of World War I, as Virginia Woolf for example:

And now I will hazard a second assertion, which is more disputable perhaps, to the effect that in or about December, 1910, human character changed. [...] All human relations have shifted—those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics and literature. Let us agree to place one of these changes about the year 1910. (1924, p. 114)

<sup>34</sup> Paul Valéry explains that the First World was a military and economic crisis, but above all an intellectual crisis. Knowledge was powerless, science was dishonoured, beliefs were proved wrong. Written in 1919, his essay 'The Crisis of the Mind' starts by stating that 'us later civilisations, we now know that we are mortal' (p. 405). (my translation of: '*Nous autres, civilisations, nous savons maintenant que nous sommes mortelles.*')

<sup>35</sup> (my translation of: '*les homélies patriotiques et le bourrage des crânes, les poncifs de la guerre.*')

The conflict led to a post-war nation obsessed with death, as the Great War marked a shift in the approaches to bereavement and mourning (Cannadine, 1981). According to Patricia Jalland, moving away from the Victorian religious framework that gave people a ‘model of acceptance of death [...] as the will of God’ in a society where grief ‘was openly expressed’, post-war Britain promoted a ‘culture of avoidance, minimal ritual and private sorrow’ (2014, para. 19). Most soldiers died in horrific conditions and their bodies were not repatriated, denying their families<sup>36</sup> the chance to give them a grave in their own country. Instead, new methods were implemented, particularly through collective mourning: public commemorations, the erection of the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior in Westminster Abbey, and many others. Thus, Jalland states that ‘the interwar generation grew up in a bleak atmosphere of mass mourning for the dead servicemen of the Great War’<sup>37</sup> (para. 23). Private mourning was overwhelmed entirely by a smothering public grief.

At the risk of simplification, one could say the language of First World War literature was therefore largely dominated by feelings of doom and despair, centred on the ‘pity of War’ (Owen, 1919, p. 535). The general sense of social and moral disillusion is visible in the literature inherited from the period as most of it conveys an ‘anti-war’, pacifist message. Whilst it is true that, just before the start of the war, some writers saw the conflict as a necessary and positive event that would ‘revitalise a society in danger of decadence, replacing materialist values with spiritual’ (Tylee, 1990, p. 104), the widespread feeling after the first battles in the trenches is one of horrified disenchantment. A good example of this, aside from the well-known British war poets, would be Pierre Drieu La Rochelle. A prolific French writer (as well as a self-proclaimed fascist and active collaborationist during the Second

---

<sup>36</sup> About three million people, out of a population of just over 40 million, lost a close relative in the war, the secondary bereaved who lost a cousin or a friend ‘encompassed virtually the entire population’ (Gregory, 1994, p. 19).

<sup>37</sup> Jalland goes as far as stating that ‘perhaps the grand scale of national commemoration overshadowed and to an extent limited public compassion for the ordinary deaths of civilians in peacetime’ (2014, para. 23).



World War), Drieu la Rochelle first yearned for the action and the glamour of war. Freed from the oppressive bourgeois conventions of his family, he rejoiced in the freedom that military service promised from social conventions and obligations. Yet, after his first experience of combat in Charleroi, even conservative, right-wing Drieu radically changed opinion and wrote that ‘war today means being prostrate, wallowing in the mud flattened. Before, war meant men standing upright. War today means every possible position of shame’<sup>38</sup> (1934, p. 32). Great War pacifist narratives highlighted the loss of innocence<sup>39</sup> and insist on detailed description of the front to point out the absurd cruelty of mankind.

These two aspects, the fact that Britain was intensively preoccupied with death and strongly dominated by pacifist, anti-war discourse, were 'liabilities for a nation entering war' again in 1939 (Hartley, 1997, p. 2). The nation needed to be united in the fight for victory, yet 'being made one people' by bereavement 'would not be helpful' (ibid.). Churchill imposed a new discourse centred on the values of work and toil in the fight for victory. In Britain, ‘the communion of grief and the divisiveness of the class system are to be replaced, countered and healed by a new togetherness, the collectivity of the People’ War’ (ibid.).

Thus, literature needed to find a new language for a conflict where the idea of sacrifice was absent, as self-pity ‘is not attractive in wartime’ (ibid.). For authors who had lived through the First World War, pacifism became less self-evident at the start of the Second (albeit unprecedentedly violent and senseless) against the Nazis. Whilst the language of the Great War was dominated (although not exclusively) by doom and despair, that of the Second highlighted the absurdity of the ‘overturning of collective and humanistic values’ (Mackay, 2009, p. 8).

---

<sup>38</sup> (my translation of: ‘*La guerre aujourd'hui, c'est d'être couché, vautré, aplati. Autrefois, la guerre, c'était des hommes debout. La guerre aujourd'hui ce sont toutes les postures de la honte*’.)

<sup>39</sup> Wilfred Owen describes the ‘incurable sores on the innocent tongues’ (1994, p. 60) of the soldiers, whilst Philip Larkin repeats: ‘Never such innocence again’ (2015, p. 124).

The war questioned 'the writer's faith in the capacity of poetic language to describe and acknowledge that loss adequately' (ibid.). In 'Missing', John Pudney's wartime elegy, he writes 'Word will not fill the post / Of Smith, the ghost' (1943, p. 12). The eloquence of the Second World War is characterised by the lack of it, by the doubt shed on literature as to its capacity to narrate the magnitude of the conflict. This leads to symbolism, imagery, irony and sarcasm, all indirect ways of suggesting the irrationality of a war that 'ran off the edges of the map' and was 'uncontainable' (Bowen, 1962, p. 308).

This is particularly visible in terms of the shift in women's literature from the First to the Second World War. The First World War set the paradigms of female war narratives in terms of their desire to renegotiate the relationship between gender and war. At a time where the Suffragette movement, particularly militant members of the Women's Social and Political Union, was gaining more and more importance, female authors pointed out the extremely limiting social inequalities between men and women.

During the Great War, women took part in the war effort to replace men who left to go and fight on the frontline; they participated in the war economy by taking on their fathers', husbands' and sons' jobs. By the end of the war, three million women were employed in war factories, and two million 'worked in the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry, the Women's Land Army, the Volunteer Aid Detachment, and other paramilitary organisations' (Culleton, 2000, pp. 1-3). From the summer of 1914 to the fall of 1918, the female workforce in factories went up from 24% to 37% (Bourke, 2011, para. 1) and over one million women worked within the armed forces. In 1917, the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps was founded, regrouping members of volunteer associations who wore uniform and followed military rules. They were in reality limited to working in the kitchens, offices or garages, but still formed a real autonomous section of the military. Whilst working conditions were difficult (long working hours, strenuous tasks usually performed by men), war work constituted for some women a

relatively liberating experience and emancipation from domestic life. Some had high salaries, administrative responsibilities and a certain degree of autonomy (although it is important to point out the temporary character of these changes, which did not last after the end of the war).

Still, even if they fully took part in the war effort, women were alienated from it. War led to a blurring of sexual identities, and a condemnation of the 'masculinisation' of women who worked. Men's fears went beyond the fear of competition; they focused on the confusion of roles in the public as well as in the private sphere and expressed themselves particularly in the rise of misogynist and antifeminist literature.<sup>40</sup> In these texts, published as soon as censorship allowed it, since they might have demoralised the troops during wartime, women were portrayed as frivolous, futile and adulterous. Sandra Gilbert described 'the generalised sexual anxiety' and 'sexual anger directed specifically against the female' (1983, p. 424).<sup>41</sup> In parallel, this led to a wave of feminism in women's texts. Vera Brittain, for example, asks: 'Didn't women have their war as well? They weren't, as these men make them, only suffering wives and mothers, or callous parasites, or mercenary prostitutes' (1979, p. 77). The confusion of traditional gender roles, particularly regarding the demands on women, was highlighted by the Suffragettes, who argued that women deserved citizenship more than male pacifists or conscientious objectors. In propaganda, women were portrayed as gentle, fragile housekeepers, both objects of men's affections and victims of barbarous enemy acts; yet they also ought to make munitions in factories and take part in the communal war effort; a paradox which disrupted the traditionally expected attitude of loving wives and mothers. Alexis Maria

---

<sup>40</sup> See James S. Campbell's analysis of 'Owen and Sassoon' who he suggests 'found themselves enmeshed in constructions of gender that eventually discredit femininity as a moral force' in his paper 'For You May Touch Them Not': Misogyny, Homosexuality, and the Ethics of Passivity in First World War Poetry' (1997, p. 824).

<sup>41</sup> The white angels, the British nurses caring for wounded soldiers are a good example of the ambivalent vision of women participating in the war effort. In turns benefactor angels and exterminating devils when they declare soldiers apt to go back to the front, nurses are seen as both maternal figures and temptresses when living in the promiscuity of men.

De Beck, the editor of *Women of the Empire*, a book published in London in 1916 by the Dominion of Canada News Company to celebrate the contributions of the women of the British Empire in support of the Allies during World War I, also insisted at the time on the need for a much safer and more peaceful world run on women's terms.

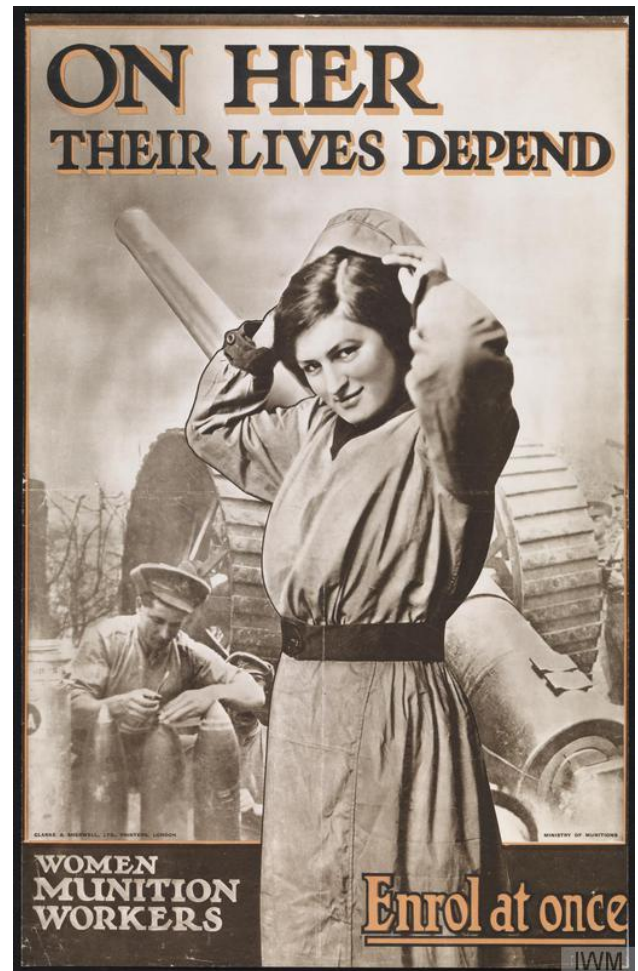
Later on, the 1930s saw the rise in publication of anti-misogynist dystopias imagining the destruction of society produced by men, envisioning 'apocalyptic ends to the reactionary past and stagnant present' (Lassner, 1998, p. 14). In the eyes of Storm Jameson or Naomi Mitchison, 'the major apparatus of state is not scientific control but prevailing social codes, and psychological warfare does not materialise as hyperkinetic thought waves, but rather as a compassionate marriage of misogyny and social control' (p. 63). In Mitchison's 1938 *We Have Been Warned*, the author highlighted Britain's male-dominated society's internal weakness, directly linking gender inequalities issues to more complex political issues, perhaps leading to war.

The situation of women changed from one conflict to another, as they were made direct witnesses of the war in 1940. In the Second World War, civilians became soldiers of the home front as British cities were directly attacked. Women were no longer helpers of men, they became full participants (albeit at times unwillingly) in the war and immediate victims of the enemy. As Jenny Hartley writes, 'all [were] enlisted in the fight against fascism and women [were] more directly involved than in the previous war' (1997, p. 2). British Women's Propaganda was issued during the war attempting to prevent the repetition of World War I conflicts between the personal, domestic life of women and the new political demands that was placed on them (Gingrich, 2005, p. 108). Women were asked to redefine their personal and domestic ideals of womanhood without going against what essentially defined their femininity, both keeping a good domestic role and fulfilling their patriotic duty. Second World War propaganda idealised the image of the war worker woman and portrayed her as

‘the strong, competent, courageous “unsung heroine of the home front”’, suggesting ‘there is not much women can’t do’ (Yesil, 2008, p. 103). It was henceforth explicitly and publicly admitted that women were essential in the fight for victory. The First World War propaganda posters inciting women to join the war effort defined them solely in relation to their sons, brothers and husbands, the real fighters. In the Second World War, posters started addressing women directly, encouraging them to fight for their own victory:



Poster, 1914, held by the British Library



Poster, 1916, held by the Imperial War Museum.  
Crown Copyright: IWM ©

First World War propaganda posters define women in relation to men. Women are only part of the war effort as helpers of men. Women in the first picture are looking at men in the horizon, and a man is standing behind the woman in the second one. Men are ever present and the concept of war is inseparable from masculinity.



Poster, 1941, held by the Imperial War Museum  
 Crown Copyright: IWM ©



Poster, 1941, held by the Imperial War Museum.  
 Crown Copyright: IWM ©

Second World War posters portray women as independent individuals who fight for victory, no longer as helpers, but as legitimate participants in the war effort. Images no longer necessarily feature men. Posters no longer aim to appeal to mothers, daughters or sisters, but try to speak out to women in general.

The start of the Second World War led to a different response from women writers compared to the First. Becoming direct witnesses of the war, women found themselves confronted with what they were always protected and prevented from seeing. In 1939, ‘the terrible barrier of knowledge by which War cut off the men who possessed it from the women who [...] remained in ignorance’ collapsed (Brittain, 1978, p. 215). Phyllis Lassner highlights how women’s literature of the Second World War is divided between authors who chose to



remain ‘lifelong pacifists’ (1998, p. 12) like Virginia Woolf or Vera Brittain, and others like Storm Jameson who found that they could no longer declare themselves anti-war after finding out about Hitler’s victims in Europe and seeing the bombs destroy their cities. The Second World War began so shortly after the First that it invoked historical and personal memory, yet its aims were distinct to the confused ones of the First, where men ‘cursed through sludge’ (Owen, 1994, p. 60) for reasons that too many seemed futile. In 1939, Britain was fighting against the Nazis, and Hitler’s devastating Blitz on cities ‘made it clear that untold numbers of defenceless civilians and children would be ground under every mile’ (Lassner, 1998, p. 26). The Second World War was the most brutal, frontal, bloody battle that ever happened, not only between different countries but between radically opposed conceptions of humanity, politics and society. As Henry Rousso says, ‘it was experienced as a mortal combat between Good and Evil, even if these are notions to be handled with precaution’<sup>42</sup> (2013, pp. 14-15). Women’s writing became direct, immediate war reporting, and was no longer dominated by a strong ‘feminist anti-war’ message, as many were ‘torn between their rejection of any form of state violence and anxiety about the destruction of their own nation’ (Lassner, 1998, p. 27).

Women responded differently to war when directly witnessing it. The rise of fascism and the Nazi threat combined with the violence women had to face in their day-to-day lives rendered anti-war messages less convincing and less evident, in contrast of the general consensus in First World War literature. Virginia Woolf’s statement in *Three Guineas* (1938), considered today the founding anti-war feminist text, that ‘for though many instincts are held more or less in common by both sexes, to fight has always been the man’s habit, not the woman’s’ (1986, p. 6) became outdated in a country where 487,000 women volunteered for women’s services (80,000 for WRNS, 185,000 for WAAF and 222,000 for ATS (Crang, 2008, p. 383). Whilst most women agreed that war solely contributed to the destruction of

---

<sup>42</sup> (my translation of: ‘*Elle a été vécue comme un combat mortel entre le Bien et le Mal, même si ce sont des notions à manier avec précaution*’.)

civilisation in the 1914-1918 conflict, many changed their minds during World War II as they recognised that the uniquely horrific consequences of Nazi policies differed from the self-deceived aims, purposeless losses, and uneasy peace that had justified their denunciation of the “war to end all wars” (Lassner, 1998, p. 4).

## 2) Women’s War Literature: ‘Resistance Writing’

Perhaps surprisingly, ‘reading and writing occupied central roles in wartime life’ (Hartley 1997, p. 3) and the demand for books, according to the Archbishops of York in 1945, ‘seem[ed] to be unlimited’ (Garbett, 1945, p. 3). In wartime Britain, *Good Housekeeping* encouraged women to read since they needed books ‘more than ever now’ and lending libraries were permanently full.<sup>43</sup> Hartley identifies three major reasons why people read during the war. Firstly, fiction, more particularly domestic fiction for women, was seen as a way to escape their wartime circumstances for mothers, daughters and sisters facing traumatic situations. Many strived to momentarily appease the fear and struggles of everyday life through the romances of Jane Austen.<sup>44</sup> People resorted to ‘comforting library books [...] about nice people dealing with problems that we can all appreciate’ (Piper, 1941, np.). Thus, books acquired a ‘quasi-maternal role in easing the more tractable problems of wartime life’ (Hartley, 1997, p. 3). In addition, people also clung to books as a way to maintain a sense of cohesion and personal stability in cities that were bombed and houses that were shattered. Describing the war years, Elizabeth Bowen wrote:

Everyone here, as is known, read more: and what was sought in books—old books, new books—was the communicative touch or personal life. To survive, not only

---

<sup>43</sup> Steve Chibnall states that, between 1942 and 1943, 'library borrowings figures were increasing, particularly for novels' (1995, p. 135).

<sup>44</sup> For Janet Teissier du Cros, who lived in Occupied France, Austen was a saviour:

Jane Austen lives, and makes you live, in a luminous world whose characters are never evil and where even the vulgar are civilised [...]. You had only to establish a link at any point between Jane Austen’s England and the world Hitler was forging to know that Hitler’s world was a nightmare that could never last. My favourite link was to imagine Miss Bates being roused from bed at five in the morning by the Gestapo. (1992, p. 64)



physically but spiritually, was essential. People whose homes had been blown up went to infinite lengths to assemble bits of themselves—broken ornaments, off shoes, torn scraps of the curtains that had hung in a room—from the wreckage. In the same way, they assembled themselves from stories and poems, from their memories, from one another's talk. (1945, p. 97)

An example of this idea is reflected in Rose Macaulay's letters to her friends after her London flat was bombed in 1941. More than the loss of her house, furniture and clothes, what saddened her the most was to have lost her books. Macaulay had inherited a large collection of seventeenth-century works and possessed an edition of the *Oxford Dictionary* that she loved dearly. After the bombing, she saw herself as 'bookless, homeless, sans everything but my eyes to weep with' (Macaulay 1941, p. 78). She wrote she was 'desolated and desperate' and could not 'face her life without books', and explained:

I can't start again, I feel, I keep thinking of one thing I loved after another, with a fresh stab, I wish I could go abroad and stay there, then I shouldn't miss my things so much, but it can't be, I loved my books so much, and can never replace them, I feel I am finished, and would like to have been bombed too. (ibid.)

More importantly, people seemed to see in literature a way of trying to make sense of the events happening around them. Hence, war books were greatly sought after. Readers felt the need to give shape and meaning to senseless violence and looked for models of behaviour as a source of comfort in literature. Leo Tolstoy's 1869 *War and Peace* was very popular, but narratives about the present were too. Hartley explains that wartime Britain also became the source of inspiration of many novels: 'our village in wartime, complete with Home Guard, rations and evacuees, was a popular theme, as was the refugee novel' (1997, p. 5). She takes the example of the library books list in Stella Gibbon's *The Rich House*, in which people read

works with titles like *Italy and the New Europe, Can America Stay Out?, Europe: Can it Survive?* (1941, p. 66).

Furthermore, reading was an activity that was fully promoted by the government, who aimed to enshrine 'the importance a free literature' as a 'democratic principle' (Hartley 1997, p. 7), making it another one of the essentially British values that needed to be defended against the Nazi regime. David Mellor notes that 'poetry, literature and the landscape are presented as the values and the very identity which Britain is fighting for', through 'Ministry of Information propaganda exhibitions such as "Books and Freedom"' (1987, p. 12). Reading became a way of indirectly resisting the Nazi regime. The idea that literature could be part of the war effort was an idea that was shared by the signatories of the 1941 manifesto 'Why Not War Writers?'. Beginning their open letter by reminding the readers the world is 'threatened by the Nazi war-machine', George Orwell, Tom Harrisson and six others state that 'the role of writers [...] is a matter of supreme importance' (Calder-Marshall, A. et al., 1941, p. 236). They argued that 'creative writers should be used to interpret the war world so that cultural unity is re-established and war effort emotionally co-ordinated' (p. 239). Writers should be given the means to 'establish during war the international understanding that is the chief aim of peace' (ibid.), as novelists are able to create 'propaganda' that is 'deeper, more humanly appealing and more imaginative than newspapers ha[ve] space and time for' (p. 237). The manifesto described the purpose of literature as an act of resistance, a war weapon even, needed for Britain to achieve 'victory'.<sup>45</sup> Memoirs like Richard Hillary's *The Last Enemy* (1942) or novels such as Graham Greene's *The Ministry of Fear* (1943) are good examples of texts that documented the war to the public whilst directly contributing to the larger cultural

---

<sup>45</sup> Many writers on the left repositioned themselves in 1940 and 1941:

When war broke out, many writers were hesitant. They did not see the issues as clearly as they had seen the Spanish Civil War, for example, or the last European war. [...] With the invasion of Russia [in June 1941], feeling has crystallised. It is no longer possible for anyone to stand back and call the war an imperialist war. For every writer, the war is a war for survival. Without victory our art is doomed. (Calder-Marshall, A. et al., 1941, p. 236)

construction of the image of the heroic RAF pilot for one, as well as the danger and cowardice that stems from not participating in the war effort.

Unsurprisingly, in accordance with the social values of its times, the 'Why Not War Writers' manifesto does not refer to women writers, and was not signed by any women. War writing primarily focused on combat experience, on the field. Therefore, women were implicitly expected to refrain from writing about something they could not even begin to imagine. Robert Graves expressed his anger and disappointment in his 1941 article 'War Poetry in This War' particularly towards women who take the liberty to write about the Second World War. He explained that there was no parallels should be established between a soldier and a woman helping out on the home front, since by doing so the male combatant became an emasculated, worthless soldier, who could not 'even feel that his rendezvous with death is more certain than that of his Aunt Fanny, the firewatcher' (1949, p. 310).

Still, women writers were prolific during the war, and most of them saw writing as an act of resistance too, just like men did. Whether or not their work supported the war or questioned it, most female writers considered their activity to be part of the war effort. Virginia Woolf thought of her writing as a 'whiff of shot in the cause of freedom' (1939, p. 235) and Elizabeth Bowen stated that 'all wartime writing' is 'resistance writing'—regardless of the political opinions put forward in texts—since it is personal life putting up 'its own resistance to the annihilation that was threatening it—war' (1945, p. 97). Women's writing was also an act of resistance *per se*, since they were so obviously ostracised by men from the field of war literature. Phyllis Lassner explains that 'with full recognition that women rarely influenced government policies, many became active resisters through writing that questioned their social and political status in relation to accepted definitions of victimisation' (1998, p. 3). Some women novelists also saw themselves as 'historians of the scene' (Hartley, 1997, p. 9), feeling a duty to record the details of the conflict so as to bear witness for future generations.

Noel Streatfeild for example wrote that she 'stood up for the [novelists'] value as historians of the age' (1984, p. 180).

Women's literature of the Second World War is in essence a literature of self-assertion, in view of the context it is written in as well as in view of the authors' gender. Even so, it is vital to note the sense of added political responsibility these writers seem to impose on their work.

### 3) From Jenny Hartley to Kristine Miller: Women's War Writing in Recent Studies

Women's literature of the Second World War is a subject that still lacks sufficient recognition, as few scholars have deemed it worthy of attention. This firstly stems from the fact Second World War literature in general was for a long time neglected by scholars of the mid-century English novel, who were 'long obsessed by the 1930s and the 1950s' (Taylor, 1997, para. 1). As early as 1941, Tom Harrisson expressed his disappointment with the lack of good texts being published during the conflict, noting 'the large number of different writers who have poured out indifferent material', and sarcastically adding, as a reference to Churchill's famous speech: 'never have I felt that I owed so little to so many' (1941, p. 76). Decades later, the prolific literature of World War II authors was still completely denied by some established writers such as Salman Rushdie, who stated: 'If you think of World War II—America, Germany, and Italy all produced extraordinary novels about it; England didn't' (quoted in Kakutani, 1983, p. 23).

It is only in the 1980s that studies such as Alan Munton's *English Fiction of the Second World War* (1989) and Adam Piette's *Imagination at War: British Fiction and Poetry, 1939-1945* (1995) started to act as 'a corrective to those who feel that the 1939-1945 conflict takes second place to the First World War in terms of literary output and value', highlighting 'how texts describe 'the private experience of the war to be disjointed, complex and a dark one where the British imagination reveals a broken and disaffected world' (publisher's summary

of Piette's study). Yet, one notable aspect of both these works is their focus on male writers, particularly authors such as Evelyn Waugh or Graham Greene. With the exception of Virginia Woolf and Elizabeth Bowen, women were for a long period of time generally denied the same acknowledgment as male war writers. Studies which have now become references in the field of Second World War writing, such as *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of World War II* (2009) and Mark Rawlinson's *British Literature of the Second World War* (2000), respectively only devote one chapter to 'Women Writers and the War' and briefly refer to Elizabeth Bowen in a chapter on the representation of metropolitan ruins.

Even though they dominated the publishing market (Humble, 2001, p. 1), most women's texts written in the 1930s and the 1940s remain in what is still referred to today as the 'middlebrow' category, a 'dirty word' applied to 'cultural products thought to be too easy, too insular, too smug' (ibid.).<sup>46</sup> Middlebrow culture partly stemmed from the expansion of the middle classes after the First World War, which produced a society where the majority of the population was part of this new, 'indeterminate social class: something that had never existed in England [before 1918]', they were 'the people who are most at home in and most definitely of the modern world, the technicians and the higher-paid skilled workers, the airmen and their mechanics, the radio experts, film producers, popular journalists and industrial chemists' (Orwell, 1941 in Newsinger, 1999, pp. 74). At the time, George Orwell seemed to place faith in the newly enlarged middle classes, as 'they [were] the indeterminate stratum at which the older class distinctions [were] starting to break down' (ibid.).

Middle-class readers constituted the anticipated readership of middlebrow novels, written mainly by upper- and middle-class women, which angered the established authors who feared a breaking down of the structural class system. Literature was becoming

---

<sup>46</sup> For an extensive analysis of the middlebrow novel, see Nicola Humble's *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s: Class, Domesticity, and Bohemianism* (2001) or *The History of British Women's Writing, 1920-1945* (2015), edited by Maroula Joannou.

increasingly democratic,<sup>47</sup> which contributed to a devaluing of 'literature' as a cultural and class indicator. Virginia Woolf herself summoned reviewers to explicitly refer to her as 'highbrow', 'a man or woman of thoroughbred intelligence who rides his mind at a gallop across country in pursuit of an idea' (1942, para. 3), so as to not be mistaken for a disreputable middlebrow writer. This is how she describes those who are neither highbrows nor lowbrows:

It is the doing of the middlebrows. They are the people, I confess, that I seldom regard with entire cordiality. They are the go-betweens; they are the busy-bodies who run from one to the other with their tittle tattle and make all the mischief—the middlebrows, I repeat. [...] They are not highbrows, whose brows are high; nor lowbrows, whose brows are low. Their brows are betwixt and between. [...] The middlebrow is the man, or woman, of middlebred intelligence who ambles and saunters now on this side of the hedge, now on that, in pursuit of no single object, neither art itself nor life itself, but both mixed indistinguishably, and rather nastily, with money, fame, power, or prestige.

If any human being, man, woman, dog, cat or half-crushed worm dares call me "middlebrow" I will take my pen and stab him, dead. (ibid.)

In light of both male writers and reviewers' reluctance to value more popular women's texts<sup>48</sup> and the scorn and disdain of well-established authors like Woolf, most of women's wartime fiction was never reprinted after its first publication and remains mostly unknown to twenty-first century readers. It is only in the 1990s (nearly fifty years after the end of the war) that (mostly women) scholars started to focus their interest on the tropes of female war writing.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> According to Queenie Leavis, in 1932, 'the reading habit is now often a form of the drug habit' (1978, p. 7).

<sup>48</sup> Women writers never managed to form a successful, well-respected group like the Auden Group for example, which was nearly exclusively male.

<sup>49</sup> Although the vast majority of scholars who analysed women's war writing are themselves women and wrote in the transition period between second-wave and third-wave feminism, they did not

In 1997, Jenny Hartley published *Millions Like Us: British Women Fiction of the Second World War*, in an attempt to rescue women writers from oblivion.<sup>50</sup> Her work groups together Elizabeth Taylor, Elizabeth Bowen and Rose Macaulay with much lesser-known authors like Susan Ertz, Eileen Marsh, Phyllis Bottome or Sylvia Townsend Warner. Hartley claims that women's literature of World War II is a 'literature of commitment and citizenship' (1997, p. 15), and that this is why it has been studied so little. She writes that 'feminist criticism has favoured fictions of subversion, opposition and negotiation', but that conversely, 'the heroine of the People's War does not start fires in attics; she is more likely to stay up all night fire-watching in a cold garage' (ibid.). Hartley presents us with texts which, according to her, feature typical Blitz values and rarely question Britain's war motives and war actions.

A year later in 1998, Phyllis Lassner published *British Women Writers of World War II*, a study which looks at some of the same texts, although in a much more detailed manner. Lassner insists that rather than there being a uniform, single reaction to the war in women's writing, it is vital to highlight the differences that are found in all individual female war texts. Unlike Hartley, Lassner focuses heavily on the ambiguity found in female works, concentrating both on authors who supported the war and on others who held on to their strong pacifist values. Whilst Hartley analyses many more popular novels, Lassner chooses to carefully survey much more overtly political texts, particularly in the chapter on Storm Jameson and Katharine Brudekin's dystopian fictions. Incribed in a strongly feminist approach, Lassner's analysis argues that 'these British women writers construct [their writing]

---

necessarily inscribe their research within a radically feminist theoretical framework. The names of Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray or Judith Butler are hardly ever mentioned in these works.

<sup>50</sup> Jenny Hartley also published *Hearts Undefeated* (1995), an anthology of Second World War women's texts (which ranged from articles to diary entries or letters to the press) Patricia Beer commented on this work saying: 'it [the anthology] is substantial in spite of the fact that inclusion was limited: a few exceptions were made but, in general, to qualify you had to be British, middle-class, apolitical and, of course, indomitable' (1996, p. 14).

in a combination of political, historical, and fictional discourses to produce a literature that reaches beyond pleasing forms to shape an ethical/political aesthetic' (1998, p. 23).

One could argue that whilst they provide tremendously interesting material on and analyses of women's war texts, these studies still consider women's war writing as a separate, different kind of war writing, in opposition perhaps to men's war texts. In Lassner's work as well as in Karen Schneider's *Loving Arms: British Women Writing the Second World War* (1997), whilst both critics do highlight the individual divergences between women writers, the underlying message is that male and female experience during the war cannot ever be reconciled and that women's war writing is partly restricted to the questioning of gender limitations and differences during the war.

Another aspect that is noticeable in the works on women's writing of the Second World War, including Gill Plain's *Women's Fiction of the Second World War: Gender, Power, Resistance* (1996) or Victoria Stewart's *Women's Autobiography: War and Trauma* (2003), is the fact that very few studies have focused exclusively on the period of the Blitz and the home front experience.<sup>51</sup> The Second World War being a very dense period, most studies try to give an extensive overview of women's war writing and look at very diverse aspects of it, such as Holocaust testimonies or war reporting from the Eastern front or the Balkans.

Kristine Miller is one of the few scholars who consider specifically 'home front' Second World War texts giving women and men writers the same status and importance, analysing their work from a socio-political angle.<sup>52</sup> Her study *British Literature of the Blitz:*

---

<sup>51</sup> Victoria Stewart recently published an article on British women's writing of the Second World War focusing on the home front experience, entitled 'The Second World War in Contemporary Women's Fiction: Revisiting the Home Front' (2015). However, this paper focuses on contemporary fiction, that is to say texts published in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

<sup>52</sup> Victoria Stewart also looked at both men and women writers' 'home front' fiction in *Narratives of Memory-British Writing of the 1940s* (2006), yet approached their texts from a psychoanalytical point of view, particularly looking at the issue of memory. I am more interested here in the socio-historical reassessment of the Blitz period.



*Fighting the People's War* (2009) focuses on male writers such as Henry Green and Graham Greene as well as female authors like Elizabeth Bowen and Rosamond Lehmann. All are looked at in the same light of her socio-political approach to the topic, through which she analyses authors' ability to 'question the assumption of a unified cultural understanding of the People's War' (2009, p. 1). Whilst she highlights individual differences or similarities between all writers, pointing out that 'Blitz literature is not a coherent collective defence of the war but an expression of imaginative freedom to disagree about the People's War' (p. 11), she analyses women and men authors alike, focusing on the themes inherent to the historical context rather than on perceived 'gender-specific' topics.

### C) Aims and Methodology

Following the two previous sections which highlight, on the one hand, the recent factual revision of the period of the Blitz in the attempt to deconstruct a 'myth' and, on the other hand, the limited attention that has been given to women's writing of that time, my aim in this thesis is to extend the historical and social reassessment of the 1940s in Britain to the literary field.

Taking as a point of departure Angus Calder's chapter 'Formulations of Feeling' in his pioneer study *The Myth of the Blitz* (1991), the main objective of this work is to oppose the historian's idea that writers during the Second World War had a very limited ability to produce work that stood outside the People's War rhetoric. In his analysis of wartime writing, Calder explains that although 'the writer, who can (most can't) step outside conventional discourses and paradigms, is in a position to defy the myth's status as an adequate and convincing account of human feeling and behaviour', unfortunately only few 'work outside the myth's paradigm' (1991, pp. 143-144). He goes on to refer to artist Francis Bacon's 1944 *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of Crucifixion*—whose dark imprisoned half-animal half-human figures he compares to frightened Londoners in the Blitz—and Louis MacNeice's

mid-war poems *The News-Reel* and *Brother Fire*, as two examples of artistic productions<sup>53</sup> which dared to ‘work outside the myth’s paradigm’ as they ‘express with both eloquence and caution the challenge and hope involved for citizens as they tried to order their war experiences’ (ibid.). Calder writes that ‘very few writers during the war, or in nearly half a century since, have come close to the radicalism of Bacon or even matched the side-step of Louis MacNeice’ (p. 143).

Whilst it is true that, during the Blitz, literature ‘was conscripted into the war effort’ by a government that ‘enshrined [it] as a democratic principle’ (Hartley, 1997, pp. 6-7), I believe Angus Calder and Mark Rawlinson’s argument according to which ‘the character of wartime writing was strongly determined by its relations to the discourses with which, in the broadest sense, Britain’s war effort was administered’ (Rawlinson, 2000, p. 205) is too reductive. I contend that it is too simplistic and unwise to consider that authors writing in a time of overwhelming social and cultural propaganda cannot critically reflect on their surroundings and merely contributed to a literature that aimed at forming a coherent defence of war.

I aim to further Phyllis Lassner’s study *British Women Writer of World War II* (1998) on the political dimension of women’s war writing by directly inscribing my literary research within the theoretical framework of the ‘myth of the Blitz’, and narrowing it by exclusively focusing on representations of the Blitz years in London. Lassner’s very comprehensive study focuses on many aspects of women’s war writing, from works written before the war to texts produced after the conflict, and from writing in Britain about Britain to women writing outside Britain about other European cities. I choose to focus solely on texts written during (or shortly after) the Blitz as I am interested in how writers related to a specific social and political setting, that of the ‘People’s War’. My work also concurs with Kristine Miller’s

---

<sup>53</sup> Interestingly, both artists cited by Calder are Irish or Irish-born.

*British Literature of the Blitz*, who was the first scholar to establish a link between the ‘myth of the Blitz’ as defined per Angus Calder and the literature written at the time. Miller looked at both male and female authors, and analysed novels as well as poetry, crime stories or movies, attempting to place British Literature of the Blitz ‘within dominant narrative of modern literary history’ (2009, p. 23). My aim is to extend her analysis of writing during the ‘People’s War’ by focusing it more specifically on lesser-known women writers, in order to draw more specific conclusions from women’s war fiction in relation to the ‘Myth’.

This thesis is therefore one of the first pieces of research to take Angus Calder’s theoretical framework of the ‘myth of the Blitz’ as the main point of reference to discuss virtually unknown women’s texts of the 1940s. In his study, Calder deconstructs the ‘myth’ by confronting it with historical facts. In my thesis, I follow the same method by comparing specific values of the People’s War rhetoric against the literary production of women writers. I have selected three main aspects of Calder’s study to analyse. Considering several novels by different authors, I address these concepts in three different chapters.

The first two of these aspects are ‘patriotism’ and ‘class’, and the third one, more abstract, ‘the representation of the hurt body’. I have chosen these three main themes because they seem to be the most crucial to Angus Calder in his analysis of the constructed and superficial rhetoric of the People’s War. The themes of class and patriotism are the ones that most often come back in the study of Second World War propaganda in Britain, and the myth of the Blitz is described on the back cover of Calder’s book as one that nurtured a national feeling of ‘assumed invincibility of an island race’ and ‘the ability to pluck victory from the jaws of defeat by team work’ (1991, back cover). The third aspect, ‘the representation of the hurt body’ (or lack thereof), is another essential aspect the Blitz public discourse. Mark Rawlinson, in his study *British Writing of the Second World War*, devotes one of his six chapters to the description of violence, arguing that a large part of British wartime writing is

‘related to the negation of apocalyptic projections’ (2000, p. 71). He explains that the wound’s invisibility and complete absence of the hurt body, not only in the media but also in literature, is compensated by a ‘wartime art’s focus on buildings’ (ibid). The transfer from the human to the architectonic is a way to make war more apprehensible to people as ‘war’s delight of the senses veiled atrocity’ (p. 78). For the government, not lingering over the lost lives or heavily wounded victims of the bombings and focusing on uniting symbols was also a way of reinforcing the validity of war actions and war aims in popular consciousness; and, according to Rawlinson, war writers followed the same idea. To him, an essential aspect of wartime fiction is the idea of violence on architecture being turned into resistance, as it ‘brings home’ and connotes social cohesion. Even though millions of civilians’ homes were damaged, a sense of pride was constructed around the still-standing monuments. The possible destruction of buildings like Saint- Paul’s Cathedral and the complete absence of physical victims led, in Rawlinson’s words, to an ‘ideology of spectacle and the legitimation of state violence’ in World War II narratives (p. 77).

Through the close reading and textual analysis of the novels I focus on, I will explore how women’s fiction of the Second World War engages with propagandist discourses of the Blitz period, highlighting whether or not it shows an awareness of the constructed ‘mythical Blitz values’ imposed on the public (and private) sphere; and to a further extent the will to question, challenge and contradict these values. The main research questions that guide my research throughout this thesis are, amongst others, the following: To what extent did women writers participate in the construction of a mythical national memory? To what extent does women’s literature of the Second World War work within or challenge the paradigms of traditional Blitz values?

The aim of my research is not to determine to what extent the ‘Blitz spirit’ really sheltered British citizens during the war. It is not about understanding whether or not people

did really feel extremely patriotic or if England did really become a ‘classless community’. These are questions that have been dealt with extensively by historians. My aim is to shed light on forgotten authors who produced works that present us with a vision of the war that may or may not question or criticise the propaganda setting they were created in. I do not intend to assess the objectivity of authors and my thesis does not hope to reflect on women writers’ reliability in terms of factual truth. My main objective is to help place women writers in a category of valuable, talented and recognised war writers by examining their ability to retain their individuality and critical skills even when surrounded with Churchill’s very forceful propaganda.

Since it furthers Phyllis Lassner and Kristine Miller’s pioneer previous studies, this thesis starts off already presupposing that women’s writing on the Second World War did show at the very least an awareness of the constructed aspect of propagandist public discourses; however more precise sub-questions of the topic are yet to be answered. What social aspects of wartime life are women writers more or less ready to discuss? How explicitly do female authors contest typical Blitz values? Are there any specific factors or circumstances that lead women writers to be more or less vocal about certain imposed values? Did certain social, educational or political circumstances encourage certain writers to be more daring than others in terms of questioning values of solidarity and unity? This thesis aims to give an extensive overview of the literary representation of the Blitz in Britain by women writers, and therefore deals with texts written by eight different authors.

The corpus of texts I have chosen to focus on has been carefully thought through and needs to be commented on in order to inform the reader regarding the reasons behind the grouping together of the selected authors. One of the lesser yet essential objectives of this work is to contribute to the resurrection of scarcely known narratives, hence why I have mostly chosen texts that have never been the object of thorough analyses. As mentioned in the

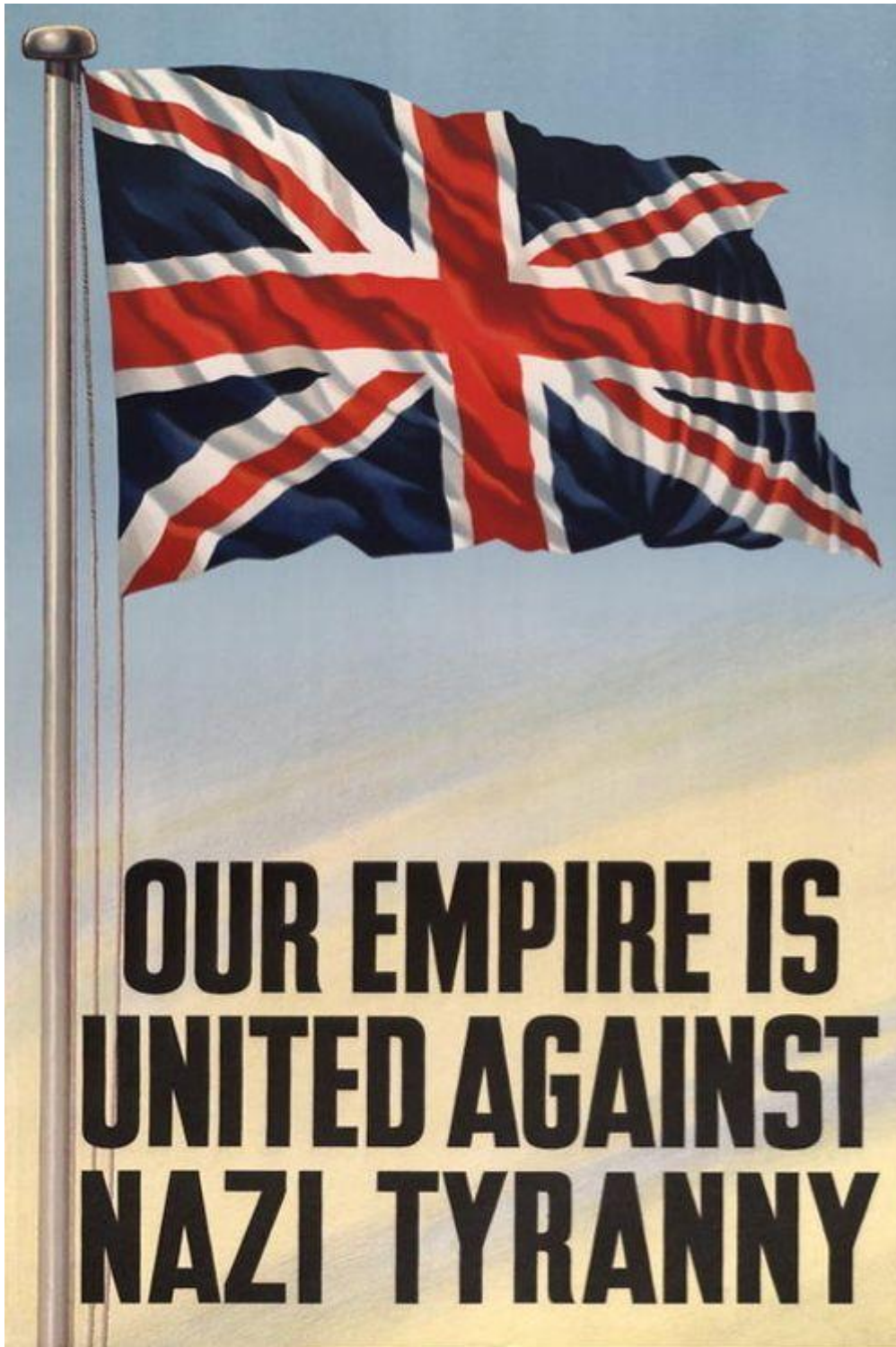
previous section, middlebrow and popular writers of the Second World War are the ones who have received the least attention, and this thesis strives to rescue some of these prolific yet forgotten writers from complete oblivion. Most of the authors I deal with have only rarely been studied, with the notable exception of Elizabeth Bowen, whom I have included in this thesis hoping to offer a new social-historical perspective on some of her best-known works. Similarly, the work I have chosen by Vera Brittain has received little attention.

In the first section of my dissertation, I focus on the issue of patriotism in women's writing of the Blitz through the close reading of three texts: *Anger in the Sky* (1943) by Susan Ertz, *Miss Ranskill Comes Home* (1946) by Barbara Bower and the short story 'Mysterious Kôr' (1942) by Elizabeth Bowen. I have chosen these three authors because, considering the very political dimension of the issue at hand, I wanted to look at material produced by women from different nationalities and distinct geographical and political backgrounds, in order to be able to give a more comprehensive vision of the question. Barbara Bower was English, born to English parents, whilst Susan Ertz was an Anglo-American citizen, and Elizabeth Bowen Anglo-Irish.

The second chapter looks at the representation of social class issues in the novels *Shelter* (1941) by Marguerite Steen, *London Pride* (1941) by Phyllis Bottome and *The Heat of the Day* (1948) by Elizabeth Bowen. I have chosen women from different social backgrounds in order to not limit my analysis to one very specific point of view. The first two novels were written by women who constantly asserted their strong sense of belonging to the working classes. Although they both managed to establish themselves as successful writers and earn very reasonable wages, their works exclusively focus on working-class environments and characters, narrating the lives of poorer citizens angered by social inequalities—inequities which, according to them, were only accentuated during the war. On the other hand, Elizabeth Bowen was not from a working-class background and benefitted from a very comfortable

upbringing, later on mixing with upper-middle class writers like Virginia Woolf or Vera Brittain.

The third chapter focuses on the depiction of the physical and psychological consequences of the Blitz on the civilian body in another three novels: *Account Rendered* by Vera Brittain (1945), *There Were No Windows* by Norah Hoult (1944) and *Sunset Over Soho* (1943). I have chosen to group these three texts together with the intention of studying as diverse a corpus as possible. Whilst *Account Rendered* is a novel, *There Were No Windows* is a fictional biography and *Sunset Over Soho*, a crime story. My aim is to be able to draw conclusions based on a widespread variety of works that reflect the extent to which the ‘Myth’ was understood as propaganda, analysing authors from different backgrounds and various genres.



Imperial War Museum IWM (Art. IWM PST 15791) ©





## **Chapter I: Patriotism at War**

### Introduction

In October 2016, a few months after the majority of the British population voted in favour of Brexit, Prime Minister Theresa May gave a speech to a Conservative Party conference in which she strongly criticised left-wing politicians and intellectuals who despise public patriotism and pro-British sentiment:

They find your patriotism distasteful, your concerns about immigration parochial, your views about crime illiberal, your attachment to your job security inconvenient. They find the fact that more than seventeen million people voted to leave the European Union simply bewildering. Because if you're well off and comfortable, Britain is a different country and these concerns are not your concerns. (May, 2016, np.)

Theresa May suggested it is entirely acceptable and even legitimate to be patriotic, and that it is on the contrary inappropriate and nonsensical to suggest that patriotism is inevitably linked to xenophobia and bigotry. The Prime Minister touched on one the most divisive issues in British politics, and more generally in British society, identifying 'a common dislike of patriotism in Britishness, and an over-readiness to conflate the former concept with nationalism and racism' (Townsend, 2016, para. 9), particularly coming from the left wing. As Chris Townsend puts it, 'we are probably more ready to think of Nigel Farage [ex-UKIP leader] as a patriot than we are Jeremy Corbyn, and a slew of negative associations follow' (ibid.).

Patriotism is indeed far from a unanimous, positive and progressive feeling in Britain, as fewer and fewer people feel inclined to assert their love for their country. In 2014, Britain's leading centre for independent social research, NatCen, released findings from a 2013 British Social Attitudes survey that showed a decline in people's pride in being British. Comparing this survey to another conducted ten years earlier in 2003, it is noticeable that whilst the

population still said they were proud of being British (82% of the participants both years), people were ‘less proud’ than they used to be. In 2003, 43 per cent said they were ‘very proud’ of their nationality, whilst 39 per cent confessed to be only ‘somewhat’ proud (Tilley et al., 2004). A decade later, only 35 per cent expressed strong pride, and 47 per cent ‘somewhat proud’ (Young, 2014, para. 6). The data shows this change had taken place across much of British society, as only the views of those who were the most fiercely proud in 2003—the over 65s and the least well-educated—remained unchanged. Whilst different theories were offered to try and explain this decline in patriotic feeling,<sup>54</sup> particularly when trying to consider it in relation to the recent unexpected result of the Brexit referendum, it is essential to understand that the notion of patriotism in Britain has always been a significantly dividing one.<sup>55</sup>

Since the late nineteenth-century in Britain, there has been a rift amongst the intellectual elite between those who promote the fundamental value of *citizenship*, ‘rooted in an attachment to the state as the supreme focus of collective loyalty, identity, and the common good’ (Stapleton, 2005, p. 152),<sup>56</sup> and those who advocate the ideal of *patriotism*, emphasising ‘the primacy of the nation over the state and impossibility, indeed incoherence, of a world in which national ties ha[ve] been significantly loosened’ (ibid.).<sup>57</sup> This conflict, leading to the

---

<sup>54</sup> Penny Young primarily links the readiness to express feelings of patriotism to political, social and financial conjunctures, stating that ‘the act of going to war sharpened some people’s patriotism’ in 2003 at the start of the Iraq war, whereas people felt less allegiance to Britain in the aftermaths of the final crisis and recession in 2013 (Young, 2014, para. 5).

<sup>55</sup> It is worth mentioning here that the question of Scotland and Scottish independence is beyond the scope of this essay, and that the author is aware the issue of patriotism would need to be approached differently when looking at the case of Scotland.

<sup>56</sup> These were mostly philosophers, social scientists and political thinkers, although Bernard Bosanquet and J. S. Mackenzie also strived to spread a ‘gospel of citizenship’ in the Charity Organization Society and the Civic Education League.

<sup>57</sup> These would primarily be writers and artists who addressed the same audiences as those above. It is to be noted here that ‘the support of avowed patriots for their state would not always be guaranteed, especially when it threatened to subjugate other peoples, for example, the Irish and the Boers’ (Stapleton, 2005, pp. 152-153).

lack of a united sentiment of patriotism, stems partly from the fact that national awareness is less dominant in Britain than in other countries.<sup>58</sup>

Unlike countries like France whose shared national heritage dates back to the Middle Ages,<sup>59</sup> Krishan Kumar argues that the ‘moment’ of English nationhood was the beginning of the nineteenth century, with the strengthening of British industrial and imperial supremacy (2003, pp. 200, 202, 233). Even then, national awareness manifested itself mainly through cultural expression rather than in political terms, since nationalism as a constitutional idea was constantly underplayed by competing sub-national loyalties. The relatively recent sense of British national identity, combined with a ‘disquiet about the illiberal, racist turn of European nationalist movements’ and the role the British Empire held in ‘heightening suspicion of the nation’, has led to what J. M. Keynes identifies as a cult of ‘patrophobia’ in British intellectual, cultural and social life of the twentieth century (quoted in Skidelsky, 1983, p. 91). Julia Stapleton refers to a fear of patriotism being corrupted and ‘transforming legitimate pride in national independence into chauvinism and aggrandisement’ (2005, p. 156). Today, ‘unlike the unseemly particularisms on other shores, British nationalism prefers not to recognise its own existence, instead painting its history in the colours of multicultural open-mindedness’ (Broder, 2016, para. 12). Even Brexit supporters prefer to describe the will to reassert ‘control of immigration [...] not [as] a chauvinism of [their] own, but merely the need to manage [their] liberal beneficence properly’ (ibid.), as the idea of patriotism still inevitably gets bad press.

Given the country’s lack of strong patriotic tradition, the British government went to great lengths to gather the people around symbols of unity during the two major conflicts of the twentieth century. In the First World War, the Conservative Party ‘enhanced its grip on

---

<sup>58</sup> In France, the newly elected president Emmanuel Macron claimed in 2017 that he would be ‘the president of the patriots facing the threat of nationalism’ (quoted in Chrisafis, 2017, para. 4).

<sup>59</sup> According to Colette Beaune, ‘the nation “France” was a new category of thought that gradually emerged in the Middle Ages’ (1987, p. 102). (my translation of: ‘*La nation France est une catégorie nouvelle de la pensée dont le Moyen-âge a vu la lente émergence*’).

ideas of national identity and patriotism' (Ward, 2004, p. 106). In order to minimise the influence of the rising pacifist and anti-war movements, the government's main tactic was to trigger patriotism using iconic figures to reinforce the feeling of belonging to the British nation. These included real people presented as heroes and fitted into national mythology, or images coming from popular folklore such as Britannia, John Bull and the British bulldog, fighting alongside the French cockerel and Marianne, the allegory of the '*République française*'. Yet, after witnessing the extent of the disastrous consequences of the Great War, many intellectuals like H. A. L. Fisher, an Oxford historian and president of the Board of Education<sup>60</sup>, tried to warn against the dangers of the newly found patriotism. In a series of lectures given in 1923, Fisher asked to consider:

whether we have not reached a stage of evolution in which it is necessary that our notions of patriotic duty should be revised, whether it is possible to maintain in full vigour the old exclusiveness of the nation, whether war has not become so great a menace to civilisation that greater authority should be attached to such machinery as may be contrived for averting it. (1924, p. 114)

Fifteen years later, the 'peace-keeping patriotism' Neville Chamberlain demonstrated in Munich paradoxically nearly drove the country to defeat in 1940. Chamberlain's appeasement policy was heavily criticised by Winston Churchill, whose different take on patriotism ostracised him from the Conservatives.

In 1940, Churchill formed a new coalition government with full support of the Labour party, including Hugh Dalton and Ernest Bevin, who had opposed the Munich agreement and called for rearmament against Fascism. The government's patriotism was then (in theory) two-fold: 'the outward-looking patriotism that sought to defend the nation was drawn together with an inward-looking patriotism that concerned itself with the well-being of the people' (Ward,

---

<sup>60</sup> The equivalent of today's Secretary of State for Education.

2004, p. 106). This concept was, at least in appearance, in line with the socialist patriotism George Orwell was advocating in the same period in his 1941 essay ‘The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius’, in which he highlighted the ways patriotism could be used to serve systems of government. Underlining the distinction between the negative forces of nationalism and the positive potential of patriotism, Orwell believed that ‘a sense of collective identity is deep-rooted to the point of inextricability’ (Townsend, 2016, para. 5): ‘however much you hate it or laugh at it, you will never be happy away from [Britain] for any length of time. The suet puddings and the red pillar-boxes have entered into your soul’ (Orwell, 1941, section I). To him, a world where one can free oneself of one’s nationality is both unlikely and highly undesirable.

One cannot see the modern world as it is unless one recognises the overwhelming strength of patriotism, national loyalty. In certain circumstances, it can break down, at certain levels of civilisation it does not exist, but as a POSITIVE force there is nothing to set beside it. Christianity and international Socialism are as weak as straw in comparison with it. Hitler and Mussolini rose to power in their own countries very largely because they could grasp this fact and their opponents could not. (ibid.)

Orwell maintained that the left’s sense of shame at expressing British pride was ultimately wrong, as he added:

It is obvious that this preposterous convention cannot continue. The Bloomsbury highbrow, with his mechanical snigger, is as out-of-date as the cavalry colonel. A modern nation cannot afford either of them. Patriotism and intelligence will have to come together again.<sup>61</sup> (section V)

---

<sup>61</sup> Here, Orwell sets a precedent to one of Benedict Anderson’s core ideas in *Imagined Communities*: In an age when it is so common for progressive, cosmopolitan intellectuals (particularly in Europe?) to insist on the near-pathological character of nationalism, its roots in fear and hatred of the Other, and its affinities with racism, it is useful to remind ourselves that nations inspire love, and often profoundly self-sacrificing love. (2006, p. 145)

Indeed, the Prime Minister's speeches and the Ministry of Information's propaganda aimed to foster and strengthen the desire to fight for victory amongst the British people, most of whom were at first reluctant to enter another conflict after the Great War. Therefore, public discourse was based on a fierce denigration of the enemy coupled with a strong cult of the 'home front hero'. Firstly, it had to be obvious to everyone that Germany would inevitably lose the war and that history was bound to repeat itself. For example, on August 8, 1943 at 9:30 p.m., the BBC Home Service Basic broadcast 'The Black Day of the German Army', reminding its audience of the defeat of the Germans on the same day in 1918, as the Allies began their final assault on the Hindenburg Line. The goal was to trigger people's animosity towards the enemy, by highlighting its cruelty and giving citizens a target on which to focus their anger and emotions. The Ministry of Information ordered the BBC in 1941 to 'explain the exact nature of the beast we are fighting, by giving the public this clear objective for their feelings and emotions' (BBC WAC, 1941, January 5).

Whilst painting the savage cruelty of the Nazis, propaganda also encouraged the admiration of the new national heroes: people on the home front. Suddenly, the Home Guard, firemen, postmen and even journalists were to be admired and praised for their effort. Lyrical descriptions of emblematic (yet far from authentic) figures of brave citizens were to serve as models of behaviour to adopt in wartime. In the programme *The World Goes By* broadcast by the BBC Home Service on September 18, 1940, a speaker reported:

If I should live to be as old as Methuselah, I shall never forget the calm, rich humour, the quiet resolution, the many little kindnesses and the friendliness of the ordinary folk I've met this week. [...] I'm remembering a woman I met on Sunday in the East End. She hadn't even a needle and cotton left from the shambles that was her home. She just said: "We'll sing that fellow Hitler to his grave yet". (quoted in Vallée, 2006, para. 28)

This 'national hero-making'<sup>62</sup> involved embellishment and exaggeration of every daily event. The average person became a war champion for supporting the nation's battle. Women's testimonies were presented on the radio and in newspapers as incarnations of what was suitable to think, say and do. Their lifestyle, their values, their attitude were exemplary and were supposed to spark in the audience an identification process. These perfect citizens, seen everywhere in the media, gave the impression that they were the British norm. In the country's collective imagination, Britain became a nation where women factory workers and soldiers fought against the enemy and defended the values of democracy with courage and determination. Negative or sceptical reports from individuals were censored, or, for the sake of credibility, only disclosed with a disclaimer commenting on their 'unusual' character.

By providing clear 'explanations' of the situation, propaganda aimed to highlight the importance of national allegiance in the fight for victory, and the ministry's instructions to radio programmes in this matter were specific:

It seems to us that the problems of supply, prices and taxes are not well understood by the public, and we would like you to make sure that, in the appropriate context and as often as possible speakers may be brought to mention the following points:

- sacrifices are for the expansion of the war production.
- describe the increase in war production and comment on military successes (news); introduce a reminder that this was only possible because of sacrifice.
- avoid phrases reminiscent of Goering's 'guns instead of butter'. (BBC WAC, 1941, March 4)

Here, the first two instructions insist on the necessity of sacrifice in the name of combat and greater national interest, strategically pointing out the direct link between the soldiers' military victories on the front line and people on the home front. Propaganda therefore was a remedy

---

<sup>62</sup> A term coined by Cécile Vallée (2006).



to the possible slackening and abatement of the war effort. It was constantly paired with praising certain categories of the population that may have been upset or exhausted in order to elicit their determination. Men and women needed to be convinced they were on a crusade and that what was at stake was so crucial and noble that the difficulties and suffering caused by the war, the risk of being wounded or even killed, were worth it.

The main objective of propaganda was to maintain faith in victory. Even though there was no possible way of backing this up with data, numbers, or any infallible strategy, the superiority of the British army was constantly reaffirmed. Churchill's political strategy relied on the double technique of minimising the enemy's strength and the British military defeats whilst exaggerating the power of the Allies' armies. In critical moments like the Blitz, German bombings were said not to be threatening considering the obvious military power of the British nation on a larger scale. It was repeated that Britain's defence plan, on land as well as in the air and sea, was so effective that invasion and defeat would never happen. In modern war, the key to victory was armament superiority, and government propaganda insisted on the idea that the industrial power of the United Kingdom and its Empire was rumoured to be so much greater than the enemy's that it would defeat Germany before the end of 1942.<sup>63</sup>

Propaganda put forward the cultural and spiritual 'British' values that needed to be defended at any cost: democracy, Christian morals and the nation's exceptional history and heritage.<sup>64</sup> The constant 'hero-making' of the people mainly served to justify war, to render it

---

<sup>63</sup> A fact that has since then been refuted by several historians, amongst whom Max Hastings: The inescapable truth is that Hitler's Wehrmacht was the outstanding fighting force of World War II, one of the greatest in history. For many years after 1945, this seemed painful to concede publicly, partly for nationalistic reasons, partly also because the Nazi legions were fighting for one of the most obnoxious regimes of all time. (Hastings, 1985, para. 7)

(See his 2010 work *Overlord: D-Day, June 6 and 1944* for more information.)

<sup>64</sup> A similar process was undertaken in the Soviet Union after Germany broke the 1939 German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact. Facing the threat of a Nazi invasion, Stalin's government had to reinvent the soviet model and discard socialist ideology in favour of patriotism, to be able to lead the 'Great Patriotic War'. On November 7, 1941, Josef Stalin addressed the people  
Comrades, citizens, brothers and sisters, men of our Army and Navy! [...]

legitimate in the eyes of the still sceptic pacifists only twenty years after the end of the First World War. The ultimate objective of propaganda was to create an idealised portrayal of the people themselves, of their nation and, above all, of their combat, and these are the feelings that are generally associated with today's collective memory of the Blitz.

However, despite the government's efforts to stir feelings of patriotism during the Second World War, the idea that this conflict needed to be fought in the name of the greater 'British' good and that the violence inflicted on German civilians was entirely legitimate may not have been as straightforward and universally accepted as Churchill implied. Recent historical assessment of the Blitz by historians like Angus Calder has shown that the desire to fight for so-called British values was at first difficult to inspire in a generation still traumatised by the previous war.<sup>65</sup>

This was especially true for women, in a society that had seen the rise of powerful feminist movements strongly based on internationalism and pacifism since the end of the nineteenth century. In 1874, the British Women's Peace and Arbitration Auxiliary of the London Peace Society was created, and the movement only grew more energised after the

---

Grave danger overhangs our country. [...] Side by side with the Red Army, the entire Soviet people is rising in defence of our native land. [...] [Hitler] is out to restore the rule of the landlords, to restore tsarism, to destroy the national culture and the national existence as states of the Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians, Uzbeks, Tatars, Moldavians, Georgians, Armenians, Azerbaijanians and the other free peoples of the Soviet Union, to Germanise them, to turn them into the slaves of German princes and barons. [...]

Lenin, the great founder of our state, used to say that the chief virtues of Soviet men and women must be courage, valour, fearlessness in struggle, readiness to fight together with the people against the enemies of our country. [...]

The Red Army, Red Navy and all citizens of the Soviet Union must defend every inch of Soviet soil, must fight to the last drop of blood for our towns and villages, must display the daring, initiative and mental alertness that are inherent in our people. [...]

Forward to victory! (Stalin, 1943, pp. 5-6)

Recycling slogans that had previously brought citizens together throughout centuries, addressing the people as 'brothers', Stalin exalts patriotic concepts and inscribes the war against the Nazis in the long tradition of 'sacred' wars fought by Russia. References to the 'Great nation of Lenin, but also of Pushkin, Tolstoy, Tchaikovsky, Chekhov, Suvorov and Kutuzov' support the need to fight for victory.

<sup>65</sup> Alongside the formation of movements like the Peace Pledge Union in 1934, the number of registered conscientious objectors during World War II neared 60,000 (Rose, 2003, p. 171), multiplying by nearly four World War I's figure of 16,000 (Barker, 1982, p. 121). Although they were ostracised and regarded as coward 'conchies', more men asserted their right to refuse to perform military service on the grounds of religious convictions or freedom of thought.

'pointless' First World War. By the late 1930s however, with the establishment of dictatorships in Germany, Italy and Spain, Fascism became a threat women pacifists could not ignore. During the Spanish Civil War, even women like Winifred Holtby who were convinced that war meant 'the pendulum [of history] [was] swinging backwards, not only against feminism, but against democracy, liberty and reason, against international co-optation and political tolerance' (Holtby, 1934, p. 151), recognised the urgent need to prevent the worldwide disappearance of civilisation as they knew it. In 1938, the Women World's Committee Against War and Fascism was relaunched as the Women's Committee for Peace and Democracy as female peace campaigners were forced to face a 'waning of that international spirit which alone can make a peaceful world practicable' (Bolt, 2004, np.). The women who were part of the organisation actively assisted Spanish refugees and worked to raise money, food and clothing for the victims of Franco's regime.

By 1939, Britain's war objectives seemed clearer and more legitimate than in the First World War, giving oxygen to the 'popular argument (advanced during every period) that war as a whole is wrong, but *this* war is the outstanding exception' (Brittain, 2005, p. 36). British peace societies were undermined by their loss of supporters and were obliged 'to weigh the merits of principled futility [...] against those of uncomfortable patriotism' (Bolt, 2004, np.). Pacifism (rather than pacifism)—the general ethical opposition to violence or war, *except* in cases where force is deemed *absolutely necessary* to advance the cause of peace—was becoming increasingly popular, a concept only reinforced by the serious consequences of the Battle of Britain and then the Blitz.<sup>66</sup>

Pacifism thus became one of the main aspects that characterised women's literature of the period, highlighting an essential ambivalence and ambiguity in terms of patriotism and national allegiance, which, as mentioned earlier, resulted from the collapse of 'the terrible

---

<sup>66</sup> For more information on pacifism, see Alan John Percivale Taylor's *The Trouble-Makers* (1957); Martin Ceadel's *Thinking About Peace and War* (1987), and Richard Norman's *Ethics, Killing and War* (1995).

barrier of knowledge by which War cut off the men who possessed it from the women who [...] remained in ignorance' (Brittain, 1978, p. 215). This new war presented new characteristics, particularly in the sense that it was seen as an ideological conflict between fascist partisans imposing by fair means or foul a 'New World Order' and defenders of democracy and human rights. Women's war writing became direct, immediate reporting, and much of it was no longer dominated by a strong 'feminist anti-war' message, as many 'are torn between their rejection of any form of state violence and anxiety about the destruction of their own nation' (Lassner, 1998, p. 27).

Following this thesis's main aim, to extend the historical reassessment of the period of the Blitz to the literary field, and with the intention of challenging Angus Calder and Salman Rushdie's views according to which war writers were incapable of stepping outside the social conventions of their time, this chapter considers two novels and one short story written by women writers during or just after the Blitz in Britain, with particular attention to the treatment of the concept of patriotism. Because it would be unwise to fit all women's responses to the start of the Second World War in one single conceptual scheme—as Penny Summerfield or Phyllis Lassner's extensive research shows,<sup>67</sup> women's reactions to hostilities were extremely varied—the following section does not aim to strictly label writers as 'pacifists' or 'jingoists', but instead seeks to highlight the ambiguities and tensions at play in different works regarding the concepts of British pride and patriotism.

Focusing on three examples of Blitz fiction, *Anger in the Sky* by Susan Ertz (1943), *Miss Ranskill Comes Home* by Barbara Bower (1946) and 'Mysterious Kôr' by Elizabeth Bowen (1942), I aim to highlight how three different women writers reflect not only an awareness of the imposed patriotism and nationalism in Britain, but also a desire to question it, far from being coerced into fitting into a wider discourse defending British values at all

---

<sup>67</sup> See Phyllis Lassner's *British Women of World War II* (1998) and Penny Summerfield's *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives* (1998).

costs. What I hope to shed light on is a widespread feeling of unease regarding the imposed rhetoric of the People's War, a conscious desire to reflect on and confront individual opinions concerning the public discourse, coming from all strata of society.

It is interesting to group these writers together as they come from different geographical and social backgrounds. Barbara Bower was a devout Christian from a small village in Hampshire, who lived with her parents until the age of forty-two and mostly wrote children's books; Susan Ertz was an Anglo-American citizen who resided in London, married to a British army officer and deeply involved in the war effort both in the First and Second World War; whilst Elizabeth Bowen was a very wealthy Anglo-Irish writer who divided her time between the English capital and her estate in the Irish countryside, where many established writers like Virginia Woolf or Iris Murdoch visited her. Yet, each one of these authors' texts critically reflects on the idea of allegiance to a nation, and presents some of the same ambiguities and uncertainties that characterise women's Second World War literature.

A) *Anger in the Sky*, Susan Ertz (1943)

Born to American parents in 1894, Susan Ertz moved back and forth between England and the United States during her childhood but chose to live in London when she was eighteen. She did canteen work for American soldiers in the First World War and married a British Army soldier in 1932. This is unfortunately just about all the available information on Ertz,<sup>68</sup> other than the fact she was a prolific writer of novels (including *Madame Claire* (1923) and *Now East, Now West* (1927)), short stories and children's books, most of which are not very well-known and today out of print. During her writing career, however, the critics constantly praised Ertz's work. Grant Overton included her in *The Women Who Make Our Novels* in 1928, stating that 'Miss Ertz can extract the last bit of dramatic feeling from the situation she

---

<sup>68</sup> The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography does not have an entry for Susan Ertz.

has [...] and [...] can, more successfully than Mrs. Wharton generalise her conclusions and make them seem applicable to human nature everywhere' (1967, pp. 114-115). Twenty years later, Hamilton Basso also asserted that Ertz was 'a better writer on almost every count than several of her contemporaries who have managed to acquire larger and noisier reputations' (1947, p. 99).

Yet, after the war, Ertz's novels were ignored. Even in the recent rise in interest for Second World War women's writing, very little attention is given to her texts. I share Miriam L. Berg's view that the author has been 'unjustly neglected' (1980, p. 5), as Ertz was a particularly talented writer able to realistically depict a social setting in a precise historical time. Focusing on the transformations taking place in British society in the interwar and Second World War period, she was particularly interested in the tension between private feelings and interests and social responsibility. In most of her novels, characters face 'the conflict between unfaithfulness to a moral obligation and personal conscience' (p. 6). More specifically, she was a pioneer in her treatment of female characters as strong, independent and critical thinking participants in the war. As Berg explains, 'one of her primary assets is her ability to portray the ideals that engender the emancipation of women, nonconformity, freedom of thought, intellectual honesty, and the dignity of the individual' (ibid.).

*Anger in the Sky* (1943) is Ertz's one and only 'Blitz' novel. Set in England during the bombings (partly in the countryside, partly in London), it tells the story of Mrs. Anstruther, whose big Elizabethan house is 'filled to capacity with a collection of fifty to sixty evacuees, bombed-out friends and relatives' (Hartley, 1997, p. 58). Building intricate relations between the many characters, the novel depicts the war as an ambivalent period where people are torn between blindly supporting their country's actions and questioning the whole meaning behind the war itself. Interestingly, this text is generally considered to be a 'propaganda novel'. After the novel's publication, *The Saturday Review* stated: 'it is a book full of encouragement and

goodwill and good feeling [...] it seems a little unduly hopeful about the good effects which will result from the war' (Drew, 1943, p. 24). In the *Atlantic Monthly*, critics were suspicious of the utopian England Ertz describes: 'the strength of this story lies in its warm-blooded picture of that classless community which England has (temporarily?) become in its own defence' (quoted in Calder, 2004, p. 201). Robert Calder made the novel one of his case studies in his book *Beware the British Serpent: The Role of Writers in British Propaganda in the US, 1939-1945* (2004), in which he comments on the government's efforts to mobilise authors for war in Britain, particularly through the creation of the Author's Planning Committee in 1939 (p. 47).<sup>69</sup> My argument is that these readings of the novel are far too reductive and obliterate a whole other side of the text, which presents a much more ambivalent and daring depiction of the 'People's War'. As a dual citizen of Great Britain and America married to a soldier, Susan Ertz presents us with a text which raises serious questions on the ideas of patriotism, the sense of duty to the nation, the fundamental imperative that British values must be defended, and the problems that arise as soon as these are contested.

*Anger in the Sky* is one of many 'village' novels published during the war, set in the countryside, away from the terror of the bombs falling every night on the big cities. Along with texts such as *The Oaken Heart* (1941) by Margery Allingham and *The Castle on the Hill* (1942) by Elizabeth Goudge, Ertz's novel fits in this larger genre of 'countryside' fiction, much appreciated by the working and middle-class readerships in the 1940s. Many authors

---

<sup>69</sup> On September 5, 1939, two days after the declaration of war, the Ministry of Information sent out this letter to around seventy writers in order to request their service in terms of propaganda:

I am directed by the Minister of Information to inform you that your name has been entered on a list of authors whose services are likely to be valuable to the Ministry of Information in time of war. The Minister will be grateful, therefore, if you refrain from engaging yourself in any other form on national service without previously communicating with the Ministry of Information. He would also be glad to have any particulars that you may care to supply about your specialised knowledge in any field likely to be of interest to the ministry and of your acquaintance with foreign countries and languages Please send particulars of any change of address, and all communications to me at Room 133, at the above address.

Yours Faithfully,  
A. D. Peters. (1939, September 5)

chose to remove their narratives from the urban landscape and focus on much smaller towns where very little seemed to happen and not much disturbed the peace of the quiet English countryside. In wartime, this resurgence of 'rural' literature is easily linked to the myth of pastoral England, a country whose name 'itself rings with the mythologising precepts of Arcadia, the bucolic and with a palpable sense of a lost Golden Age' (Rhowbotham, 2013, para. 4). In Allingham's novel for example, living in a village during the war, far from the bombs and combat zone, is 'like following a quiet domestic film which had been accidentally photographed on the negative of a sensational thriller' (1941, p. 67). These novels perfectly embodied images of sustained 'domestic traditions and community stability' (Lassner, 1998, p. 130) The calm and beautiful spacious fields and the comforting harmony of the welcoming English cottages are the backdrop of a literature of escapism for readers experiencing the Blitz. Novelist Gladys Bronwyn Stern recalls that 'That-Village-in-Wartime novel [was] my happiest form of escape fiction [...] very little sob-stuff, a little more snob-stuff, and perhaps rather too much musing dialogue' (1944, pp. 70-71).

Yet, the village novels' 'relative safety and insularity' (Lassner, 1998, p. 130) cannot be understood as completely detached from the conflict; rather, they necessarily need to be approached and received as war novels in the same way Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* is unanimously considered a Blitz narrative. In *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams analyses how the antagonism countryside-city is exacerbated when society undergoes radical socio-economic changes, when the myth of a 'purer, more natural' society of a happier past, is evoked in opposition to a decadent present. The critic debunks the notion of rural life as simple and unadulterated, linking the country to images of a Golden Age. According to him, this is 'a myth functioning as a memory' that dissimulates class conflict, enmity, and animosity present in Britain (1975, p. 43). Terry Eagleton also explains how the myth of a rural England first surfaces as the one side of a coin, the other side of Englishness



being the cruel consequences of the industrialisation of the nation on the agricultural world. The literary critic explains how ‘the idea of a timeless rural England [first] emerged at exactly the point when the country was becoming the first in the world to undergo industrialisation’, paradoxically highlighting that ‘there was nothing timeless or idyllic about this landscape of capitalist landowners, grinding poverty, depopulation and a decaying artisanal class’ (2011, para. 1). He refers to Thomas Hardy as not being ‘the most cheerful of authors’, since the writer ‘knew there were scarcely any peasants to be found’ in what was certainly not a peaceful Eden-like countryside (ibid.). Most of them ‘had been reduced to landless labourers by market forces and the Enclosure Acts, or driven into the satanic mills of early industrial England’ (ibid.). The countryside became the symbol of a timeless, changeless England, ‘just when it started to shrink’ (para. 6).

A few decades later, the First and Second World War led to the resurgence of the popularity of the rural England myth, not in opposition to dangers of modernity but to dehumanising conflict. Soldiers fought in the name of ‘Chipping Campden and Lavenham’, led on by the recurrent use of landscape imagery in wartime speeches,<sup>70</sup> even though the majority of them probably would have never even heard of Lavenham. As Eagleton puts it, ‘visions of peace and harmony are the agreeable illusions of which war and imperialism are the nightmarish underside’ (2011, para. 9). Similarly, in *Authoring War*, Kate McLoughlin precisely argues why the ‘pastoral’ is ‘in many instances’, ‘founded on, or enabled by war’ (2011, p. 97). Recalling Paul Fussell’s translation of the classical tag ‘*Et in Arcadia ergo*’, ‘Even in Arcadia I, Death, hold sway’ (Fussell 1975, pp. 245-246), the scholar states that

---

<sup>70</sup> In the First World War, a good example of this would be the propaganda poster series by Frank Newbould, “Fight For It Now”, in which there is no trace of London or mining towns of the North, but all the archetypes of Southern England: Salisbury cathedral, hilly countryside landscapes, white sheep, etc. These images recall the answer Edward Thomas gave Eleanor Farjeon, his biographer, when she asked him why he thought in France in 1916: ‘he stopped, and picked up a pinch of earth. “Literally, for this”. He crumpled it between finger and thumb, and let it fall’ (quoted in Smith, 2000, p. 113). Similarly in the Second World War, Churchill insisted on the need to fight for victory by often referring to landscape imagery: ‘We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills’ (1940a).

'intrusion and interaction [...] characterise the relationship between the bucolic and the bellicose' as 'war is immanent in the rural, insofar as its sounds may penetrate the quietude at any moment' (McLoughlin, 2011, p. 98).

In light of this, I argue that *Anger in the Sky* is a perfect example of a simple narrative set in a rural area, where characters are safe in the countryside immersed in nature, that however holds a much stronger political meaning than usually be associated with the escapism of 'rural' novels. Geographically, everyone is removed from the direct zone of conflict; however, the war keeps intruding in the life of Mrs. Anstruther and her peers. Although the novel has been very little studied, the two most significant analyses of it as an authentic war novel are radically opposed. On the one hand, Jenny Hartley writes that the novel symbolises the solidarity and unity of the British people during the war, the text being a perfect illustration of the 'Blitz spirit'. In her study *Millions Like Us*, she refers to 'the motif of the open house' in female wartime literature as one that 'kept pace with the ideals of 'home-made socialism''. To her, 'the open house is the emblem of the nation's adaptation to war', as 'the values it exemplifies are those of hospitality, tolerance and community' (1997, p. 54). Recurring images of strong women making the difficult decisions of welcoming those in needs depicts, in Hartley's opinion, a deep feeling of solidarity between the middle classes of the countryside and the destitute, bombed-out families of the big cities. On the other hand, Phyllis Lassner highlights (albeit only briefly) how women writers like Ertz are able to subvert the rural novel genre using 'the unlikely setting of the 'static' village and its country houses to conduct heated debates about war aims and their connection to domestic social relations and cultural identity' (1998, p. 133). Focusing on the aspect of class, Lassner hints at the powerful social message of the novel, particularly relating to the topics of 'class exclusions and snobbery' (p. 134).

These two very different analyses of the novel are a good reflection of what I believe is one of the main feature of women writers in wartime, as they are torn between questioning and supporting conventional public discourses, expressing a constant ambiguity in terms of political and social issues. I seek here to highlight the ambivalent treatment of the specific issues of patriotism in *Anger in the Sky*. I will first focus on the writer's very noticeable understanding and recognition of both the legitimacy and the superficiality of the People's War rhetoric in the novel, before moving on to the constant tension between patriotic, pro-war opinions and pacifist discourses running through the text.

The ambivalence of the political positioning of the novel is particularly reflected in the constant dialectical opposition of different pairs of characters. I will first take the example of the different attitudes and reasoning of the Londoner Sibyl Ellsworth and the villager Mrs. Anstruther.

As mentioned previously, the key word that keeps coming back when one reads historical accounts of the Blitz published before the late twentieth century is 'high morale'. The collective memory of the period is centred around the idea that during the bombings, British citizens constantly remained calm, even cheerful, when having to face the German bombs every night. People were 'taking it'— a phrase that O'Brien argues undoubtedly 'reflected the reality of the situation' (1955, p. 401—carrying out their daily task in a particularly joyful mood.

In *Anger in the Sky*, one particularly interesting character who seems to faithfully depict this spirit of 'high morale' is Mrs. Ellsworth, an elderly lady who owns and lives in a flat in London. Her mind is set on remaining in her apartment during the bombings, even as she watches the bombs destroying neighbouring buildings. The way she explains her strong desire not to escape the Blitz perfectly illustrates the heroic image of the stoic British citizen, convinced of the nation's invincibility: 'London is my home', she says, 'and I mean to die in

it, if I can. [...] We decided, once and for all, not to uproot ourselves. If this building is hit, *tant pis*' (Ertz, 1943, p. 176). She epitomises the brave, courageous Londoner who will not surrender to feelings of fear. During a particularly violent raid, the frail little woman maintains that 'panic is such a ghastly, pitiable thing, far, far worse than death. Fear is worse than death. I made up my mind not to feel fear, and, above all, not to cling to life. Here I stay. If they want me, here I am' (p. 177).

The main drive behind the people's high spirits during the Blitz was, according to some historians, a sense of belonging to a nation. Titmuss for example, as said previously, attributes people's high morale to a universal will to work under the stress of national necessity (quoted in Jones et al., 2004, p. 463). Sibyl Ellsworth's views on Britishness in *Anger in the Sky* seem to fit within Churchill's propaganda framework, as she narrates her newly found love for her nation and all the cultural and social heritage attached to it, which must be defended come what may:

'I began to love all the things I'd belittled before. Our patience, our love of fairness, our steady progress towards equity and justice, our love of freedom—even when it deteriorates into mere *laissez-faire*—above all, our good humour. I fell in love with our great men and began to study some of them with a new interest—Shakespeare, Milton, Baxter... And though, as you know, William, I never wanted to live in the country, I suddenly saw why the English countryside has such power over the heart and why it has made so many poets.' (Ertz, 1943, p. 183)

Mrs. Ellsworth's British pride enables her to literally enjoy the bombings and go as far as pitying the countries that will never get to experience the Blitz. She swears she does not hate living in the middle of bombs:

When the bombings began in earnest I felt a kind of exaltation because my love was being so much more than justified. When I saw that these people were not going to be

broken, not their spirit quenched, it was the best moment of my life. It was worth having lived for. [...] I'm almost sorry for other countries that have not had to endure this extremity of danger and suffering. [...] I'm glad I'm here; here in London, here in this flat. I wouldn't be anywhere else for the world. (p. 184)

At first glance, when considering Mrs. Ellsworth's character, one would think that Susan Ertz fully supported the idea that British morale during the Blitz was at its best and indeed participated in the wider political and social propaganda promoting the invincibility of and the support owed the nation. This would be in line with Hartley's reading of the book as part of a 'literature of citizenship' (1997, p. 15). However, Sibyl Ellsworth is not a character that the reader would necessarily empathise with and certainly not look up to since she is very close to being a caricature of English jingoism. Her comments lack credibility and her rhetorical declarations remind us of Churchill's carefully planned speeches. 'I'm glad I'm *here; here* in London, *here* in this flat', the solemn tone and the repetitions in her last sentence sound unnatural and the man she is addressing stares at her with disbelief rather than admiration before running away to take cover during the actual bombing. Sybil is a character that is arguably very purposefully exaggerated in order to lead the reader to question her sincerity. She is the perfect (illusory) reflection of the myth she supports, regularly mocked by Mrs. A. who finds Sibyl's admiration for her 'god' Churchill unjustified (Ertz, 1943, p. 101).

Susan Ertz seems to be aware of the fact Britain holds a long tradition of national myths, legends, and a general sense of heroism, which all bring together a community around specific values. In the case of the Blitz, collective memory supports a myth of 'British or English moral pre-eminence, buttressed by British unity' (ibid.), an idea which is perfectly visible in the case of Mrs. Ellsworth. Her staying in her flat quoting Shakespeare suddenly takes on for her a much more important meaning of resistance, which is not based on any rational and logical argument for promoting the war effort.

A closer look at the main character of the novel, Mrs. Anstruther, supports the idea that Susan Ertz was aware of the constructed nature of the British good spirits and people's newly found patriotism, and questions the legitimacy of the People's War rhetoric. Mrs. Anstruther, physically removed from the war as she lives in a small village but much involved in the larger political and social debates that take place around her, shows fear and doubt, two attitudes that historians who nowadays attempt to debunk the Myth of the Blitz say were much more common than is generally assumed. Ruth Anstruther explicitly questions the superficiality of the Blitz spirit, just like the historian Angus Calder who argues that the image of a nation united in adversity and resisting hardship was almost entirely constructed by the political propaganda of the late 1930s and 1940s. Mrs. A. is, for example, aware of Churchill's tendency to turn defeats into victories and of his extraordinary capacity to make a catastrophic situation like that of Dunkirk sound like the country's 'finest hour'.<sup>71</sup> She is fed up with 'reticence, stubbornness and understatement' as she thinks 'they're the very things that might lose us the war' (Ertz, 1943, p. 117), and is able to reflect on the entirely constructed and largely unjustified 'belief in British invincibility'<sup>72</sup> that shelters her peers:

How, Mrs. A. wondered, do such gentle spirits as Miss Lubbock and her mother survive wars? [...] Miss Lubbock was as certain as most of her kind that Britain could not lose the war. The ups and downs of the struggle meanwhile did not alarm her. The belief in British invincibility sheltered her and her mother and millions like them, like a great iron umbrella. (p. 100)

---

<sup>71</sup> For another woman writer's reflection on Dunkirk which challenges the way it was narrated in the political discourse of the time, see Chapter III, section C on Gladys Mitchell's *Sunset Over Soho* (1943).

<sup>72</sup> Philippe Chassaing explains how this myth can be dated back to the sixteenth century when, under the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, the Spanish Armada led by Philip II in 1588 was defeated after just a few battles. This episode, long considered one of England's greatest military achievements, founded the myth of 'British invincibility' in front of any threat of invasion, encouraging and exacerbating a sense of national pride (2011, p. 5).

We underrate our enemies so, England might well emblazon on her coat of arms, 'the reports are greatly exaggerated'. It seems to sum up the national temper. (p. 117)

More interestingly, Mrs. Anstruther is also irritated by the ever present 'Blitz humour' which was often expressed in the form of jokes or cartoons in the newspapers. During the war, 'when the Luftwaffe was laying waste to large swathes of urban Britain', the spirit of the Blitz 'was based on the determination to "keep smiling through", even in the face of terrible adversity' (McKinstry, 2006, para. 4):

Shops became a favourite symbol of defiance. Big and small, they had their windows blown out. The West End stores would erect painted wooden fronts with only tiny panes of glass to replace them; the little fruiterers and grocers would often do without any glass at all. The impromptu signs became favourite blitz jokes. 'MORE OPEN THAN USUAL' was a common one. 'BLAST!' was the most laconic. One pub advertised, 'OUR WINDOWS ARE GONE BUT OUR SPIRITS ARE EXCELLENT. COME IN AND TRY THEM'. (Calder, 1969, p. 174)

Mrs. Anstruther has trouble understanding the legitimacy of the numerous jokes which for her are only a smoke screen put up to prevent any serious reflection on Britain's war strategy and war aims, and more importantly on the disastrous consequences of the conflict on the home front. Ruth thinks to herself:

I wonder if we aren't suffering from too great a sense of humour. The ability to see the comic side of everything leads to the inability to see the serious side of anything. Though I would confess it to no one but you, I begin to weary a little of the humour of the cockneys after the raid, and though it is as a humour that brings tears to the eyes, I would welcome rage, indignation in its place. (Ertz, 1943, p. 139)

Mostly, Mrs. Anstruther looks down on people like Sibyl Ellsworth. She believes the sudden resurgence of British pride in many citizens bears a strong resemblance with, on the one hand,

a cowardly denial of reality, and, on the other, overpowering selfish arrogance. She can put her surroundings into perspective and is aware of the fact that during a conflict, war allows civilians to be heroes, and people simply rejoice in the egotistic pleasure of feeling useful:

A sort of pride seemed to uphold them; pride in their ability to 'take it', pride in the fact that they were 'in the news', were a part of the war front and were fighting back. They had been taken out of their normal grooves, out of themselves, and endless would be the stories exchanged the tales handed on from one to another, the deeds of bravery or of comedy retailed. The bereaved would find listeners; comforters would be sustained, perhaps, by the realisation that the war had come to them, had selected them from out those teeming millions for drama or for tragedy. They belonged to the world's great army of the bombed, who find, to their own surprise, unexpected inner stores of strength and are enlarged thereby. (p. 162)

The completely opposite attitudes of these two women, the elderly Londoner and the middle-aged countryside house owner reflects Ertz's ability to see beyond the imposed myth of the People's War and highlight the often obvious discrepancy between what people ought to think and what they actually felt.

The start of the Second World War led to a different response from women writers than in the First. As stated in the introduction to this chapter, women's writing became direct, immediate war reporting, and was no longer dominated by a strong 'feminist anti-war' message, as many 'are torn between their rejection of any form of state violence and anxiety about the destruction of their own nation' (Lassner, 1998, p. 27).

Susan Ertz's novel is a perfect example of this ambiguity. At first glance, *Anger in the Sky* seems to be highlighting the necessity of war and the legitimacy of the fight for victory. Mrs. Anstruther's three children actively participate in the war effort and she herself opens her house to refugees and evacuees. Her son Lennox is determined to prove the war is



necessary and that everyone who is able to put two and two together should be involved in it. In a heated debate with his American friend, who does not seem to see the point in the conflict, he states:

If there was ever a war for freedom, this is it, and you believe in freedom. If we should lose this war—and we may lose it; we’re fighting alone, and under every conceivable disadvantage—if we lose it, everything is lost. Civilisation will get a setback it may not recover from for centuries. (Ertz, 1943, p. 85)

Ertz chooses to have characters strongly reinforcing the image of an England fighting alone, a vision at the core of Churchill’s propaganda. London is fighting thanks to the ‘courage of a few’ (Churchill, 1940b), and its greatness is reinforced by the fact it has been left to stand alone, as it is the only one brave enough to face the Nazis:

And here, in unlovely, battered, paintless London she felt she was at the core, at the very core and firm centre of the world’s resistance to the sickness that had been so nearly fatal to it. (p. 339)

This idea is strengthened as the writer, herself both British and American, seems to strongly condemn American isolationism throughout the novel. In the *New York Times*, her book was said to ‘help unbombed Americans to understand the British point of view’, as an ‘American can only be impressed and sobered by the universality of war in England, the apparent determination of most Britons’ (quoted in Calder, 2004, p. 201). This would fit in with Angus Calder’s main idea that ‘the Myth of the Blitz was a propaganda construct directed as much at American opinion as at British, developed by American news journalists in association with British propagandists and newsmen—and was all the more accepted by Britons because American voices proclaimed it’ (1991, p. 212).<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>73</sup> Edward R. Murrow is probably one of the most famous American broadcast journalists and war correspondents in Britain. Him and his team of ‘Murrow boys’, although said to be of ‘unquestionable integrity’ and ‘completely committed to the ideals of broadcasting as a public service and of journalism as truth-telling’ (Calder, 1991, p. 212), so closely cooperated with the British that in 1943

In *Anger in the Sky*, the young English woman Viola (who volunteers as a nurse in London) falls in love with Elliott Tully, an American visiting the country, also a fervent supporter of America's non-intervention. He is in love with her, yet she rejects him on the ground of his non-compassion for her people:

If you keep aloof, aloof from the war and from the world after the war, I don't see how we, the peoples who are fighting Nazism, and you who didn't fight it, can ever come together. Or not for a hundred years. Even if I were very much in love with you instead of being what I am, very, very fond of you, I don't think I'd marry you as things are. [...] I'd always have to avoid thinking, "My people died for the things we both cared for; yours made armaments and sent supplies". (Ertz, 1943, pp. 293-294)

Viola's patriotism and conviction that everything needs to be done to help Britain fight the enemy surpasses her own most intimate feelings of love, emphasising the key wartime idea of the supremacy of the 'collective' over the 'personal'. The imposed moral obligation to fight for victory overrides her whole entire personality, and every choice she makes is based on whether or not it will contribute to the war effort. She herself is aware of the she has 'lost her privacy, she has not got a private life any longer, and the war 'has destroyed the separateness of the world [she] lives in': I don't think we can any of us be just private persons again, wrapped up in our own little affairs, I may never accomplish anything much, but at least I'm part of the world I live in or I'm nothing' (p. 293).

---

Winston Churchill offered to make Murrow joint director-general of the BBC, which the journalist turned down. According to Calder, 'there is not the least doubt that Murrow [...] used his broadcasts consistently to influence US public opinion away from isolationism' (ibid.). He wrote about London and Londoners:

I never knew that people were so wonderful. Taxi cab drivers, waiters, charwomen, waitresses, actresses, even wealthy West Enders who I thought would crack first—all take their beating each night, shake the noise of the night from their heads, and face the new day and its dangers with calmness. (quoted in Seib, 2006, pp. 70-71)

London is more alive tonight than it has ever been in its history [...]. London is fighting for its existence. London can never die as long as the spirit of London lives. No bomb, no landmine has yet been devised which is capable of killing this spirit. (p. 71)

Whilst these specific aspects of the novel seem to support Churchill's war policy, there is another side to the text that cannot be neglected, which contradicts the idea according to which Susan Ertz is a mere propagandist at the service of the People's War rhetoric. Bearing in mind she herself held dual citizenship, one cannot deny Ertz also voices strong criticism of Britain's war aims in the novel. This is particularly visible in the character of Elliott, Viola's lover, a fervent supporter of America's isolationism who ridicules England's diplomatic strategy:

I am just old enough to remember the last war. You wanted us to come in and help—naturally—things were getting pretty hot for you and the French, and you were pretty near the end of your tether. Well, we came and we fought and we helped to win this war. Then we went home again without getting—or it seemed that way to us—so much as a thank you. [...] Then, as soon as this war came in sight we knew it would begin all over again. We guessed you'd work hard to try to make the war look like a holy crusade—well, all right, maybe it is; we won't argue about that—and start telling us what we ought to do. [...] You let Europe get into a hell of a mess—and after all, Europe's your affair, not ours—and then as soon as you're in a tight spot you turn to us and say you're fighting for freedom and democracy. 'Oh, yeah?' we say? 'Maybe you are, but if you care such a hell of a lot for them why didn't you do something about it sooner.' You've got a huge, vulnerable Empire, and as soon as some big bully comes along wanting a slice of it you think we ought to take off our coats and help to lick him. (pp. 91-92)

Elliott Tully here is portrayed as a sensible, moral and pleasant young man who puts forward reasonable arguments whereas his opponent's reaction is to childishly leave the room, 'abruptly saying good night' (p. 94), go to her bedroom and lock the door. Despite his many conversations with keen war supporters during his time in England, and despite being caught

in an air raid himself, Elliot does not change his mind on the role America should (not) have in the war. Ironically, he strongly feels the need to protect his country in the same way the English, more particularly the character of Sibyl Ellsworth mentioned earlier, do. Elliot greatly admires American culture and architecture, and the thought of him being responsible for the potential destruction of his nation is unbearable:

Often he wondered what his English friends and acquaintances would say if they could see Georgetown—to him by far the most attractive quarter of Washington. He took enormous pleasure in its elm-shaded streets, in its old houses—Queen Anne or Georgian in type—in the old, uneven herring-bone brick pavements, in the charming doorways and unexpected corners. [...] He recalled a brief visit to Chelsea [...] partly to see the bomb damage and the sad ruins of the Old Church and partly to see the home of Whistler, Carlyle and Rossetti. He now thought that Georgetown possessed all the charm of Chelsea plus a great deal of its own. (p. 259)

Paradoxically, the English seem to regard this as ‘tight-minded’ nationalism (p. 284), whilst their defence of the British land in the name of their green and pleasant land seems entirely legitimate. On the other hand, it is Viola who, upon spending time in America, softens her anger at American isolationists as she gradually empathises with arguments that do not necessarily come from people who ‘lean toward fascism’ (ibid.). She writes to her parents back in England and explains:

I’m beginning to understand, and with humbleness of mind, the enormous complexity of American life. It makes me feel ashamed of our casual, snap judgments and of our ignorance. (ibid.)

I’m conscious all the time I’m here of a perfectly understandable mixture of sympathy and fear. Their hearts go out to us, freely and generously, and then they think of their sons and the deep peace of their own country and of all the good things they’ve tried

to build in it and have built, and they draw back in a sort of sick horror, as if they'd looked over the edge of an abyss. (p. 288)

Elliott Tully not only reuses the same references to George Washington 1796 Farewell Address in which he advised Americans to avoid 'entangl[ing] our peace and prosperity in the toils of European ambition' (a policy that had been followed for 120 years until World War I, in which 160,000 US citizens were killed), but also brings up the sensitive topic of the British Empire's legitimacy. The American non-interventionist in the novel sees the conflict as an Imperialist war and suggests that Britain should take her responsibilities after 'sprawl[ing] all over the globe' (Ertz, 1943, p. 93). The British characters feel uneasy at the mention of the colonies and tentatively say that 'we've been guilty of a bit of banditry in the past. [...] However, that's past history, and if we've sinned we've suffered for our sins. [...] And by and large we've been civilizers rather than exploiters' (p. 87). Here Ertz seems to be touching on a delicate issue, explicitly alluding to certain people's ideas, particularly members of the Communist Party, who argue that the British and French ruling class were 'seeking to use the anti-fascist sentiments of the people for their own imperialist aims' (Calder, 1991, p. 81).

Elliott's reference to Britain's 'huge Empire' reuses one of the arguments used by American non-interventionists who considered rescuing European Empires an unjust war aim. The more militant activists attacked the British Empire and its imperialist politics. Senator Burton K. Wheeler called it 'the greatest aggressor in the pages of history' (1941, quoted in Doenecke, 2003, p. 203), and Senator Gerald P. Nye 'the ace aggressor of all time' (ibid.). Ernest Lundeen referred to 'the bleeding British Empire, this empire with nearly 600,000,000 people, this empire whose sword has been dripping with the blood of enslaved and oppressed peoples for a thousand years' (ibid).<sup>74</sup> Whilst none of the two characters in *Anger in the Sky*

---

<sup>74</sup> For more information see Justus D. Doenecke's 'The British Empire: A Dubious Cause' by in *Storm on the Horizon: The Challenge to American Intervention, 1939-1941* (2003).

wins the argument, and both actually end up marrying,<sup>75</sup> Ertz adroitly brings up many arguments in favour and against an eventual American intervention, placing political matters at the heart of the novel.<sup>76</sup>

Acting a potential moderator between the two characters, Mrs. Anstruther herself also makes a number of comments that allow us to see her scepticism and her distaste of the established wartime discourse. She has lived through the First War and is baffled by the fact Western society is again repeating the same tragic scenario. She repeatedly highlights the absurdity of the conflict:

There are limits to human folly. After this, people will regard wars as scientists regard plagues. They'll use their brains to make war on war. (p. 23)

War, war... is this, she thought, what all man's ingenuity has come to... hunted and being hunted? (p. 30)

To Mrs. A., war leaders are readily, knowingly, organising murder sessions. She compares warfare to babies being killed in car accidents, which is obviously in itself terrible but unplanned, whilst 'war is dreadful because it is *willed*. War is the evil in man coming to the top like scum on a pot of boiling jam' (p. 141). Unlike Mrs. Ellsworth who is glad to be in London, Mrs. Anstruther feels she is a helpless spectator of the destruction of humanity:

---

<sup>75</sup> Elliot joins the military once American enters the war, but does so solely to please Viola, who arguably manipulated him into doing so. Once he arrives in England, in a uniform in which 'he did not look at all soldierly; he looked as if he had borrowed someone else's clothes', he calls and tells her: 'Viola are you... I'd like to hear you say you're glad I'm here' (pp. 334-335).

<sup>76</sup> This is a topic that Marguerite Steen also reflects on in the novel *Shelter* (1941). In one of the 'Newsreel' of the novel, the writer chooses to follow one of Churchill's speeches about Hitler's wicked aims by a particularly ironical remark on funds being raised in British colonies:

This wicked man, the repository and embodiment of many forms of soul-destroying hatred, this monstrous product of former wrongs and shames, has now resolved to break our famous island race by a process of indiscriminate slaughter and destruction. [...] *Winston Churchill, September 11*

Fund for the relief of distress by indiscriminate bombing of London is opened by the Lord Mayor on the 12<sup>th</sup>. Funds are opened in Dominions and many other parts of the world. (Steen, 1942, p. 105)

See full analysis of the novel in Chapter II, section A.

Call it sacrifice or call it privilege to give your life for your country, look at it as you will; the end is the same. The end is the tragic and premature return to clay of those who have not yet lived. (p. 30)

This tragedy is being repeated every hour, every minute of every day and will be multiplied and multiplied before the end. What balm can we find against the daily agony, this recurring sacrifice of youth? (p. 140)

Angus Calder in *The Myth of the Blitz* states that any 'literate, thinking person' was confronted to a 'moral problem' during the war: 'day by day you either believed the evolving Myth (which showed at each stage how Britain was invincible), or you relapsed into scepticism and fears'. When you recovered from such an aberration, the Myth had already 'moved ahead to help you onwards' (1991, p. 120). This implies an internal dilemma for people who question their own feelings should these not necessarily match the 'national norm'. Mrs. Anstruther's character is precisely a victim of this moral dilemma, unable to side with Viola or Elliott, and unable to decide what her own thoughts tell her. Often quoting Wilfred Owen's poems describing the horrors from the previous war, Mrs. Anstruther is a strong, independent woman who seems at a loss in terms of the moral behaviour to adopt. A pacifist at heart, she participates in the war as much as he can, even if she sometimes must consciously force herself to do so. Susan Ertz's novel is therefore a perfect example of blurred borders between the private sphere of feelings and the imposed morals of the public sphere.

This 'moral dilemma' is all the more visible as the author touches on the topic of class. Mrs. A. opens her big country house to people in need, just like the privileged classes were said to do *willingly* and *gladly* in the broadcasts and newspapers of the time yet, in reality, dislikes having to mix with the lower classes. The myth of the English countryside village as a little community and haven is heavily criticised in Ertz's novel, as the people who live in the house belong 'to an exclusive and self-conscious society which possessing both humiliations

and advantages, demanded from its members something special in the way of uprightness, simplicity and courage' (Ertz, 1943, p. 8). Mrs. A. seems to feel like she has to welcome refugees more than actually desires it, showing how middle-class citizens themselves had trouble living up to the expectations set by the People's War rhetoric.

Mrs. A. experiences difficulties confronting the 'outside world', where she is at an obvious 'disadvantage' (p. 9) during the war, and appears to be much more prejudiced against the lower-classes than Churchill's speeches describe the British to be. In the village, newly-arrived refugee women mock her clichéd speech, and she herself wonders if she sounds 'hypocritical' when she explains that 'affection and mutual respect can bring us together whatever our lives may happen to be'. Her audience replies that 'all the same, you sticks to your kind of folks and we sticks to ours [...] your kind don't think our kind is good enough, not good enough to be friends with' (p. 29).

In light of this, I believe that Susan Ertz fits in the recently defined framework of 'resistant female war writers'. I have showed how Susan Ertz's representation of the Blitz presents the reader with an ambivalent discourse which both supports and resists the rhetoric of the People's War, highlighting the differences in the many individual experiences Londoners had of the bombings. Using the 'rural village' novel as a support to question myths of 'British endless continuity' and 'British invincibility',<sup>77</sup> Ertz is not a writer trapped within conventional discourses and dares to step outside the Myth. Whilst the text ends on a very sentimental passage about the rebirth of the city of London, the novel is not merely an ode to British citizens during the country's 'finest hour', it a representation of the contradictions and internal national conflicts of the period, underlining the inevitable paradox between imposed public discourse and internal private feelings.

---

<sup>77</sup> A similar idea is found in Angela Thirkell's many novels set in the fictional English county of Barsetshire, for example *Cheerfulness Breaks In* (1940).



B) *Miss Ranskill Comes Home*, Barbara Bower (née Todd) (1946)

As in the case of Susan Ertz, very little is known about Barbara Bower. Her date of birth remains to this day unclear; references place it around '1890(?)', but no source is able to give a precise year. Born to an Anglican vicar and his wife in Yorkshire, she lived with them in Hampshire until her late marriage at the age of forty-two. Bower worked as a Voluntary Aid Detachment nurse during the First World War, and started writing shortly after the end of the conflict. Her prime focus was children's fiction, attempting more specifically to 'combine the worlds of fantasy and real life adventure' (Pollard in Todd, 2003, p. 320) in novels for young teenagers. Her most famous works are the stories of Worzel Gummidge, a walking, talking scarecrow. The series of books, the first of which was published in 1936, was adapted for radio and television, most notably with former *Doctor Who* actor Jon Pertwee taking the lead role from 1979 to 1981 in the eponymous ITV series. Added to this, Bower wrote short fiction for adults, and regularly reviewed books for *Punch*. Barbara Bower, her married name, and the one she used to sign her books, never had children and died in 1976.

*Miss Ranskill Comes Home* is Bower's only novel. Published in 1946, it narrates a rather unusual story, very different to other popular 'Blitz' novels written in the same period. It resembles more the adventure tale of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* than Phyllis Bottome's London docks stories. The text follows the life of Nona Ranskill, a middle-aged English woman who finds herself stranded on a desert island after falling off a ship. She spends four years there, along with a man simply referred to as the Carpenter, both surviving off fish and leaves. After the Carpenter dies, Miss Ranskill is rescued by a ship and brought back to England. Whilst she was away, the Second World War started and Nona has to learn to adapt to a new routine. To an outsider, war conventions and newly established daily

regulations like the blackout or ration books seem illogical, frustrating and enslaving. Miss Ranskill is at a loss to see the point in people's strange priorities such as avoiding careless talk and limiting the amount of hot water usage. After three years as 'a desert island housewife, unaware of war or peace, and without suet or bottled fruit'<sup>78</sup> (Todd, 2003, p. 209),<sup>79</sup> Nona Ranskill returns to an England that she does not understand and which does not understand her.

At the time of its publication, the novel was a success, mainly because it is both entertaining and thought-provoking.<sup>80</sup> It was said to be 'a work of great originality, and delightfully readable, a blend of fantasy, satire and romantic comedy [...] a very entertaining novel and less light than it seems' by Rosamond Lehmann; and 'a witty first novel which [...] displays a fine appreciation of life's values' by J. D. Beresford. It was also praised by American critics, with the *New York Times* stating it was a blend 'of reality and fantasy, irony and pity' (all quoted in Pollard in Todd, 2003, p. 318).

Yet, the novel is surprisingly absent from the studies of Jenny Hartley or Phyllis Lassner. This is arguably because of the very conservative image that is associated with the author, who was a very devout Christian and who makes most of her characters very pious too. However, there is a constant 'unconventional streak' running through Bower's works, most of which show a 'dislike of authoritarianism' (Pollard in Todd, 2003, p. 321) in her works. For example, in the poem 'Sign-Posts'—which serves as a foreword to *The Very Good*

---

<sup>78</sup> Perhaps a humorous reference to one of Orwell's famous quotes, mentioned earlier: 'However much you hate it or laugh at it, you will never be happy away from [Britain] for any length of time. The suet puddings and the red pillar-boxes have entered into your soul' (1941, section I).

<sup>79</sup> The edition I use in this section is the one by Persephone, who decided to publish the novel under the author's maiden name 'Barbara Euphan Todd'. In my work, I refer to her as Barbara Bower.

<sup>80</sup> However, the novel was not reprinted, like most popular women's novels written around this time and, up until 2003, the British Library was one of the only places where one could find a copy. Wendy Pollard contacted the publishing house Persephone Books and convinced them to release a new edition. It is today the forty-sixth title on Persephone's Book List, which includes the works of authors like Noel Streatfield and Katherine Mansfield. Persephone promises books that are 'neither too literary nor too commercial' but are 'guaranteed to be readable, thought-provoking and impossible to forget' (Persephone website), qualities that are fully met by Bower's text.

*Walkers*, a book of adventure she wrote with Marjory Joyce in 1925—Bower seems to encourage children to step off the ‘correct’ path designed by adults, and break free from rules, daring to ‘stray’:

Along the hot and dusty roads where grown-up people go,  
The finger-posts are pointing out the way to So-and-so,  
They are policemen tall and straight.  
You hardly dare to stray or wait,  
They seem to say, “you mustn’t stay,  
There really isn’t time to play,  
Now that’s the way, Now that’s the way!”

[...]

But all about the meadow ways where pixie people go,  
The swallows flash and flicker past, like arrows from a bow,  
They point the way to Over There,  
To Far Away and Anywhere?  
“Beyond”, they say, “the hills are blue,  
Beyond Beyond the roads are few,  
And we’re the finger-posts for you!” (quoted in Royce and Todd, 1925, p. xii)

My purpose here is to highlight how *Miss Ranskill Comes Home* is ultimately a poignant satire of the preposterous patriotism of (part of) the British population during the war, in the form of a funny and candid story in which misunderstandings and confusions hold a strong political message. I aim to present the novel as an excellent counter-example for Jenny Hartley’s chapter ‘Blitz and the Mothers of England’ in her study *Millions Like Us* (2007), in which her main argument is that most British women writers of the 1940s depict the Blitz’s function ‘to enlighten and empower’ (p. i). Hartley writes that most writers gave a ‘positive

spin' to destruction and described scenes in which 'the Blitz kills but it is also the scene of fresh life, new friendship and above all community' (p. 21).

Whilst it is true that a large part of British wartime writing participated in the construction of the mythical national memory in that it 'mobilises the manpower and morale on which the sovereignty of the country depends' (Rawlinson, 2000, p. 2) and presented 'unprecedented government control over the lives of Britons [...] as an exigency of war' (p. 169), *Miss Ranskill Comes Home* describes, on the contrary, England as a country where citizens have lost any critical thinking skills and whose interactions do not resemble 'friendship' and 'community' but primarily 'suspicion' and 'resentment'. In fact, it focuses on the same political and social issues that George Orwell deals with in his dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, published three years later in 1949, particularly in the sense that Barbara Bower highlights the 'primitive patriotism' (Orwell, 2003, p. 74)<sup>81</sup> of a certain part of the British population who blindly follow the sometimes illogical rules of a particularly repressive, highly regulated society. *Miss Ranskill Come Home* is a light-hearted story that holds a much more serious message depicting people with many similarities to Orwell's imagined citizens of Oceania.

George Orwell, in his essay 'Notes on Nationalism', asserted the need for England (particularly left-wing parties) to understand the benefits of patriotism as a drive for social progress. Whilst is it hard to perfectly pinpoint the writer's exact definition of 'patriotism', critics generally refer to this specific passage, in which he contrasts 'positive patriotism' to the dangers of nationalism:

---

<sup>81</sup> From the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*:

It was not desirable that the proles should have strong political feelings. All that was required of them was a primitive patriotism which could be appealed to whenever it was necessary to make them accept longer working hours or shorter rations. And even when they became discontented, as they sometimes did, their discontent led nowhere, because, being without general ideas, they could only focus it on petty specific grievances. (Orwell, 2003, p. 74).

By ‘patriotism’ I mean devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life, which one believes to be the best in the world but has no wish to force on other people. Patriotism is of its nature defensive, both militarily and culturally. Nationalism, on the other hand, is inseparable from the desire for power. The abiding purpose of every nationalist is to secure more power and more prestige, *not* for himself but for the nation or other unit in which he has chosen to sink his own individuality. (1945b, para. 2)

What Orwell promoted was not unconditional, blind love of one’s country, on the contrary it is a proactive patriotism, based on a desire to preserve essential values and drive political progress. He sees this concept as an inoculation against Fascism and a unifying cause that needs to be recognised as essential in the fight against rising totalitarian regimes. In 1941, he writes: ‘one cannot see the modern world as it is unless one recognises the overwhelming strength of patriotism, national loyalty. In certain circumstances it can break down, at certain levels of civilisation it does not exist, but as a *positive* force there is nothing to set beside it’ (section I). Patriotism can create a sense of togetherness that ‘cuts across differences and generates positive change with unparalleled force’ (Townsend, 2016, para. 8). It is in this sense Orwell believes that patriotism can save a nation from falling to the hands of a totalitarian state: ‘There can be moments when the whole nation suddenly swings together and does the same thing, like a herd of cattle facing a wolf’ (Orwell, 1941, section III).

In understanding Orwell’s views on national allegiance in relation to his novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949),<sup>82</sup> the key aspect to reflect on is the fundamental difference between the positive patriotism described in ‘The English People’ (1947), and the ‘primitive patriotism’ showed by the citizens of Oceania. In Orwell’s novel, citizens are brainwashed

---

<sup>82</sup> The novel was clearly inspired by the Soviet system, with its one and only political party, its falsely protective leader surrounded by a cult of personality, its triennial production plans, its parades and ‘spontaneous’ demonstrations, its endless waiting lines, its slogans, its re-education camps, its huge posters and its public confessions... but also by Nazism and Francoist Fascism.

into supporting a repressive totalitarian regime by the logic of a society based on fear, surveillance and distrust. Their ‘love of Big Brother’ is not combined with a desire for progress. *Miss Ranskill Comes Home* is a novel set during the Blitz in a small, unnamed town of Southern England, which was not a totalitarian regime and resembled in no way whatsoever Nazi Germany, yet what Barbara Bower denounces is a very similar kind of ‘primitive patriotism’ noticeable in people who were subjected to constant patriotic propaganda promoting the necessity to join the war effort. There are striking similarities between the two novels that I believe need to be pointed out in order to highlight how Bower is an excellent example of a women war writer who dared to step outside the conventions of the People’s War rhetoric.

My analysis of the novel will be divided into three parts. The first one will focus on the author’s use of defamiliarisation, which leads the reader to consider certain aspects of wartime social conventions in a new light; the second one will focus on the ‘primitively patriotic’ behaviour of some of the key characters, reinforcing the ideas that blind patriotism has corrupted and perverted England; and the third one will focus on the relationship between women in the novel.

In *Miss Ranskill Comes Home*, the reader is made to share Nona’s feelings of incomprehension, frustration and anger at society when she comes back to England through the author’s use of defamiliarisation. This term, ‘by which literary works unsettle readers’ habitual ways of seeing the world’ (Birch, 2009, p. 281), was first coined by the Russian structuralist theorist Viktor Shklovsky who defined it as the process or result of rendering unfamiliar. He refers to the concept of ‘estrangement’ in his founding essay ‘Art as Technique’ (1917):

The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar,’ to make forms

difficult to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. (Shklovsky, 1998, p. 16)

Defamiliarisation transforms the familiar object, behaviour or institution, into something strange, non-sensical and sometimes even ridiculous. The artists' aim is to quash automatic impressions and reactions on seeing, hearing or touching things. Keith Booker, in his study *Dystopian Fiction*, considers the main technique of dystopian fiction to be defamiliarisation: 'by focusing their critiques of society on spatially or temporally distant settings, dystopian fictions provide fresh perspectives on problematic social and political practices that might otherwise be taken for granted or considered natural and inevitable' (1994, p. 19). He takes Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as an example of this idea, as the novel is set in the future year of 1984 and in Airstrip One (formerly known as Great Britain), a province of the superstate Oceania. Orwell is able to criticise certain social issues of his own time, particularly the political regime of the Soviet Union, by forcing readers to consider them from a distanced perspective.

In *Miss Ranskill Comes Home*, Barbara Bower uses the same device. Readers who are already familiar with the ins and outs of wartime society are forced to look at it in a new way, and question their usual rapport to certain aspects of it. For example, Miss Ranskill is surprised to see black curtains on Marjorie's windows, unaware of the necessity for blackout regulations:

Miss Ranskill felt breathless. [...] Perhaps if she had more air she could sleep. She switched on the light and hurried to the window. It was queer that Marjorie, who had always described herself as an out-of-door person, should have fastened the curtains to the window-frame with drawing-pins, but perhaps it was part of the nursing programme. And why were the curtains black? Possibly Doctor Mallison disapproved

of the early morning light? Even very ordinary doctors had queer fads sometimes.  
(Todd, 2003, p. 137)

This passage, combined with Miss Ranskill's surprise at not being able to eat her butter allowance all in one go, not being able to buy clothes because she does not own a ration book, not being able to have a bath with over 10 inches of hot water, and being shouted down for complaining about the 'canning crusade' that the women have begun (Nona's argument is that since they never ate that much canned fruit before the war, why should they now eat it at every meal? (p. 271)) all contribute to giving the reader a general atmosphere of repression and unpleasant constant niggling about details by the people who consider themselves 'in charge'. This does not mean of course that Barbara Bower did not understand the reasons behind the various wartime rules, but more that she wanted to describe what life was really like during the war, daringly questioning the 'established conventions' which Angus Calder argues writers were bound to (1991, pp. 143-144): in *Miss Ranskill Comes Home*, every individual's daily routine becomes trapped in a multitude of overzealous rules.

The idea of 'defamiliarisation' is reinforced by the fact Nona is coming back to England after four years away, a long period during which she was cut off from civilisation (and all the evil associated with it) on a desert island. *Miss Ranskill Comes Home* is a story based on the duality between both locations: the peaceful island in the middle of the ocean and the second repressive, violent one of Britain. The sharp contrast between the descriptions of an idyllic life with the Carpenter in the first place and constant feelings of humiliation and loneliness in the second necessarily lead even the most inattentive reader to link Nona Ranskill's journey back home to that of the Fall of Man. Indeed, the novel opens on the description of an Eden-like place. Its two only inhabitants, the Carpenter and Nona, live in complete chastity (although they are most of the times partly naked for practical reasons—Miss Ranskill only wearing a 'brassiere' and 'what remained of a pair of grey-lock knickers')



(Todd, 2003, p. 10)), and build a companionship based on solidarity and respect. In this pre-lapsarian paradise, social differences, aesthetic conventions and financial preoccupations are non-existent. Nona cuts off her long hair to 'tie the bait to fish-hooks and fix on buttons' (p. 117), and money is easily disposed of and burnt to help keep the fire going and 'make it more homely' (p. 5). In this place, one feels 'grand', one feels 'rich' (p. 251) only not with money but with individual respect and resourcefulness. Nature offers all that the Carpenter (sanctified by the capital C as well as his profession, the same as Saint Joseph) and Nona could possibly need, fresh water to quench their thirst, fish to feed on, and branches to build a shelter. Nona Ranskill's fall from this heavenly island is, just like in the Bible, both spiritual and physical. She decides to go home on the boat the Carpenter built just before he died, and gets caught in the violent waves of the ocean: 'the water seemed to crash from every direction, now cracking against the bows as though determined to split them, now leaping at the port gunwale, now hurtling at the starboard' (p. 29). Nona would have died if a destroyer passing by had not rescued her.

The fact that Nona is saved by a military boat destined to annihilate others is not a simple coincidence, it anticipates the violence that corrupts the land Nona is about to go back to. In strong contrast to the paradise she left, the island Miss Ranskill comes home to is anything but welcoming, chaste and safe. The moment she sets foot on firm ground, Nona notices the lack of colour of her grey surroundings, except for 'the gold stripes on the First Lieutenant's sleeve' (p. 51). Miss Ranskill therefore straight away gets the impression she is returning to a country where individuality is overrun by authority, where the only people recognizable amongst the 'grey shapes' (ibid.) are policemen and soldiers. In the first hours she spends in England, Nona is scolded by a lavatory attendant because of her shabby appearance, looked down on by several women from her own class who 'make her feel as ignominious as a disgraced puppy' (p. 61), and humiliated by her oldest friend, who believes

she is a spy and a traitor to her own country. Miss Ranskill is at first left in stunned incomprehension in a world where new, illogical rules seem to have been established. She also hears conversations that make very little sense to her, as people give accounts, in a very cheerful tone, of so-and-so's house being bombed. After a particularly gruesome description of 'a head lying by the pavement—clean cut off by the flying glass' (p. 65), Nona's 'aching head' is left to wonder:

Had the language changed or had she forgotten words. Was she, perhaps, a trifle mad? Rip Van Winkle<sup>83</sup> could scarcely have felt more puzzled than she did? What had happened in her absence that fantastic horrors could be described so casually? Even the language was secret from her, full of strange words and alphabetical sequences. (p. 66)

The title of the novel gains all its irony when Nona realises the 'home' she comes back to is a place where she feels humiliated and marginalised. Miss Ranskill is overwhelmed with nostalgia and the longing to go back to her purer home, where a Christ-like figure (the Carpenter still spiritually 'speaks' to Nona when she is back in England) had washed her of her sins and superficial values. She feels unwelcome in her own country, in which she is 'more and more a foreigner' (p. 171).

Nona's despair reinforces the contrast between the two islands, the idyllic desert one and the dystopian one. Winston undergoes a similar experience in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* when he dreams of a 'Golden Country' in the moments where he is the most miserable in Airstrip One:

---

<sup>83</sup>*Rip Van Winkle* is a short story by American writer Washington Irving, published in *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon* (1819). Set in the Catskill mountains, the text tells the story of Rip, a pleasant man loved by everyone but his wife, who one day meets a group of strangely dressed walkers (amongst whom the ghost of Henry Hudson). He strikes up a conversation with them and drinks what they offer him, and shortly after falls asleep at the bottom of a tree. When he wakes up, his gun has rusted, his clothes have holes in them and his beard is a foot long. He goes back to his village to find it completely changed. None of the people he used to know are there, his wife has died and his friends have fallen in the American Revolutionary War. Rip realises he has been asleep for over twenty years.

The landscape that he was looking at recurred so often in his dreams that he was never fully certain whether or not he had seen it in the real world. In his waking thoughts he called it the Golden Country. It was an old, rabbit-bitten pasture, with a foot-track wandering across it and a molehill here and there. In the ragged hedge on the opposite side of the field the boughs of the elm trees were swaying very faintly in the breeze, their leaves just stirring in dense masses like women's hair. Somewhere near at hand, though out of sight, there was a clear, slow-moving stream where dace were swimming in the pools under the willow trees. (Orwell, 2003, p. 31)

In *Miss Ranskill Comes Home*, what has caused the Fall, the change in values and this loss of essential goodness is of course Britain's decision to join the war. Bower, although she chooses to do it through a religious metaphor, suggests war caused the downfall of humanity. She alludes to the Second World War as an absurd conflict that is not based on any logical rationale as 'friendly Italy had become foe; Russia, so often cartooned, was the saviour of civilisation, and France was divided against herself' (Todd, 2003, p. 43).

Just as in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, public manipulation is everywhere in Bower's novel, and the political system everyone follows blindly is limited to slogans such as 'saving the country' and 'doing one's duty' (ibid.). In Marjorie's house:

The walls [...] were ornamented with slogans, JUMP TO IT startled from the head of the bed. The injunction CARELESS TALK COSTS LIVES stood in a frame by the telephone, DON'T GIVE A LIGHT TO HITLER was pokerworked into a panel by the window, BE A SPORT AND SPARE THE SOAP glaring in red paint on white oilcloth above the washbasin. (p. 103)

The only books mentioned in the novel apart from Rudyard Kipling's poems are *Hygiene in the Home*, *St. John's Handbook* and *Communal Cookery*. Culture is limited to the government-controlled newspapers and there is no mention of music or any artistic activity.

Similarly, there are no books in Big Brother's society, in which the government make creating, writing and imagining serious crimes. In the production of books destined to be distributed to the proles, creativity is not required since machines are responsible for the process from start to finish. Songs are 'composed without any human intervention whatever on an instrument known as a versificator' (Orwell, 2003, p. 141). In *Miss Ranskill Comes Home*, Nona is also annoyed at the 'illiterate song[s]' she hears over and over (Todd, 2003, p. 171).<sup>84</sup>

'Careless talk' during the war in Britain in Bower's text heavily resembles 'thoughtcrime', as independent thinking is non-existent and, above all, the issue of language is an essential one. Nona is thrown by the need for an identity card or talk of Objectors, conchies, Quislings and Nasties, the ATS, the WAAF, the ARP and other incomprehensible abbreviations, as she says 'even the language was secret from her, full of strange words and alphabetical sequences' (p. 66). The author of *Wartime* Paul Fussell interestingly highlights the following in the chapter 'Fresh Idiom': 'The hope entertained by both Allies and Axis that they were conducting the war with maximum efficiency and thoroughly up-to-date methods was nourished by the widespread employment of acronyms and abbreviations' (Fussell, 1990, p. 258). Just like Newspeak in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to limit the number of words to limit people's thoughts, the government jargon in *Miss Ranskill Comes Home* makes people easily submissive to the media and official discourse, as acronyms subtly nuance the truth.

---

<sup>84</sup> It is essential to note here that whilst the passage I highlight here might appear to be a direct counterargument to the main thesis of this work, since it reflects on the lack of 'free, authentic' cultural production during the war, it also acts as a direct supporter of it. Bower explicitly refers to the assiduous attempt to use culture for propaganda purposes, be it music, literature or cinema, but the simple fact that this novel was published (and praised by both the readers and critics) shows that there was a cultural resistance to this political reappropriation of the arts.

Society in Bower's novel is also described as being ruled by a constant feeling of anxiety and suspicion. One of the main fears during the war, largely instilled by the Ministry of Information, was the presence of a Fifth Column in Britain.<sup>85</sup>

Fifth columnists, who certainly did exist in small though insignificant numbers, were imagined as Nazi infiltrators that blended into British daily life. As such, working-class Britons had to maintain utmost vigilance in reporting their neighbours for any unsavoury activities. The culture of secrecy, then, merged with a culture of suspicion. A normally symbiotic relationship, built on a ritual of give-and-take, had been challenged. (Wilkinson, 2015, p. 5)

In light of this, people feared their neighbours, friends and even members of their own family who could report any 'suspicious' activity or comment. In *Miss Ranskill Comes Home*, Colin's mother is afraid of discussing certain matters in front of him as she explains even children can turn in their mother.<sup>86</sup> People only whisper to each other and Marjorie is terrified about a conversation potentially leading to one of the 'extra-confidential' topics which she would not dare even think about. England is under omnipresent government surveillance in Bower's novel, as there is 'no trust in the country' (Todd, 2003, p. 135). People scrutinise each other in the street, on the train and even in their own homes, as anything could be reported to the police and used against them.

---

<sup>85</sup> A Ministry leaflet, published in June 1940, declared the following:

There is a fifth column in Britain. Anyone who thinks that there isn't, that it "can't happen here," has simply fallen into the trap laid by the fifth column itself. For the first job of the fifth column is to make people think that it does not exist. In other countries the most respectable and neighbourly citizens turned out to be fifth columnists when the time came. The fifth column does not only consist of foreigners.... The Government is doing its duty and is dealing vigorously with the fifth column. It has rounded up a great many dangerous and suspect characters and it is keeping a constant look-out. It is not difficult to deal with such people if action is taken in good time and in good order. But it can't be done unless you help. It is up to you to do your duty too. (Ministry of Information, 1940 in Glover, 1990, p. 47)

<sup>86</sup> Just like in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, where 'children were systematically turned against their parents and taught to spy on them and report their deviations' (Orwell, 2003, p. 136).

The 'real-life' dystopia of Bower's novel leads its main character to be anything but patriotic, and she hates and wants to leave Britain. Just like Winston, she is the only one who seems to be able to detach herself from the routine and realise what her world has turned into. She is obsessed with the idea of a return to a better past, a preserved island:

If, retaining her present knowledge, she could put back the clock, return to the island and (her heart lifted at the thought) talk to the Carpenter, what would she have to tell him? There they had struggled for food against the wiles of that food and the elements. Here, they must submit to the dictates of the bureaucracy before being allowed to buy food and clothing. There the dying of the beacon fire had been a tragedy: here the showing of a light by night was a crime. On the Island two people had done the work of two. In England a thousand might do the work of four thousand or ten do the work of two. On the Island they had obeyed the rules they had made, on this other Island, in spite of the need for weight-pulling, in spite of the equal need to win the war, thousands were employed to see that the rest did not cheat. (p. 192)

In light of this, *Miss Ranskill Comes Home* appears to be presenting serious social criticism, behind the amusing story of a woman who comes back to a different world after years on an island.

The repressive, frustrating and unpleasant atmosphere described in *Miss Ranskill Comes Home* is facilitated by the blind loyalty most of its citizens have for the state. Bower's text definitely does not fit in the 'literature of citizenship' category defined by Jenny Hartley, as she describes the same 'primitive patriotism' in most of her characters as in those of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, in which despite having never even seen Big Brother people are obsessed with doing what is best for the Party.

Believing they are doing what is best in support of their government so that Britain can win the war, the majority of the characters in Bower's novel are however in constant

rivalry. The British people described in the novel seem to be obsessed with the (unclear) idea of 'duty', a priority that takes over every other aspect of their lives, even if it sometimes leads them to be either rather selfish and 'beastly' (p. 156). Miss Ranskill's old friend Marjorie is the caricature of a perfect People's War fighter, spending every waking minute participating in the war effort. She does not stop to have a proper conversation with Nona whom she thought dead, as she is afraid she will be late her 'for camouflage nets' workshop (p. 102). Only when Marjorie starts suspecting that Nona held an important position in the Wrens (Women's Royal Naval Service) does she deign to inquire about where she has been all this time, a place that she supposes must have been 'frightfully exciting' and 'absolutely thrilling', fighting for the country. Marjorie is only moved by emotions of power, arrogance and jealousy, and her behaviour lacks any logic. One minute she assumes her friend had a high-flying job serving for Britain, and the next she is suspecting her of being a spy, on the grounds of her not having a ration book. Whilst she asks her best friend humiliating questions about her possibly being a traitor, she also compares her to a pet, easily disposed of:

"I mean," said Marjorie, "I mean that if my puppy, and I *adore* my puppy, chewed up the Union Jack I almost think I'd have him shot. He could have my last pair of silk stockings. He could destroy anything I have but not the *Flag*." (p. 125)

In the name of the fight for victory, she shames her friends and neglects her own children. Bower strips any patriotic sentiment from all credibility when she portrays model citizen Marjorie breaking into hysterical fits for particularly trivial incidents. When Nona Ranskill turns the light on at night, Marjorie starts screaming, blabbering insanities such as asking Nona if she was not used to the blackout on the desert island because she had 'wanted to be neutral' (p. 139). Marjorie is no longer capable of reasoning calmly and logically, and cannot put any distance between her own life and the imposed ideals of the People's War.

The patriotism overpowering this woman's life distances her from 'real', immediate issues as she is more concerned by the potential help for the enemy one electric light could cause at night, than by a bomb trapping people in her own basement:

Was there any *truth* in this strange island where laddered stockings, a lack of notice boards and an illiterate song had more power to rouse emotion than death and destruction and the smashing of bombs! Had it been worthwhile to take the sea-lane to a wonderland where young men resented their leaves and their mothers kept up the conventions of the fifth form? (p. 171)

Not only is the British society a horrible, repressive atmosphere, but it is also one where denying one's self becomes the main rule, in the name of one's love for Britain and one's will to help it defeat the enemy. Patriotism is neither a positive outlet, nor the progressive force that Orwell wishes it to be, it is a destructive and harming one that affected the people's most essential (Christian) values, solidarity and family.

The narrative technique of observing English society from an estranged insider's point of view leads to very funny, absurd borderline moments, but mostly it portrays wartime society as one when people are putting on an act. Patriotism being the key word ruling every aspect of the citizens' lives, people go the extra mile to be the most heroic and the least suspicious in the eyes of their neighbour. When Miss Ranskill is reunited with her oldest friend, Marjorie, she first sees her from afar, performing a real-life stunt as she tries to dismantle a potential unexploded bomb in her garden greenhouse. The whole scene is hilarious as Marjorie shouts orders to two other women solely equipped with garden hoses:

Two of them carried buckets of water and the third [...] an implement that reminded Miss Ranskill of a garden hose *and* a motor pump. [...]

"Don't pump till I say," commanded Marjorie. "It's an incendiary bomb—delayed action. I'm Number One. You're Two, Miss Sprink, and Miss Jebb's Three." [...]



Marjorie pushed past her and sprinted, with much flapping of blue trousers, down the path between the parsley and potatoes. Then she dropped to her knees and began to crawl on all fours towards a greenhouse by the far hedge. A trail of narrow grey piping followed her. Miss Sprink or Miss Jebb plonked the pump into one bucket. Miss Jebb or Miss Sprink, in the attitude but not the garments of a Heber, stood beside her with the other bucket poised. [...]

Marjorie butted the greenhouse door with her head, Miss Sprink and Jebb pumped furiously and Miss Jebb or Miss Sprink shifted the spare bucket from one hand to another. Both of them had set, stern faces. (pp. 97-98)

This scene is obviously meant to make the reader smile. Three middle-age women have convinced themselves they have the skills and power to save their house from an unexploded bomb and feel endowed with a sense of extreme importance to the rest of community; yet from an outsider's point of view, the situation is comical because it merely looks like a staged performance.

Patriotism is first and foremost publicly demonstrated here, people feel the need to constantly prove themselves, which leads Marjorie in another passage to proudly list her many duties such as leading her military-like committees for turning curtains into clothing. The patriotism the women feel is 'primitive' as it is in Orwell's Oceania; because it is based on a sense of moral obligation, personal pride, and more importantly a sense of fear. Bower describes a society ridden with suspicion and distrust, in stark contrast with the feeling of 'unity' that Hartley referred to in her chapter 'Blitz and the Mothers of England'.

The third aspect of the novel that I want to highlight is the description of women characters, particularly the depiction of the lack of female solidarity. Whilst the myth of the Blitz supports the idea that a strong sense of sisterhood flourished during the bombings, as they bonded at work and helped each other in the home, Bower seems to suggest the reality

was very different, and that relationships between women were perverted by the overwhelming duty to be patriotic. In the text, most of the main characters are female: Nona's friend Marjorie, her sister Edith and the landlady Mrs. Phillips, the Carpenter's widow and the various lavatory attendants, shop assistants or train passengers she meets all are women, and they are all scornful, particularly unpleasant people. Nona's first encounter with each of them is systematically one where she is either humiliated or scolded. The women's unpleasant behaviour seems to be rooted in two issues: the first one is class-related, as Nona's dishevelled appearance clashes with her surroundings in a very middle-class atmosphere and women therefore look down on her, and the second, much more important, is found in the duty women feel they owe to their country that comes before any links of friendship, family or just polite and courteous social behaviour.

Women seem to focus their anger and frustration specifically onto Nona, and this is because there is a huge gap between Miss Ranskill and her peers, not only because she has no real family and no community, but mainly in terms of opinions and physical appearance. Since Nona Ranskill has been away for so long and comes back free-spirited, carrying nothing but her ragged clothes, she embodies a freedom which the other women seem to feel deprived of. Paradoxically, whilst she was 'imprisoned' on a desert island, unable to leave it, other women see her as a symbol of physical and spiritual empowerment. Nona's clothes have holes in them and she wears 'her shoes slung round her neck by their laces' (p. 227); she keeps repeating she has no underwear and encourages women, as practical advice, to follow her example:

So this dress problem is even more important to you than it was to me. Still we are all women together, aren't we? My problems *then* are our problems *now*, so that is why I am going to tell you how I managed. Well, I seldom wore more than two garments at once. It is marvellous how you can ring the changes with two garments. On Sunday the

suit, on Monday the jacket and knickers, on Tuesday the skirt and the vest, On Wednesday [...] the brassiere and knickers. (p. 265)

Not only is this received as a distasteful joke by the audience of women, but also comes across as rude and disrespectful. Nona Ranskill, who lived happily on her island, compares her issues to their wartime problems, and strives to establish an impossible link between herself and them, using the pronoun 'our'. Nona irritates them because of her permanent cheerful and humorous mood, eating all her jam at once and not following the 'niggling annoyances that had hedged up' (p. 227) around the British people:

'You might try to *think*,' so Edith expostulated frequently, 'I don't want to seem *disagreeable*, but really it looks almost *greedy* to eat all your butter ration at one meal.'

'It seems greedier to me to make such a fuss about it and niggle it out in tiny bits. When it's there I eat it: when it's finished I go without. I don't *want* every day to be the same.'

'But it makes it so awkward for *us*. Of course I'm delighted to share everything with you, but it's different for Philippa and she *notices*.' (p. 228)

Again, the italicised words highlight how women in particular refuse to see Nona as belonging to their community. Unlike Marguerite Steen's *Shelter*, in which the war brings together women facing the same struggles,<sup>87</sup> there is no trace of sisterhood, companionship or female solidarity, even between sisters in a time of hardship. Nona is denied support by other members of her sex. Miss Ranskill becomes the Other, bullied by women who have been forced into becoming irrationally aggressive, most probably under the pressure to be a 'good Brit'. The most hostile women in the novel are the most patriotic.

The women fighting for their country in the novel do not demonstrate a healthy balance between female nurturing instincts and patriotic values so often promoted by the propaganda of the time, but are extremely aggressive and deprived of any femininity. They

---

<sup>87</sup> See Chapter II, section A.

have internalised the idea that doing their duty equates to refusing to show any maternal feelings or female solidarity. They seem unable to show any empathy at all, and their will to defend the country is not based on pity for Hitler's victims or fear that their peers could be hurt, but on arrogance and pride:

Mrs. Phillips' outlook was Red, White and Blue. She stood stout and stalwart for thing red lines, for British Possessions coloured red, for white feathers (to be given to all me not in uniform), and for true blue of every shade. She believed in the flogging of boys and coloured persons, the shooting of shirks, the quashing of Jews, the Feudal System, cold baths for invalids, the abolition of hot water bottles, and (rather curiously) the torture of Adolf Hitler. (p. 223)

Mrs. Phillips' prejudiced behaviour reflects the close-minded opinions of (part of) the middle class in Britain in the 1940s. Her beliefs concerning the Jewish population<sup>88</sup> or 'coloured people' completely discredit whatever work she is doing to defend British values. This obviously does not mean that Bower's message is that patriotism as a concept is essentially flawed, but that it was perverted by many citizens. This 'extreme patriotism' was an idea that allowed certain people to unleash their hatred and fear of the Other in the name of a greater good, Britain's freedom. Mrs. Phillips is the very same woman who will then scold Nona about her immoral behaviour, whilst she herself has very questionable moral views on human beings in general.

The arrogance and overwhelming feelings of satisfaction that these women felt when they emphasise the importance they place on participating in the war effort is incomprehensible to Nona. On her desert island, Miss Ranskill learnt humility; on her British

---

<sup>88</sup> It is interesting that Bower chooses to have some of her characters repeatedly make strongly anti-Semitic comments as, whilst in wartime Britain there was a 'widespread awareness of the prevalence of anti-Semitic feeling', there was also an 'unwillingness to admit sharing it' (Orwell, 1945a, para. 7). See Orwell's 1945 essay 'Anti-Semitism in Britain' for more information.

home island, modesty is a long-lost value and people are unaware of the wider world around them.<sup>89</sup>

Unlike her peers, Miss Ranskill is the only woman in the novel who seems to be able to form lasting and caring relationships with children, and who is a reliable mother figure. Whilst she has no children of her own, Nona feels an immediate connection with the child in Marjorie's house, with the young soldier about to go back to the front, and with the late Carpenter's son Colin. These are her most comfortable encounters throughout the story, as she understands the fears they are experiencing. There is a particular passage where Nona seeks shelter in a basement with a young boy during a violent air raid, in which she succeeds in reassuring him, unlike his mother who scolds him for crying (pp. 140-165).<sup>90</sup> She understands the needs of children, as she is the sole character capable of empathy in a society where national allegiance seems to have brought an end to natural human compassion.

With regards to this idea of empathy, the ending of the novel is particularly interesting. Nona decides to adopt Colin, the son of the Carpenter, as she realises he is having a difficult time coping with the loss of his father and accepting the presence of his stepfather. Miss Ranskill, who has never been married, never been with any man, and has never formulated the wish to have children, decides to formally become the boy's adoptive mother. She is anxious to provide him with the stability and attention he is lacking. Here, Barbara Bower seems to

---

<sup>89</sup> To further the metaphor of the Fall which I touched on earlier, the women who surround Nona are in the same position as Blaise Pascal's hypothetical student at the beginning of the *Pensées*: an anonymous human in the vain position of Adam and Eve after the Fall, who still needs to achieve a complex reflection before becoming aware of his miserable position and reach his grandeur by accepting it. Women in *Miss Ranskill Comes Home* contrast with Nona because they are conceited, egocentric and unaware, as Pascal writes in *Pensées*, that 'Man's grandeur is that he knows himself to be miserable'<sup>89</sup> (1993, fr. 347). Miss Ranskill herself refers to the downfall of humanity into vanity and perversion by highlighting the 'appalling pocks in our civilisation' exposed during the years of war (Todd, 2003, p. 191).

<sup>90</sup> Mrs. Bostock, the boy's mother, is angry after the raid 'not so much against Hitler and the German bombers as against an unspecified body who had allowed [her] to suffer inconvenience', as the bombs interrupted the movie she was watching at the cinema (p. 167).

highlight the need for adults to take care of future generations, as young children traumatised by the war find it hard to cope with their surroundings in a world deprived of any logic.

This ending potentially contradicts and even delegitimises the argument of the whole novel. Nona Ranskill is an independent woman who speaks her mind and lives freely, yet the last pages of the book seem to confine her to a very traditional 'home', as she attempts to recreate a socially appropriate living space and living habits. On the one hand, some critics have suggested that Bower is advocating a return to a conservative and traditional vision of womanhood, one centred around family (Gemie et al., 2012, p. 138). This might fit in with what some historians consider the 'step backwards' women took after the war, returning to their homes and abandoning the important changes in women's newly acquired independence, particularly in the field of work. Experiences of women after World War II are usually 'represented as opportunities cruelly cancelled, doors closed, hopes and dreams dashed' (Lake, 2004, p. 359). The rise in the number of marriages and the fact that most women who had taken up paid work for the first time left it as soon as the war was over is described by feminists as a tragic waste of successful progress. Ann Summers writes that, just like after the First World War, 'old ideas about what was appropriate for women began to be reasserted' (1975, p. 149), and Edna Ryan and Anne Colon state that 'after the war [...] many women surrendered their wartime jobs and returned to a domestic role' (1989, p. 139). Nona Ranskill going back to forming a traditional home might be interpreted as a step back to sheltered, conservative life moving away from the freedom and independence she had discovered on the desert island.

However, I would argue that Bower's novel, and Nona's behaviour, are inscribed within the more general restructuration of femininity that took place during the war. During the conflict, although women did take on men's work and found themselves forced to redefine concepts of domesticity, gender differences were just as marked and, more importantly,

femininity was reinvented as a *sexual* condition. Thanks to the power of advertising and the development of the cinema industry during and after the war, women become conscious of their desirability and attractiveness, through media that ‘incited sexual desire and promised its gratification’ (Lake, 2004, p. 361). Jill Matthews in *Good and Mad Women* pointed out the gradual change from a femininity based on the core conception of the woman as ‘the mother of the race’, to a femininity linked to ‘permissive consumerism’ (1984, p. 89). Leslie Johnson also highlights how, by the 1950s, ‘femininity became a question of glamour and charm’ (1989, p. 6). Marilyn Lake, in her study of the evolution of advertising between the 1920s and 1950s, interestingly notes the introduction of the male gaze in adverts for female products just before the Second World War. Whilst adverts previously presented women looking in a mirror and wondering if they were beautiful enough, they later include a male figure scrutinising women, explicitly defining femininity in terms of ‘heterosexual desirability’ (Lake, 2004, p. 364). This image of the female body and mind led women to gradually take ownership of their position as sexual objects in the gaze of men, to the extent that some historians talk about an ‘epidemic of sexuality’ (Reekie, 1985, quoted in Lake, 2004, p. 368) and some writers state ‘everybody in London was in love’ (Bowen, 1962, p. 95). Women’s newly found struggle to seize more opportunities in terms of sexual encounters, which paradoxically did not please established feminist organisations, that thought the ‘cesspool of vice’ could only hinder female ‘advancement’ (Street, 1943, quoted in Lake, 2004, p. 369). Jessie Street for example, argues that chastity and economic independence are the way to female progress, whereas ‘sexual debauché’ cannot free women from their condition as ‘creatures of sex’ (ibid.).<sup>91</sup> Still, it is important to understand that this new sexuality was to

---

<sup>91</sup> Feminist ideas like these paradoxically (and ironically) mirrored nineteenth-century reductive visions of the female body. Jessie Street was herself part of the British Association for Moral and Social Hygiene founded in 1870 by Josephine Butler, which hoped to liberate women who were ‘reduced to their sex’ (Lake, 2004, p. 369). Yet, the message was contradictory as women could not freely display their sexuality, and were encouraged to annihilate it, dangerously paralleling patriarchal concepts of femininity.

most women empowering, leading them to embrace marriage to fulfil their sexual desires. These ideas are present in women's diaries of the time, as they express their annoyance at not being able to share and enjoy intimate moments with their husbands as much as they would like, moments which they think are essential to the marital relationship. As an example, a woman sent a letter to her doctor explaining that mothers 'still have an urge for an evening entertainment of a much-earned holiday with only an attentive and loving husband' (NHMRC, Letters Received, quoted in Lake, 1995, p. 72). During the war, female empowerment was above all a sexual one, more than a short-term professional-related one.

In *Miss Ranskill Comes Home*, Nona is single, but constantly advocates marriage. This can seem paradoxical after the previous analysis yet, as I also pointed out, marriage can be linked to sexual freedom. Lake states that:

Rather than characterise the triumph of marriage and domesticity in the 1940s and 1950s as a conservative retreat, a return to the old ways, we should rather understand these phenomena as the triumph of modern femininity, youthful adventurism and a path embarked on by women attempting to live as female sexual subjects and explore the possibilities of sexual pleasure. (Lake, 2004, p. 371)

This completely fits in with the behaviour of the novel's main character, who for example supports a young soldier against his family who do not approve of his relationship with a girl they consider unfit. Miss Ranskill understands his desire to marry a woman whom he finds (physically) 'comforting' (Todd, 2003, p. 178). Going against social expectations, Nona confirms the legitimacy of the young couple's desire to have sexual relations, which she sees as a positive outlet in a period of war. The book concludes with the heroine deciding to turn her home into what resembles a 'women's shelter' where expectant mothers could come and live in a quiet place, but more importantly where they could enjoy having intimate relationships in a safe space whenever their soldier husbands come home (pp. 290-291). Miss



Ranskill is willing to offer couples a sheltered place, away from the moralising feminists and Christian organisations, who ended up joining forces at times during the war.

*Miss Ranskill Comes Home* is a fascinating novel in the way it uses a simple story line, a perhaps very candid tale of a woman stranded on a desert island, to make much more serious observations about wartime society. It strongly deviates from the People's War rhetoric, particularly through its harsh criticism of patriotism, leading to a lack of empathy and solidarity between citizens: 'And as for being in this war all together, we aren't. In this village we're just playing at it' (p. 230). She focuses specifically on female relationships, which are gravely affected by the new expectations placed on them, and the overwhelming feeling that they need to 'do their duty'. Women surrounding Nona have become aggressive bullies, abandoning their friends and family in the name of Britain. These women are obviously unhappy and frustrated as they direct their anger against Miss Ranskill, who embodies sexual and spiritual freedom. The most interesting aspect of the novel—apart from the fact that it is a good example of the main idea of this thesis: women writers daring to question the 'Myth of the Blitz—is probably the way Barbara Bower engages with the redefinition of female identity that took place during the war years, through which women became fully (or at least more) aware of their power as sexual human beings, and the pleasure they could get out of it.

C) 'Mysterious Kôr' (1942), Elizabeth Bowen

As said before, one of the main core ideas of the Blitz spirit rhetoric was that the British were one people, united by an invincible solidarity. The bombing of big cities and the memory of it is one that represents the epitome of wartime community. This idealistic value that characterised the People's War ignored the more complex, private individual divergence in opinions about the legitimacy of the war and efficiency of wartime regulations. To further our analysis of the notion of patriotism in women's Blitz novels, it is essential to consider this

issue in relation to the notion of imperialism, since Britain was an ‘imperial nation’ (Rose, 2003, p. 239).

As Sonya Rose explains, ‘while the Empire may seem to have been some remove from Great Britain’s wartime national identity as it fought the “People’s War”, it was throughout imbricated in it’ (2003, p. 239). She highlights that ‘not only was Britain dependent upon the military, industrial, and diplomatic support’ of the colonies, ‘Britain was reliant as well on the Empire for its self-image as a virtuous imperial power’ (ibid.). Churchill’s leitmotif that Britain was fighting for democracy and freedom needed to be consolidated by the belief that the Empire was key for the welfare and progress of local people in the colonies. In popular discourse, the British ‘understood their colonial relationships as fostering democracy and their nation as a benevolent, paternalistic imperial power’ (ibid.). Several propaganda posters depicted imperial unity, showing Caucasian and Asian men standing next to each other and featuring the word ‘together’ in capital letters. The image of a different religious and ethnic communities standing shoulder to shoulder and united in adversity is the one that has remained and that is generally invoked today, particularly in the recent terrorist attacks in England.<sup>92</sup> However, in the recent historical reassessment of the 1940s, this utopian image of a united Empire has been called into question; and this not only by critics who aim to rescue soldiers in the colonies from oblivion,<sup>93</sup> but also by historians who argue that public opinion in the 1940s was not all supportive of colonialism.

---

<sup>92</sup> References to the ‘Blitz spirit’ were plenty after the attacks in Manchester and London in March, May and June 2017. The hashtag #WeStandTogether was one of the most popular, accompanied with pictures of people from different religious communities embracing.

<sup>93</sup> As Yasmin Khan reminds us in *The Raj at War: A People’s History of India’s Second World War*, ‘Britain did not fight the Second World War, the British Empire did’ yet it gets no recognition for it (2015, p. 5). William Dalrymple also explains that:

No less than five million citizens of the British Empire joined the military services between 1939 and 1945, and that almost two million of these, ‘the largest volunteer army in history’, were from South Asia. At many of Britain’s greatest victories and at several of the war’s most crucial turning points — El Alamein, Monte Cassino, Kohima — a great proportion of ‘British’ troops were not British at all, but Indian. (2015, np.)

Certain scholars believe many British citizens were aware of the paradoxical aspect of the rhetoric of the People's War: encouraging British citizens to defend their country's core value of democracy and freedom while crushing nationalism and claims for independence in colonies. Calder points out the particular position of the Communist Party in his chapter 'Celts, Red and Conchies' in *The Myth of the Blitz* (1991, pp. 65-89). The Communist Party published a manifesto declaring that the British and French ruling class were 'seeking to use the antifascist sentiments of the people for their own imperialist aims' (Branson, 1985, p. 271). At the Communist Convention organised in London on January 12, 1941, Krishna Menon, then residing in the capital, said that:

we [the people of India] are not impressed by such things as democratic imperialism, there is no such thing, as there is no such thing as a vegetarian tiger... There is no use in asking whether you would choose British imperialism or Nazism, it is like asking a fish if he wants to be fried in margarine or butter. He doesn't want to be fried at all.  
*(The People Speak, People's Convention, 1941 in Calder, 1991, p. 86)*

Furthermore, historians such as Sarah Britton explain how the years after the First World War saw a surge in anti-imperialism. Britton focuses on two examples, 'two protests directed at the 1924 British Empire Exhibition (a dispute by a group of African students over press coverage of the 1924 British Empire Exhibition's African Village, and a battle fought by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) against "sweated conditions" for the exhibition's workers) and an all-embracing and vociferous anti-imperial "counter-exhibition" staged by the Glasgow Independent Labour Party (ILP) to coincide with the 1938 Glasgow Empire Exhibition' (Britton, 2010, p. 68). These protests reveal the multiple ways in which exhibitions and their meta-narratives could be contested, highlighting destabilising discourses that 'challenged the cohesion of the Empire Exhibitions and the narratives presented within them' (ibid.). Furthering this idea, Rose writes that the Colonial Office during the Blitz 'had long been

keenly aware that the British citizenry were not particularly interested in the Empire, and that those who were interested tended to be in favour of granting independence to the colonies' (2003, p. 244). The 1940s were therefore a tense period in which citizens in Britain witnessed increasing messages of national unity alongside rising anger and frustration at the treatment of populations in the colonies.

This paradox is one that many authors dared to write about, unlike Calder suggests in *The Myth of the Blitz*. Here, I take Elizabeth Bowen as an excellent example of a citizen torn between on the one hand her hatred of the Nazis and fear for Britain and on the other her indignation at the situation in the British colonies. I propose to analyse her short story 'Mysterious Kôr' (1942), focusing mainly on the issue of intertextuality, to highlight how the writer links the problematic question of imperialism to that of patriotism on the home front. I argue that Bowen's main objective is to question the legitimacy of blind national allegiance in wartime by establishing a link between the horrifying Nazi bombing of London and the British Empire's own brutality in its colonies. I will first briefly comment on Bowen's background as an Anglo-Irish citizen and how this informed most of her oeuvre, before moving on to analysing the short story itself.

Elizabeth Bowen's Anglo-Irish background was formed by her upbringings in Dublin and at Bowen's Court, her family's country house in Farahy, County Cork where she spent her summers. Bowen's Court was one of the 'Big Houses', symbolic focal points of the Anglo-Irish political dominance of Ireland from the late seventeenth century, but unlike many others was not destroyed or attacked during the Irish revolutionary period. When her father became mentally ill in 1907, Bowen and her mother moved to England, eventually settling in Hythe. After her mother died in 1912, Bowen was brought up by her aunts. Even though she

remained in England, where she started her career as a writer and mixed with the Bloomsbury Group, she returned to Ireland often, eventually inheriting Bowen's Court in 1930.<sup>94</sup>

At the beginning of the Second World War, Bowen immediately volunteered her services to the British Ministry of Information.<sup>95</sup> She reported on Irish opinion, particularly on the issue of neutrality (Lee, 1986, p. 12). She wrote over two hundred reports, most of which have since been destroyed or are still secret. She took her responsibilities very seriously, and diligently sent in documents every two weeks. Effectively, she worked as a spy, recording opinion in her home country. This has since sparked a debate amongst Irish scholars, as there is an ongoing controversy regarding whether Elizabeth Bowen was a loyal British citizen taking part in the war effort, or merely an 'Irish traitor'. To Jack Lane, member of the controversial Aubane Historical Society,<sup>96</sup> Bowen betrayed her nation, as she 'befriended people under false pretences, reported in secret, got paid for it' (quoted in Aubane, 2008, p. 5). On the other hand, Martin Mansergh claims that she was of great use to both the British and Irish governments, as 'she was helpful to both countries' which 'were not enemies during World War II' (ibid., p. 4). Whatever her motives, Bowen seems to have been devoted to England, yet there was never any sign of her hating Ireland. In 1948, she wrote that she regarded herself 'as an Irish novelist' and that even though she had been 'going backwards and forwards between Ireland and England', it had never robbed her of 'the strong feeling of [her Irish] nationality' (quoted in the Bellman, 1942, p. 425).

---

<sup>94</sup> Bowen's Court was extremely expensive to maintain and in the end, Bowen had to sell it, only to see it almost immediately demolished by the new owner.

<sup>95</sup> On July 1, 1940, she wrote to Virginia Woolf:

I think I told you I had asked the Ministry of Information if I could do any work, which I felt was wanted in Ireland. On Saturday morning I had a letter from them saying yes, they did want me to go. Now it has come to the point I have rather a feeling of dismay and of not wanting to leave this country. (1940b, pp. 215-216)

<sup>96</sup> The Aubane Historical Society (AHS) is a historical society of amateur historians based in County Cork, focusing on local history and the Irish revolutionary period. It has a relatively controversial, 'revisionist' approach to Irish history and has been criticised by some Irish academics in the past.

What hence characterises Bowen's work is ambivalence in her treatment of national politics, in reference to both Ireland and Britain. As Allan Hepburn writes, 'living between English and Irish culture, she positioned herself as an outsider to both as the rhetorical slippage between "we" to mean "the Irish" and "we" to mean "the English" betrays' (2008, p. 9). Extremely critical of any kind of nationalism—here the term is understood as Orwell defined it in 1945 as 'the habit of identifying oneself with a single nation or other unit, placing it beyond good and evil and recognising no other duty than that of advancing its interests' (1945b)—a recurrent theme in Bowen's work is her characters' difficulties in feeling loyalty or national allegiance to any particular nation. The issues of betrayal and treason are, for example, at the heart of *The Heat of the Day* (1948). Bowen was always reluctant to define herself as either Irish or English/British as she disliked the idea of referring to one nation as superior to the other. In a letter to her Canadian lover Charles Ritchie, she wrote: 'I think we are curiously self-made creatures, carrying our personal worlds around with us like snail their shells, and at the same time adapting to wherever we are' (quoted in Glendinning, 1985, p. 139).

It is easy to link these views to Bowen's experience growing up in a community threatened by Irish independence forces and neglected by the British political support. Her own anxieties as a child, very aware of growing national tensions and violence during the Irish Troubles, explains why Bowen's work often displays, explicitly or more subtly, a dimension of critical reflection on imperialism. Her critics have focused on either the Gothic influences in her 'Anglo-Irish Big House' novels, stressing her reading of Le Fanu and James' (McCormack, 1991, p. 853), or on modernist literary influences in her wartime texts, which make her 'a hybrid of modernist detachment and Victorian thematics' (Mooney, 2007, p. 246). However, these two separate visions of the writer are not mutually exclusive. Rather,

they complement each other to constitute what could be defined as one of the main themes of her oeuvre: the trauma and distress caused by power-thirsty nationalism.

Fredric Jameson argues that the colonial experience lies at the root of Western modernism, highlighting the 'informing presence of the extraliterary, of the political and the economic' in modernist texts (Jameson, 1990, p. 52). To him, colonialism necessarily involves an aspect of 'spatial disjunction' that leads to 'the inability to grasp the way the system functions as a whole', henceforth 'artistic content always has something missing about it [...] in the sense of a privation that can never be restored' as the imperial world can never fully get to know the 'radical otherness of colonial life, suffering and exploitation' (p. 58). In his study, Jameson takes the case of Ireland as 'a kind of exceptional situation, one of overlap and coexistence between these two incommensurable realities which are those of the lord and the bondsman altogether, those of the metropolis and the colony simultaneously' (p. 67). James Wurtz linked Jameson's theory to Elizabeth Bowen's case, stating that 'the Anglo-Irish perceived themselves to be under siege from the increasingly vocal Irish Catholic majority [...] and, at the same time, the Act of Union reduced the influence of the Ascendancy [leading them to] slip into irrelevancy' (Wurtz, 2010, p. 120). Indeed, Bowen's background fuels her modernism: the legacy of imperialism creates in her texts a space torn 'between a British-aligned First World status and a nationalist-aligned Third World position, fully occupying neither' (Wurtz, 2010, 126), the *Big House* dramatising the 'radical incompleteness' that Jameson mentions (1990, p. 58).

Thus, Elizabeth Bowen's works feature countless explicit or more subtle references to the imperial strategies and policies of the British Empire. Ireland's colonial context definitely informs two of her major works *The Last September* (1929) and *Bowen's Court* (1942). *Bowen's Court* 'documents the history of successive generations of the Bowen family in Ireland from the time of their first arrival as part of the seventeenth-century Cromwellian

conquest to the author's own time in the early-twentieth century' (Kelly, 2013, p. 139). The text could be understood as a response to the dominant narrative in the post-independence Irish context, one depicting the colonial community (the Anglo-Irish gentry) as a class of alien Others, 'who lived parasitically off Irish land and labour and were out-of-place in the Irish landscape both during colonialism and after it' (p. 137). Elizabeth Bowen was certainly concerned about the position of the Anglo-Irish in Ireland, and *Bowen's Court*, as does her essay 'The Big House', argues that while the old myths of the Anglo-Irish as 'the heartless rich' had been broken down 'from the point of view of the outside Irish world' the house, its occupants and its history were still seen as enemies (1940a, p. 29). Her response to this context was to explore her own family's position in its ambiguities and subtleties, highlighting their strong attachment to Irish land and culture. *Bowen's Court* is therefore not just a story within a story or a story about the past, but a 'conscious expression of territorial identity told to counteract the suspicion that surrounded the Irishness of the Anglo-Irish and their place in Ireland that prevailed in the post-independence period' (Kelly, 2013, p. 139). Furthermore, *The Last September* not only subtly depicts the Anglo-Irish refusal to face the reality of the war surrounding their comfortable environment, but also the submissive fatalism of a community facing an inevitable decline. The Naylor and Montmorency families are threatened by the violent yet legitimate resentment of the IRA. The last scene of novel, the burning of the house, is both tragic and beautiful, cruel but necessary.

At the same time, Bowen was deeply moved by the disastrous consequences of the war in her second home country, Britain. She directly witnessed the bombing when living in London, and wrote several short stories set during the Blitz on the capital, as well as *The Heat of the Day* (1948), her most famous novel depicting life under the bombs. In her wartime fiction as well as in her essays, Bowen expresses her love of Britain and her despair at seeing it destroyed. She also praises, in the fashion of the time, the courage of the Londoners and the



feeling of community that reigned in the city. In her essay 'Britain in Autumn' (1950), she describes how 'we [the British] have almost stopped talking about Democracy because for the first time we are a democracy [...] we are almost a commune' (p. 54). Yet, Bowen published this text highlighting the courage of Londoners because she was aware of the real need for a 'literature of citizenship' that Hartley refers to. She considered that optimistic, uplifting, self-rewarding works were certainly superficial but above all essential to 'sustain' morale and war effort:

What the future England will want to know is how the ordinary man lived through extraordinary times. At present it is necessary to sustain ourselves by taking the ultra-heroic view. We must point out, first of all, how wonderful everyone was. This may be carried-I must say, at the risk of offending readers-to the point of misleading sentimentality. While we think we depict the ordinariness of the ordinary man, we very often paint him in roseate hues. (1942, p. 140)

In light of this reflection on the legitimate tendency to perhaps describe wartime life in 'roseate hues', Bowen also acclaimed authors who dared to record the Blitz from another point of view. In 1942, she reviewed Maurice Richardson's *London Burning* (1941) in these words:

To those accustomed to the 'blitz' books in emotional language, Mr. Maurice Richardson's *London Burning* may ring cold. For instance, Mr. Richardson opens, with perfect candour, by saying: 'I joined the AFS to dodge the Army. I have always had a peculiar horror of the Army, due to cowardice, hatred of discipline, phobia of scratchy uniform dating from school O.T.C. days'<sup>97</sup>. And the whole of his book is a record of what one might call involuntarily courage, marked throughout by an anti-heroic tone. (1942, p. 140)

---

<sup>97</sup> The Officers' Training Corps, more fully called the University Officers' Training Corps (UOTC), are military leadership training units operated by the British Army.

Elizabeth Bowen's own wartime fiction tells a different story than her essays, and features the very characteristics—a capacity to produce 'a first-rate corrective to idealised official pictures of us British at war' (Bowen, 1944b, p. 169)—that she particularly appreciated in other authors. While Mark Rawlinson writes that Bowen's name brings 'comforting familiarity' (2011, p. 160) and Guy Woodward states that her work reflects 'a contemporaneous and enduring Anglocentricity of British wartime mythmaking' (2015, p. 9), I argue that it is too simplistic to interpret her fiction as a direct support to the British government and as a reflection of wartime jingoism. Most critics have focused on her ability to depict bombed London in a way that very realistically depicts the 'degrading effects of war' and the 'feeling of deterioration of the spirit' which seems to be 'the war's residue' (Bryant Jordan, 1992, p. 130), but very few have associated her war texts with a desire to question the legitimacy of the presence and the actions of British troops in colonies overseas. Although most of Bowen's wartime short fiction is set in England and not in Ireland, several texts refer (be it directly or indirectly) to the complex relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. In the following section. I examine here 'Mysterious Kôr' (1942), a wartime short story that resists the imposed patriotic discourse of the People's War, according to which the purer and superior British values of democracy and freedom needed to be defended against the Nazis, and in which Bowen explicitly challenges the legitimacy of British imperialism through the use of intertextuality.

'Mysterious Kôr' is a short story written in 1942, first published at the end of the war in John Lehmann's *Penguin New Writing* 20 in 1944. It was later released as part of Bowen's *Collected Stories* in the 'War Years' section. 'Mysterious Kôr' tells the story of a couple, a young woman called Pepita and a soldier named Arthur, walking through the bombed streets of the capital at night and fantasising about a fictional place called Kôr. The text has been studied mainly in terms of its Gothic atmosphere as it is heavily influenced by late nineteenth-

century literary tropes (the mood is ghostly and verges on terror) and on Bowen's detailed description of the Londoner's psychological struggles (an intense fear and desire to escape) during the Blitz.<sup>98</sup> However, it also presents us with interesting critical reflections on the British Empire. Furthering Lassner's idea that "'Mysterious Kôr" evokes both the desolated ancient imperial city of Rider Haggard's *She* and the threat of imperial conquest in the modern age' (1998, p. 152), I want to highlight the stronger political and social message of the story in relation to the context of the People's War. Through a complex juxtaposition of places, London in England is paralleled with the imperial city of Kôr in East Africa, as the writer draws a link between the capital under the threat of invasion and a city in the hands of colonists, bringing the reader to reflect on the consequences of colonialism but also on the legitimacy of war aims.

Bowen is known to use references to other literary texts to enrich her own, as a reinterpretation of works from the past. Her use of intertextuality has been examined by Neil Corcoran in his study *The Enforced Return* (2004) which underlines Bowen's constant return to 'the already written' (p. 6) as, to her, 'reading is inseparable from remembering' (p. 9). Corcoran sees Bowen as a 'writer deeply engaged with some of the most urgent matters of both personal and public history in her time, and as a writer whose books, bending back, say much more complicated things about these histories than the rather orthodox conservatism of some of her public political pronouncements would suggest' (p. 14). In 'Mysterious Kôr', Bowen centres her story around two main literary references: Rider Haggard's novel *She* (1886) and Andrew Lang's poem 'She to H. R. H.' (1888).

In 'Mysterious Kôr', Pepita walks through the streets of destroyed London and feels unsure whether she really is in the British capital or in the city of Kôr, in what seems to be a very powerful hallucination. Kôr is a ghost town in an unknown place. *She* is a first-person

---

<sup>98</sup> See Sara Wasson's chapter 'Elizabeth Bowen's Uncanny Houses' in *Urban Gothic of the Second World War* (2010).

narrative that follows the journey of Horace Holly and his ward Leo Vincey to a lost kingdom in Eastern Africa, and its imperial city of Kôr. There, the two men meet ‘She’, Ayesha, a white queen who reigns over a primitive race of natives. *She* was praised by the critics and became an instant bestseller when it was first published. However, later in the mid-twentieth century, the novel was reread and reinterpreted as colonialist and racist.<sup>99</sup>

Haggard himself wrote about his aspirations to become a colonial governor. He was sent to Cape Town in South Africa in 1875 and cherished his exciting memory of Britain's annexation of the Transvaal in 1877. Haggard was part of the expedition that established British control over the Boer republic, and helped raise the Union flag over the capital of Pretoria on May 24, 1877. In his memoirs, he declared: ‘It will be some years before people at home realise how great an act it has been, an act without parallel. I am very proud of having been connected with it’ (1926, p. 107). Haggard maintained that it was Britain's ‘mission to conquer and hold in subjection’ lesser races, ‘not from thirst of conquest but for the sake of law, justice, and order’ (1877, p. 79). When the British government withdrew from pursuing its sovereignty over the South African interior, Haggard considered it to be a ‘great betrayal’ by Prime Minister Gladstone and the Liberal Party, which ‘no lapse of time ever can solace or even alleviate’ (Haggard, 1926, p. 194).

*She* is therefore set firmly in the Imperialist ideology of the late-Victorian period. The novel ‘invokes a particularly British view of the world’ (Stauffer, 2006, p. 19), as Rider Haggard projects concepts of the English self against the foreign otherness of Africa.<sup>100</sup> The white characters embody civilisation, wisdom and virtues, whilst the darker ones such as Amahagger represent savagery, barbarity and superstition. British qualities are constantly

---

<sup>99</sup> For post-colonial readings of the novel, see Wendy Katz's *Rider Haggard and the Fiction of Empire* (1987) and Susan Gilbert and Sandra Gubar *No Man's Land*, vol. 2 (1998).

<sup>100</sup> Still, some argue ‘racial politics of the novel are more complex than they first appear’, as for example Ayesha is of Arabian descent and Leo has Greek origins, while Holly is said to resemble a baboon—an animal Victorians typically associated with black Africans (Howe, 1949, pp. 93-95). Andrew Stauffer also writes that ‘the novel suggests deeper connections among the races, an ancient genealogy of ethnicities and civilisations in which every character is a hybrid’ (2006, p. 20).

contrasted against African ones, highlighting the superiority of Western society. In the same way, the main characters are devoted to the queen, who is essentially a symbol of colonising force, as she is a beautiful, powerful white empress reigning over black people.

In light of this, the mention of Kôr in Bowen's short story must refer to colonialism; yet Bowen subverts Haggard's novel rather than simply furthering its message. An interesting comparison can be made between Haggard's paragraph describing Kôr and Bowen's description of London. In *She*, Kôr is described as a beautiful, majestic city, even though it is dead and vacant after the settler has emptied it of all its riches:

Court upon dim court, row upon row of mighty pillars – some of them (especially at the gateways) sculptured from pedestal to capital – space upon space of empty chambers that spoke more eloquently to the imagination than any crowded streets. And over all, the dead silence of the dead, the sense of utter loneliness, and the brooding spirit of the Past! How beautiful it was, and yet how drear! [. . .] Bright fell the moonlight on pillar and court and shattered wall, hiding all their rents and imperfections in its silver garment, and clothing their hoar majesty with the peculiar glory of the night. It was a wonderful sight to see the full moon looking down on the ruined fame of Kôr. [...] The white light fell, and minute by minute the quiet shadows crept across the grass-grown courts like the spirits of old priests haunting the habitations of their worship—the white light fell, and the long shadows grew till the beauty and grandeur of the scene and the untamed majesty of its present Death seemed to sink into our very souls. (Haggard, 1991, p. 263)

In 'Mysterious Kôr', London has equally been stripped from life by the bombs and constant fear of invasion, and offers a very similar sight in the moonlight. The opening passage of the short story describing London shares strong similarities with Haggard's description of the city of Kôr, as Bowen reuses the same words and expressions:

Full moonlight drenched the city and searched it; there was not a niche left to stand in. The effect was remorseless: London looked like the moon's capital – shallow, cratered, extinct. It was late, but not yet midnight; now the buses had stopped the polished roads and streets in this region sent for minutes together a ghostly unbroken reflection up. The soaring new flats and the crouching old shops and houses looked equally brittle under the moon, which blazed in windows that looked its way. The futility of the black-out became laughable: from the sky, presumably, you could see every slate in the roofs, every whited kerb, every contour of the naked winter flowerbeds in the park; and the lake, with its shining twists and tree-darkened islands would be a landmark for miles, yes, miles, overhead. However, the sky, in whose glassiness floated no clouds but only opaque balloons, remained glassy-silent. (Bowen, 1983, p. 728)

Bowen is comparing London to Kôr, as a defeated and lost kingdom. She is describing the British capital with the same disappointment she experienced when she first saw it after reading *She* aged twelve, having been 'inclined to see London as Kôr with the roofs still on' (1947, p. 249). In Bowen's text, the city has lost its 'majesty', its 'glory', its 'splendour' and its 'beauty'. There are no 'mighty pillars' but 'brittle' houses, and Death is not an awe-inspiring presence that highlights the grandeur of the scene but a terrifying, destructive entity. Not only does the reference to the city of Kôr accentuate the darker and unfavourable side of the capital, but it also conveys the central idea that the British Empire is dying. To the writer, the greatness of an empire is inseparable from its ending. The destruction of any great power is ineluctable. In 1947, talking about Haggard's novel, she wrote that 'life in any capital must be ephemeral, and with a doom ahead' (ibid., p. 249).

The parallel between the two cities also projects a distorted experience of spatiality and temporality. London is not Kôr but Kôr is London, Kôr belongs to the past and London to

the present but both cities are dead—‘What, you mean we’re there now, that here’s there, that now’s then?’ (Bowen, 1983, p. 730). Pepita reaches a level of confusion in which the two cities merge together and she cannot differentiate Kôr from London. Chris Baldick argues that one of the Gothic’s main features is a ‘fearful sense of [historical] inheritance [...] with a claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space, these two dimensions reinforcing one another to produce an impression of sickening descent into disintegration’ (1992, p. xix). Pepita’s fantasies about Kôr reflect her fear of the future in a world where progress is paradoxically bringing humanity to an end but, more importantly, Bowen’s certainty that empires are doomed.

What is important to note is that the writer establishes a link between the geopolitical situations of East Africa being colonised by the British and Britain being bombed by the Germans. Similarities are highlighted between the consequences of imperialism and the disastrous effects of the Blitz, both caused by greed and a thirst for power from those who think ‘they had got everything taped’ (Bowen, 1983, p. 730). It is also the same ‘they’ that the soldier Arthur in the short story is furious at, the ‘they’ that robs years of his life. Kôr is looked back on in a tone of regret and nostalgia, as Pepita yearns for the mighty pillars in a long-lost place and wishes she could escape from the capital in which she feels trapped, where the same destruction is taking place before her eyes.

In the BBC Broadcast ‘She’ (1947)—in which she describes Haggard’s novel as the first text that revealed to her ‘the power of the pen’, of ‘the inventive pen’, and as ‘the first violent impact [she] ever received from print’ (Bowen, 1947, p. 250)—Bowen describes the novel as justifying imperialism through the civilising mission of the ‘savage tribes’ by the ‘Cambridge don’ from the ‘quiet college rooms’, excited at the powerful feeling of venturing to places where ‘no human foot had pressed for thousands of years’ (pp. 247-248). Britain is the centre of civilisation, in charge of the honourable but difficult task to extend its modernity

to the rest of the world. However, Bowen seems to challenge this idea in her short story, particularly through the reference to Andrew Lang's poem 'She to H.R.H' (1888), who wrote it for his friend Haggard after reading *She*. Pepita quotes the exact verses from the poem, which was placed directly before the text in most editions of the novel:

'She to H. R. H.'

Not in the waste beyond the swamps and sand,

The fever-haunted forest and lagoon,

Mysterious Kôr thy walls forsaken stand,

Thy lonely towers beneath the lonely moon,

Not there doth Ayesha linger, rune by rune

Spelling strange scriptures of a people banned.

The world is disenchanted; over soon

Shall Europe send her spies through all the land.

Nay, not in Kôr, but in whatever spot,

In town or field, or by the insatiate sea,

Men brood on buried loves, and unforgot,

Or break themselves on some divine decree,

Or would o'erleap the limits of their lot,

There, in the tombs and deathless, dwelleth *She!* (Lang, 1923, p. 168)

This is a particularly interesting and telling poem in the light of this essay's argument. Andrew Lang describes the city of Kôr as a majestic one, depicting the beauty of its many landscapes and rich history, however all of this is negated by the first word of every sentence: 'Not', 'Not', 'Nay'. The city is dead and no longer exists because of the 'spies' whose greed have led to destroy it, who 'o'erleap the limits of their lot', the same men who 'thought they had got everything taped' because 'every thing and place had been found and marked on some



map; so what wasn't marked on any map couldn't be there at all' (Bowen, 1983, p. 730). The civilising mission of the British Empire is primarily one of destruction. Lang writes that 'the world is disenchanted' through the colonisation process, a process in which Europeans dismantle and take down everything that shaped Kôr's greatness. Kôr being London in Bowen's short story, the writer could be here reversing Lang's poem, denying the beauty and highly civilised aspect of the British Empire, reduced to killing and pillaging during colonisation, and now bombing civilians during the Second World War. Even the largest empires ineluctably lose their magic and enchanting aspects.

London in Bowen's text is the cradle of death and despair, a threat to its own inhabitants. Similarly to Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* (1899) who describes Brussels as the 'city of dead', Bowen heavily draws on sharp contrasts of light and darkness to insist on the idea the capital of the British Empire is not the centre of enlightenment and civilisation on a paternalistic mission do help indigenous communities, but rather the opposite.<sup>101</sup> In *Heart of Darkness*, the 'whited sepulchre' is the Belgian capital (Conrad, 2006, p. 9), where the headquarters of the company Marlow and Kurtz work for is located. A sepulchre implies death and confinement, and indeed white Western Europe is the birthplace of the colonial enterprises that bring death to both themselves and their colonial subjects. The phrase 'whited sepulchre' is taken from the Gospel of St. Matthew, in which the apostle compares the hypocritical 'Scribes and Pharisees' to the white tombs 'which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness' (Matthew 23: 27). Marlow seems to understand that the Company is tearing 'treasure out of the bowels of the land' with 'no more moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe' (Conrad, 2006, p. 30). Thus, the image of the 'whited sepulchre' seems to be appropriate

---

<sup>101</sup> Bowen had read Conrad's works before writing 'Mysterious Kôr' and had noted: 'Conrad is in abeyance. We are not clear yet how to rank him. There is an uncertain pause' (quoted in Sherry, 1973, p. 39). This reflects Bowen's awareness of the 'unique propensity for ambiguity' at play in Conrad's texts, and the deeper level of meaning it carries than what some simply regarded a prejudiced description of indigenous populations (Bloom, 2009, p. 17).

for the Belgian capital which, as the writer suggests, constructs a hypocritical rhetoric for Europe's imperialist civilising mission, particularly the violent colonial activities in the Congo. Brussels is also the city of the dead, filled with 'dead silence' (p. 10), which turns even darker once the narrator returns there in the end, drowning in an 'ever-increasing darkness', a 'triumphant darkness [...] from which I could not even defend myself' (p. 75). The 'whited sepulchre' enables the writer to shed light on a paradox: Marlow, at the very heart of darkness in the Congo, has experienced some kind of enlightenment and revelation that reveals the evil of his enterprise, while back in Belgium, the city of the 'whited sepulchre' still seems to 'have grown darker' (p. 74) in a false light of deception.

In 'Mysterious Kôr'; Bowen depicts a terrifying 'ghostly' town (Bowen, 1983, p. 728). In the very first paragraph, from a bird's eye view, the reader is invited to scrutinise a city which is 'shallow, cratered, extinct'. The dead town has been stripped of its colours as we stare at the 'whited kerb' and 'tree-darkened islands' in the park. From above, 'for miles, yes, miles, overhead' the city is a black hole on Earth. It is not awe-inspiring like the White Cliffs of Dover or the bright beaches of the South Coast, but uninviting and weakened. London is vulnerable and fragile in what we understand is a cold winter –'the naked flowerbeds'– and looks 'brittle'. The 'soaring new flats' just like 'the old crouching houses' can no longer offer shelter from the bombs as 'there was not a niche left to stand in'. London is at the mercy of the Moon which 'drenched' and 'searched' it. The defeated city has given up and is left uninhabited. The following paragraph also conveys a desolating sense of loss. The city has lost its people—'people stayed indoors' and no one crosses the 'gateless gates of the park'—, its sound—not a voice, not a note from a radio escaped and its light—and in the sky float 'no clouds but only opaque balloons'. Even the enemy has deserted, as the Germans 'no longer came' to drop their bombs over the London roofs. Not only is the city helpless, it is threatening and dangerous to its own population. Bowen established a gloomy atmosphere

with strong Gothic influences throughout the story. From the ‘full moonlight’ to the ‘ghostly’ reflections (p. 728), the woman who ‘edged round a front door and [...] timidly called her cat’ whilst the clock ‘set about striking midnight’ (p. 731), from the cold that ‘crept up’ Callie (p. 733), people whose furtive shadows disappear quickly, ‘dissolved in the street by some white acid’ (p. 729) to Pepita sleeping ‘like a mummy’ (p. 737), all the elements of a ghost story are there. The city is anxious and frightening. To Bowen, London is not the city of enlightenment and civilisation at the head of a powerful benevolent Empire, it is another hypocritical ‘whited sepulchre’.

Bowen’s reference to the city of Kôr is one literary device that serves to question the paradox of the People’s War rhetoric of an imperialist government not only since the latter asserted values of freedom yet imposes its authority on other populations, but also because the British government’s imposed patriotism also harms its own citizens. Describing the terrifying reality of the Blitz through the interaction of three disillusioned Londoners, Bowen portrays London as a prison-like, threatening environment under the yoke of illogical, ‘laughable’ wartime regulations. In ‘Mysterious Kôr’, the soldier Arthur could be described as an anti-hero, the complete opposite to the fighters described in Churchill’s famous dithyrambic speech, which honoured the bravery of a sacred ‘few’ (1940c). Arthur does not live up to the BBC speeches’ expectations, he does not ‘sleep soundly, with assurance and majesty’ (Bowen, 1983, p. 733) like Callie assumes in the story. He is not what ‘*they* all say’ (ibid.). The young man is disillusioned as he walks the streets on what could be his last evening with his lover. He sarcastically quotes army recruitment propaganda: ‘Well, well: join the Army and see the world’ (p. 731). Arthur’s world is limited to a short-lived present, as he lives in constant fear of it ending: ‘I don’t know about “next”’ (ibid.). The young soldier is angered by the orders and ideals of a repeated ‘they’, ‘they forget war’s not just only war, it’s years out of people’s lives that they’ve never had before and won’t have again. (p. 738).

To him, 'to be human's to be at a dead loss' (p. 739), an idea that prevents him from sleeping at night.

The London Bowen depicts is a city similar to a prison. During the Blitz, private and public spheres merge together. Behind the government's ideal of 'community' and 'solidarity' are confused people deprived of their intimacy. Callie, Pepita's housemate, is the perfect example of 'the great antithesis between the external fact and the internal reality, between the objective condition and the projection of an internal world where feeling alone reigns' (Mitchell, 1966, p. 41). Callie is the 'guardian of that ideality which for Pepita was constantly lost to view' (Bowen, 1983, p. 732). She is an innocent virgin who naively talks about romantic love during the black-out and makes small talk about hot tea. She sits 'like an image' and seems to only see reality partially, 'through a veil of inexperience' (Medoff, 1984, p. 78). Her presence makes the atmosphere unbearable and suffocating, both physically (the couple cannot share a bed) and spiritually (Callie is constantly asking questions), for Pepita and Arthur who have nowhere else to go. Callie is the theoretically perfect example of an optimistic, cheerful Brit in the war. Yet this London flat is empty of any sense of community or unity. All characters resent each other's presence and Callie feels 'repugnance' and 'shyness' (Bowen, 1983, p. 733) at the idea of sharing a bed with Pepita. She is stuck in a flat 'where you could hear everything' and where the bathroom is 'shared with somebody else on the girl's floor' (p. 732). Callie has 'kept physical distances all her life' and now has to cope with a loss of intimate boundaries. During the First World War, 'the state established a hold over its citizens which, though relaxed in peacetime, was never to be removed and which the Second World War was again to increase' (Taylor, 2004, pp. 1-2). In Bowen's story, one's every move seems to be subjected to the rules and pressure of a superior authority. All the characters must act 'in accordance to the rule of the house', are 'obliged to turn off the wireless' (Bowen, 1983, p. 733) and live in complete darkness.

Practical as well as social conventions prevent the lovers from spending the night together as ‘it wouldn’t be proper’ and ‘I don’t know what your mother would say to me’ (p. 733). Pepita ‘owe[s] it’ to Arthur ‘to be cheerful’ (p. 732), in a city where individuality is crushed and people end up walking the streets ‘with no expression at all’ (p. 729). London in ‘Mysterious Kôr’ does not match Churchill’s description of the courageous city, in fact it is the portrait of three people unable to run away from each other in a flat where ‘hominess’ is ‘evaporating’ (p. 733). Even though they ‘refused to be here’, they have the moral obligation to, an idea that is somewhat ironical in the context of a fight for freedom. It seems towards the end of the story that even Callie is aware of her fraudulent behaviour, as she asks Arthur: ‘can’t wanting want what’s human?’ (p. 738) and loses ‘her own mysterious expectations’ (p. 739).

To conclude, Elizabeth Bowen is a perfect example of a middlebrow writer who was both gifted in terms of writing and deeply politically involved, never shying away from delicate political issues. Women’s wartime writing was not confined to depiction of domestic issues or dithyrambic praise of the Londoners’ courage, but also dealt with much more complex topics. The question of the British Empire was a sensitive one during the war, as public life was so overwhelmed by the rhetoric of the People’s War and the state’s imposition of values of patriotism and national allegiance. Yet, Bowen produced work that presents the reader with critical reflection on colonialism and patriotism, at a time where Churchill was praising Britain’s ‘finest hour’. Although she is often unfairly deemed an imperialist supporter who abandoned her native country of Ireland for the British nation, a closer reading of this text leads to a much more ambivalent interpretation of her work and views on colonisation.

‘Mysterious Kôr is particularly interesting insofar as it focuses on three main ideas: the ineluctable end of the British Empire; the limitations of the ‘civilising’ argument for

imperialism; and the paradox that Britain's war to defend 'democracy' and 'freedom' represents, both in relation to the situation in the colonies and the repression taking place in its own homeland. Although she did write essays such as 'Britain in Autumn', Bowen did not solely produce texts that could be described as 'literature of commitment and citizenship' as Hartley puts it (1997, p. 15). Even more interestingly, the Anglo-Irish writer was aware of the 'mythical' memory that was being constructed as the bombs were falling, and she herself praises Calder for pointing out the 'sagging or shaken morale', 'disaffection', 'raw bitterness' in *The People's War*, aspects of the home front that had previously been recorded 'for few eyes only' (Bowen, 1969b, p. 373).

### General Conclusions

There are several conclusions that can be drawn from the three texts analysed in this chapter, all of which shed light on a new angle from which to consider women's war writing.

The first, most important and most manifest one is the need to acknowledge the wide range of approaches in terms of preoccupations discussed and tone used in the works I focused on, and to reassert that there is no collective, unanimous vision of and reflection on the issue of patriotism in British women's war literature of the Second World War. Solely considering just three texts, I have pointed out that women war writers in Britain were concerned with the issue of patriotism and national allegiance, but all approached it in very different manners. Barbara Bower seems to depict an irrational jingoism using a very light hearted tone in a satirical dystopian novel; Susan Ertz chooses to subvert the genre of the 'rural novel' and has her characters hold extremely political conversations; whilst Bowen uses a much more metaphorical and symbolic short story to touch on the issue of colonialism. These three texts all question conventional discourses in a more or less subtle way, not only reflecting the complexity of the issue at hand but also highlighting the differences in the

individual experiences of the writers. This need to be kept in mind in order to understand that any further conclusions I draw is essentially limited and cannot be received as a ‘general truth’ on women’s war writing.

Thus, this once again contradicts the idea that served as a departure point for this thesis: Angus Calder’s statement that wartime writing in Britain could not ‘step outside conventional discourses’ (1991, p. 143). What is more, it also nuances Jenny Hartley’s statements on women’s war literature being a ‘literature of citizenship’ constantly supporting values of community and solidarity. Ertz, Bower and Bowen all question the established public discourse of the People’s War and refer to particularly negative and potentially harmful aspects of the patriotism continuously encouraged by the government. More interestingly, and this is my second conclusion, these texts not only contradict Calder’s reductive vision of wartime literature, but also provide complementary literary evidence to his own historical analysis of the ‘real’ individual experience of British citizens on the home front. Calder writes in *The Myth of the Blitz* that the blind trust some British citizens expressed, in the summer of 1940, in the idea they would automatically win the war was irrational and ‘tantamount to stupidity’ (1991, p. 107); exactly as Susan Ertz argues in *Anger in the Sky*. Barbara Bower’s depictions of Miss Ranskill’s terror during a particularly violent air raid confirms Calder’s mentioning of ‘widespread fear and paranoia’ and Nona’s astonishment at people’s mixed-up priorities between saving the children and making more blackout curtains is directly linked to the historian’s remark that ‘the apparent persistence of everyday normalities [...] must have involved an element of delusion’ (p. 109). Furthermore, Elizabeth Bowen’s questioning of the British colonial enterprise in relation to the government’s injunctions to fight to defend freedom and democracy is a literary expression of Angus Calder’s very same idea expressed in the chapter ‘No Other Link’: the scholar criticises Churchill’s mythologisation of an England ‘fighting alone’ whilst promoting and encouraging ‘an imperial nationalism,

compounded of monarchism, militarism and Social Darwinism' (Mackenzie, 1984, p. 253) to 'define [Britain's] own unique superiority *vis-à-vis* the rest of the world' and remind the citizens that 'they were the fortunate overlords of coloured masses overseas' (Calder, 1991, p. 54).

My third conclusion is that these three women writers present us with the relatively radical idea (in the context of the People's War) that war can only lead to the dangerous exacerbation of a patriotism based on arrogance and selfishness and devoid of empathy and above all, logic. Somerville suggest that 'there is a well-established tradition which in the name of "patriotism" explicitly rejects the use and standards of reason on the part of the ordinary citizen in relation to matters of war' (1981, p. 574). These three texts are very good examples of this idea as they all reflect the lack of logical reasoning behind seemingly patriotic actions. In *Anger in the Sky*, Mrs. Anstruther does not see the heroic dimension of Mrs. Ellsworth's decision to stay in her flat during the bombings, only a ridiculous lack of common sense. Marjorie is explicitly made fun of in *Miss Ranskill Comes Home* as she sees political and war strategies in the smallest details of everyday life, such as choosing to eat two instead of one gram of jam. Bowen subtly highlights in 'Mysterious Kôr' the paradox on which is based the People's War, as supporting Churchill's victory for freedom and democracy is intimately associated with backing up his cruel colonial enterprise abroad. This idea that patriotism does not depend on any rational reflection is not new,<sup>102</sup> but the period of

---

<sup>102</sup> Indeed, in 1854 already, Alfred Tennyson wrote his famous poem 'The Charge of the Light Brigade', written after he 'read an account in the London Times of the suicidal charge—ordered by mistake—of the English cavalry against the Russian artillery at Balaklava during the Crimean War' (Somerville, 1981, p. 574). The poet was particularly interested by the use of the phrase 'someone had blundered' and then composed the following:

Someone had blundered.  
Their's not to make reply,  
Their's not to reason why,  
Their's but to do and die.  
Into the valley of Death  
Rode the six hundred. [...]  
When can their glory fade?



the Second World War marks the first time women voice it as direct (and so, as some would argue, reliable and legitimate) witnesses of the conflict.

What is more, these texts reflect the valid but novel idea that patriotism is not a *sine qua non* to participate in the war effort, be it in a rural or urban setting. John Somerville writes that ‘for centuries [...] participation in war has been universally considered the primary form and activity in which patriotism manifests itself’ (1981, p. 568). He adds that ‘to risk one’s life [...] for one’s people and one’s fatherland became a supreme form of patriotism, and the making of war itself thus became the supremely patriotic profession and institution’ (ibid.). In these women works, this idea is entirely contradicted. Mrs. Anstruther resents the idea of a war and feels no pride for any so-called British value yet her life is dedicated to participating in the war effort as she opens her house and welcomes dozens of refugees. Similarly, in ‘Mysterious Kôr’, the young soldier Arthur does not seem to want to leave the Army or resent his job, his feelings of disillusion at the lies of the government do not call into question his desire to fight the enemy. What remains crucial to mention is that these novels were not written by pacifist writers, and that we know that Susan Ertz and Elizabeth Bowen both participated in the war effort. Susan Ertz worked as an air warden and Elizabeth Bowen wrote reports on Irish opinion for the British Ministry of Information. What then seems to be argued by these women is that one does not necessarily need to be patriotic to fight in the war, one can be motivated by other ideological yet rational arguments, even if devoid of a particularly strong feeling of national allegiance.

---

O the wild charge they made!  
All the world wondered.  
Honor the charge they made!  
Honor the Light Brigade,  
Noble six hundred! (quoted in Rumens, 2014, para. 8-13)



Imperial War Museum IWM (Art.IWM PST 0761) ©



## **Chapter II: Class at War**

### Introduction

In England, the organisation of social stratification in strictly distinct ‘classes’ is very complex. It would be impossible and unwise to try and give a comprehensive analysis of it in this introduction. For the more focused purpose of this chapter, which aims to understand women’s writing in relation to the classless rhetoric of the People’s War, I will refer to the concept of class as George Orwell defined it in 1941, at the height of the Blitz.<sup>103</sup>

In *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius*, Orwell wrote that England was ‘the most class-ridden country under the sun’, ‘a land of snobbery and privilege, ruled largely by the old and silly’ (1941, section III). The writer’s categorical statement reflects the fact that since the Victorian era, social stratification had been an essential part of British culture. This does not mean that people before then lived in a society free of wealth disparities, but that the industrialised nineteenth century was key in the architecture of ‘class’ as we understand it today.<sup>104</sup> It is during this period that the three-tier hierarchy comprising the lower classes earning their income from wages, the middle classes from salaries and profit, and the upper classes from property and rent, came to be such a defining aspect of Britain’s cultural identity. Orwell’s definition of social class, discussed at length in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, is based on three key ideas. The first one is that the sense of belonging to a specific social class is a fundamental part of a British citizen’s identity; it is not merely defined in purely economic terms, but is also linked to status and self-representation. Class refers to the ‘consciousness of the nature and distribution of power in society’ and ‘sensations of collective identity of interest among individuals’ (Neale, 1981, p. 132). The actual financial

---

<sup>103</sup> Why Orwell? As Timothy Garton Ash puts it, ‘he was neither a universal genius nor a great novelist’, but ‘his great essays straddle politics and literature’ and ‘no one wrote better about the English character than Orwell, and he was himself a walking anthology of Englishness’. Hence, ‘anyone who wants to understand the twentieth century will still have to read Orwell’ (1998, section 4, para. 1).

<sup>104</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines ‘class’ as ‘a system of ordering society whereby people are divided into sets based on perceived social or economic status’ (OED, 2010, ‘class’).

situation of a citizen and their sense of belonging to a certain community are most certainly linked, but not identical aspects of social stratification, as Orwell explains:

The essential point about the English class-system is that it is not entirely explicable in terms of money. Roughly speaking it is a money-stratification, but it is also interpenetrated by a sort of shadowy caste-system; rather like a jerry-built modern bungalow haunted by medieval ghosts. Hence the fact that the upper-middle class extends or extended to incomes as low as £300 a year—to incomes, that is, much lower than those of merely middle-class people with no social pretensions. Probably there are countries where you can predict a man's opinions from his income, but it is never quite safe to do so in England; you have always got to take his traditions into consideration as well. A naval officer and his grocer very likely have the same income, but they are not equivalent persons and they would only be on the same side in very large issues such as a war or a general strike—possibly not even then. (1978, p. 204)

The second key aspect of Orwell's comment on class is the fact that although he sees it as an ideological construction, it is a very rigid and fixed structure. Through accounts of his own personal experience<sup>105</sup> and some of his fiction<sup>106</sup>, the writer suggests that class barriers are not flexible:

---

<sup>105</sup> Orwell describes his stay with a family of miners, during which class boundaries never lessened:  
For some months I lived entirely in coal-miners' houses. I ate my meals with the family, I washed at the kitchen sink, I shared bedrooms with miners, drank beer with them, played darts with them, talked to them by the hour together. But though I was among them, and I hope and trust they did not find me a nuisance, I was not one of them, and they knew it even better than I did. However much you like them, however interesting you find their conversation, there is always that accursed itch of class-difference, like the pea under the princess's mattress. It is not a question of dislike or distaste, only of *difference*, but it is enough to make real intimacy impossible. Even with miners who described themselves as Communists I found that it needed tactful manoeuvrings to prevent them from calling me 'sir'; and all of them, except in moments of great animation, softened their northern accents for my benefit. I liked them and hoped they liked me; but I went among them as a foreigner, and both of us were aware of it. (1978, pp. 136-137)

<sup>106</sup> In *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935), the young Dorothy suffers from an attack of amnesia and starts a new life amongst a group of vagrants. Although she is happy and feels welcome, she cannot feel comfortable with them. Something inherent to her person prevents her from completing integrating

Whichever way you turn this curse of class-difference confronts you like a wall of stone. Or rather it is not so much like a stone wall as the plate-glass pane of an aquarium; it is so easy to pretend that it isn't there, and so impossible to get through it. (p. 137)

To a certain extent, according to the writer, some people feel so attached to the class they were born in that they feel less inclined to acknowledge when they 'move up' in the system. The third point to be noted is that Orwell is describing a specifically English social structure; a 'shadowy caste-system'<sup>107</sup> (p. 204) unlike any other country's social stratification. Its peculiarity resides in the fact that, unlike other European countries, the English seem to both loathe it and be attached to it.<sup>108</sup> Helena Horton still describes the country as more than ever 'class-obsessed' in the twenty-first century (2015, para. 3). An interesting example for this idea would be the different meanings linked to the word 'middle-class' in England compared to other European countries. In France for example, it is generally understood simply as defined in the Larousse dictionary: 'the social classes belonging to the service industries, formed mainly of employees, tradesmen, shopkeepers, executives, etc.', a category which today includes most of the population (2017, 'moyenne')<sup>109</sup>. In England, the term has many more subtleties, as economists now refer to the 'lower-middle class' and the 'upper-middle classes'. A recent study by Mike Savage, *The Social Class in the 21st Century* (2015), even lists seven British 'social classes': the elite, the established middle class, the technical middle

---

with the group, which will ultimately lead her to be defeated in her various encounters and go home feeling very isolated.

<sup>107</sup> The reference to the word 'caste' is not anodyne as Orwell was born in 1903 in Motihari, Bengal Presidency (present-day Bihar), in British India. He experienced the Indian social context of the caste system, particularly whilst he worked for the Indian Imperial Police in Burma.

<sup>108</sup> The 2013 BBC 'Great British class calculator: What class are you?' online test was a hit, as people seemed to be very keen to find out exactly what class they belonged to according to the analysis of detailed information about their revenues, education, etc.

<sup>109</sup> My translation of: '*ensemble des couches sociales qui appartiennent au secteur tertiaire, et qui sont constituées par des employés, des artisans, des petits commerçants, des cadres d'entreprises, etc*'.

class, the new affluent workers, the traditional working class, the emergent service workers and the precariat.

Yet, in the seminal essay 'England your England', Orwell predicted that 'this war [the Second World War], unless we are defeated, will wipe out most of the existing class privileges' (1941, pp. 54-55). He believed that the politicisation of the people in the 1940s held a strong potential for a Socialist revolution, which would lead, in essence, to a shift in power and the bettering of the general population's living conditions. The economic structure of a Socialist state would rely on the State becoming 'the sole large-scale producer', and lead to 'approximate equality of income (it need be no more than approximate), political democracy, and abolition of all hereditary privilege, especially in education' (pp. 62-63).

Orwell did not live to see a Socialist England but, in many post-war studies on class in Britain, the Second World War seems to indeed have been a turning point in British social stratification, as a period that either abolished or on the contrary exacerbated the severe class differences that had previously (nearly) always existed in the country. To a number of historians of the 1960s and 1970s, Orwell's prediction was true and the Second World War was a great 'leveller of classes' in Britain, both in terms of individual financial growth, and inter-class solidarity.<sup>110</sup> Titmuss wrote that the conflict was an example of how 'mass war, involving a high proportion of the total population, tends to a levelling in social class differences' (2001, p. 78); and Arthur Marwick stated that the gulf between classes narrowed during the conflict, explaining that the fact citizens from all social classes had to join in the war effort led to the blurring of boundaries between the rich and the poor. He suggested that 'the middle and upper classes were showing greater sympathy for, and understanding of the working class, and a greater willingness to support improvements in working-class conditions' (1980, p. 216). However, these ideas have since then been questioned, as studies like Penny

---

<sup>110</sup> On an individual level, researchers such as Richard Titmuss, Arthur Marwick or D. C. Marsh's opinions vary significantly as to whether or not this change was permanent and lasted after the war.

Summerfield's 'The Levelling of Class' (1986) demonstrate that although some workers did see their wages increase and more women took on paid work, the overall financial gap between upper classes, middle classes and working classes changed very little during the war:

There were certainly wartime changes in social stratification, and there is no doubt that some groups of manual workers improved their pay position markedly. [...] In addition, it seems that working-class women undertook paid work to a greater extent (and at higher levels of pay than women of the middle class, apart from those in the latter group who entered low-salary white-collar jobs). All the same, there were wide variations in the income levels of different working-class groups [...] and some middle-class groups. [...] The war gave rise to very little movement out of the working class via accumulation, and it may even have encouraged the widening of property differentials, both within the middle class and between the working class. (Summerfield, 1986a, pp. 201-202)

Sonya Rose corroborates this view as she writes about a 'powerful fantasy of national cross-class unity' that could not beat 'persistent expressions of class antagonism' (2003, p. 29).

Marwick insists that there is a need to strike the 'precise balance [...] between long-term and short-term factors and outcomes, and between those who maintain that *some* significant changes are discernible, and those who insist war's effects are overwhelmingly negative and regressive' to be able to formulate a true judgment on class disparities during the war (1988, p. xviii). My purpose here is not to do so, but to focus on the idea that the debate between historians who see total war as a motor for positive social change and those whom Summerfield named 'revisionists' (including herself in this group) is part of a larger reassessment process of the historical and cultural memory of the Second World War in Britain, particularly the periods of severe air raids in 1940 and 1941. This chapter aims to



expand this particular socio-historical ‘revision’ of established ideas on class structure during the Blitz to the literary field.

In contrast to the debate taking place in the academic field, the Blitz on Britain is publicly remembered as a time which undoubtedly brought people together in the breaking down of class-consciousness. The concept of the People’s War itself relies on the ‘sense that rich and poor, civilians and fighters, were “all in it together”, that privilege was or should be in abeyance’ (Calder, 1995, p. 56) and, still today, British people might refer to the ‘Blitz spirit’ when their country seems to be collectively standing against hardship.<sup>111</sup> Songs like ‘We Must All Stick Together’<sup>112</sup>—of which the lyrics describe the people standing united, rich and poor alike, no matter ‘the old school tie’—are played as background music for Blitz documentaries. In the eye of public memory, in a country where social class divisions had previously been the basis of the social structure, the bombings led to a whole nation sharing the same feelings of patriotism and bravery whilst demonstrating a strong desire to defeat the Nazis. In school books, students read Churchill's speeches, which constantly appealed to the 'entire population, men, women and children', and referred to the whole of the British community who willingly and proudly joins the war effort as 'the fronts are everywhere' (Churchill, 1990, p. 181). Pupils also study the texts of J. B. Priestley, who wrote in *Out of the*

---

<sup>111</sup> The banking crisis of the early twenty-first century resulted in a resurgence of references to the ‘Blitz Spirit. In an article entitled ‘Patience, good humour and a touch of the Blitz spirit’, *The Independent* quotes Barry Yarrow, a seventy-seven-year-old man who was queuing up outside a bank to withdraw his money: ‘Out of tragedy comes togetherness [...]. It’s the same sort of experience as in the air-raid shelters. It has brought people together’ (McSmith, 2007, para. 3).

<sup>112</sup> ‘We Must All Stick Together’ was composed by R. Butler and R. Wallace and recorded by Billy Cotton and his band in 1939:

We must all stick together, all stick together  
And the clouds will soon roll by  
We must all stick together, all stick together  
Never mind the old school tie  
United we shall stand whatever may befall  
The richest in the land, the poorest of us all  
We must all stick together, birds of a feather,  
And the clouds will soon roll by.

*People* that 'the new ordeals blast away the old shams', and that Britain was 'being bombed and burned into democracy' (quoted in Calder, 1969, p. 163).

Heavily qualifying 'the idea that the war straightforwardly boosted social solidarity' (Fielding et al., 1995, p. 26), Angus Calder's *The Myth of the Blitz* theorises the contradictions between the recent socio-historical reassessment of the Blitz, and the seemingly unchanged public memory of it. In his book, he demystifies the image of a tight-knit British community of helpful citizens by highlighting the government's political objectives when constructing this unrealistic view of the nation. According to the historian, Churchill's aim to secure the United States' involvement in the war, his desire to maintain his political support and his intention to divert the people's attention from other economic problems constituted the real drive behind the People's War campaign (Calder, 1991, pp. 90-118). Analysing the period of the bombings from a socio-historical point of view rather than an economic one, Calder writes that the myth of the Blitz in terms of class solidarity is not so much a lie as an ideal that the citizens themselves had internalised, a moral obligation imposed by the public discourse. His colleague Paul Addison furthers this idea of the pressure of a 'moral imperative' in British society during the war:

From 1940 egalitarianism and community feeling became, to a great extent, the pervasive ideals of social life: whether or not people lived up to them, they knew they *ought* to. The political influence of the ration book seems to me to have been greater than that of all the left-wing propaganda of the war years put together. The slogans of 'fair shares', sometimes thought to have been invented by Labour propagandists in 1945, originated in fact in the publicity campaign devised by the board of Trade to popularise clothes rationing in 1941. (1975, pp. 18-19)

Every Briton was told that 'the moral code of a society at war demanded that no one should benefit unduly from a collective effort in which men are getting killed' (p. 131). Calder and

Addison's idea that people were, to a certain extent, obliged to follow certain moral standards inevitably leads to the need to question the conclusions that were previously made about the cultural legacy of the Blitz, or at least approach certain aspects of it from a different angle. My aim here is to consider fictional texts of the 1940s in light of the recent debunking of the 'unified Britain' myth, focusing on how they interact with the issue of social class disparities.

The question of how the class system is represented and questioned in Second World War literature is one that has little been focused on, particularly when it comes to women's works. Whilst Adam Piette was one of the first to suggest that Blitz fiction shows a clear consciousness of the rhetoric of the 'passion for modest progress', as 'public stories' of togetherness' are challenged by 'the private voice' speaking of 'deep fissures and rifts in the society' (1995, pp. 4-5), most academics seem to deem women writers as either lacking the capacity to consciously reflect on the social structure they live in, being simple followers of political propaganda, or more interested in issues of domesticity than class disparities.

A good example of this would be Jenny Hartley's study *Millions Like Us*—considered one of the main analyses of women's writing of the Second World War—in which one chapter is devoted to the issue of social stratification in female works, entitled 'From Class to Community in Fortress England'. Hartley's main argument is that 'with the progress of war, class diminished as a principle and an overriding concern in women's fiction' (1997, p. 52). She divides women writers into two categories, those who 'reacted with nostalgic regret', and those who 'turned towards collectivity' (ibid.):

In women's war writing we find a double story: we have a record of the dying of the elite, a story told many times with pleasure, sometimes with regret, and we also found stories about the revised communities of wartime England, versions of the new societies forming inside the fortress of England at war. (p. 32)

To illustrate this idea, Hartley first offers a detailed analysis of Laura Talbot's *The Gentlewomen* (1952), a novel which aims to 'elicit our sympathy' for the very upset Roona Bolby, a 'well-connected woman who is forced to earn her living by governessing, thus employed and exploited by her own class' (p. 39). Hartley writes that Bolby's text describes on the one hand the fears and anxieties of the middle-class forced to work because of the financial conjuncture, but also, on the other hand, the struggles of the upper-class 'who are currently handicapped by the pressures of war' (p. 38). Then, the critic analyses Silvia Townsend Warner's *The Corner that Held Them* (1948), a novel about a fourteenth-century convent which she understands as a metaphor for the new communal, collective and collaborative communities that appeared in the 1940s in London.

Whilst Hartley's conclusion is interesting, I argue it is questionable, as her analysis is to an extent incomplete: Hartley's 'double story' of female war writing excludes a crucial third one. She highlights upper-class and middle-class women's fear of losing their status and hidden reluctance at mingling with the lower classes as well as the newly found feeling of solidarity in some areas, but perhaps neglects fiction depicting the poorer classes' experience of the war, which most certainly did not fit into either of her two categories. Hartley herself is aware of the limitations of her chapter, as she states 'the voice of the working-class woman was never established', since the story of class during the war was nearly always told 'from a middle or upper-class perspective' (p. 40). She quotes the writer Ethel Mannin:

It is very significant that, with the exception of myself, if I may be allowed to say so, we have no proletarian women writers—women writers of proletarian origins, that is to say, identifying themselves with their class and writing of it. (1944, p. 261)

Still, whilst it is true women with less money could not necessarily spend time writing books, some of them did produce fascinating work and, more importantly, others did tell their story: a story that fits neither the 'middle and upper classes fearing to lose their privileges'

framework, nor the ‘people from diverse backgrounds joining together’ scenario. These are stories of anger, sadness, resentment and extremely acute class-consciousness.

In light of this, the question that Hartley poses in her chapter, ‘did women join [the] orchestra of togetherness and commitment to progress?’ (1997, p. 33), remains only partly answered and, most importantly, her conclusion that ‘class diminished as a structuring principle and an overriding principle’ (p. 52) not wholly valid. I aim here to consider the issues of representation of class-consciousness in Second World War women’s writing by looking at a wider range of works, shedding light on all sides of the stories, comparing three novels written by women from different social backgrounds and with different life experiences: Marguerite Steen’s *Shelter* (1941), Phyllis Bottome’s *London Pride* (1941) and Elizabeth Bowen’s *The Heat of the Day* (1948).

The first two novels were written by women who constantly asserted their strong working-class identity. Although they both managed to become successful writers and earn very reasonable incomes, their works exclusively focus on working-class environments and characters, narrating the lives of poorer citizens angered by social inequalities—inequalities which, according to them, were only accentuated during the war. I argue here that *Shelter* and *London Pride* offer a radically different alternative to the public discourse of the People’s War. In *The Heat of the Day*, Bowen highlights the middle classes’ reluctance and even resentment at the sudden public injunction to mix with and show solidarity for the lower classes. Thus, once again in response to Calder’s suggestion that writers of the Second World War could not step outside the paradigms of the Myth of the Blitz, and more precisely to Hartley’s argument that ‘class diminished as a structuring principle’ in fiction in the 1940s, I contend here that these texts show clear awareness and resentment of the *constructed* aspect of the People’s War classless rhetoric by explicitly contrasting it with the severe reality of class inequalities and lack of social solidarity in wartime Britain.

A) *Shelter* (1941), Marguerite Steen

To understand the complexity of the moving novel *Shelter*, one needs to be aware of the author's own life experiences. Marguerite Benson was born in 1894 in Liverpool. Her mother was not particularly pleased to welcome a child, and 'had done all she could think of to get rid of this little tiresome embryo: excessive exercise on horseback, jumping off tables, and so forth' (Steen, 1966, p. 2). Marguerite's father was away at war in South Africa for most of her childhood, and killed himself in Kumasi, Ghana when she was only eight years old. After that, it was considered unsuitable to leave Marguerite with her irresponsible mother and she was adopted by family friends. The author wrote that her adoptive parents Margaret Jane and Joseph Steen were from 'the respectable working class' (p. 12), until Joseph lost his job as head gardener for a rich family, which led to them being 'poor' (p. 15). Marguerite Steen<sup>113</sup> grew up to be a very clever, albeit quite disruptive, student ('indolent, insubordinate and nauseatingly emotional' (p. 29), and then became a teacher in a small boarding school, aged only nineteen. In *Looking Glass*, the first part of her autobiography, she sees her young self as a plain young lady who strongly identified with the working classes: 'a pale provincial schoolgirl in a deplorable off-the-peg tweed suit, a cheap straw hat and rather dirty gloves' and 'a cheap cane suitcase [...] girdled with imitation leather' (p. 34). Often scolded for 'talking too broad', she found London unbearable on her rare visits to the capital as it was 'too rich, too indigestible for one brought up on such simple fare as [her]' (pp. 41-42).

Steen was just twenty when the Great War broke out, 'a war that sweeps away all your friends, and the friends of your friends and alters the whole pattern of your tranquil life' (p. 41). Because she was still very young and 'too immature' (p. 43), her uncle forbade her to join the Women's Royal Naval Service. Steen's fiancé died on All Saints' Day in 1916, yet the First World War always resonated with her as a blurred memory, as 'apart from the presence

---

<sup>113</sup> The writer took her adoptive father's name.

of the troops, the revolting food, the occasional bumble of a Zeppelin on its way to London, and the muffled sound of guns across the Channel, there might have been no war down in the Hetfordshire countryside' (p. 47).

In 1918, Steen quit her job, in what she said she was a case of 'arrested development' (p. 51), moved to London wanting to 'educate herself' (p. 52), and started writing and acting. She taught dance in schools and earned a comfortable amount of money. During that period she had a complicated romance with a married man, the only point in her life where she felt true unhappiness:

Just about then I made my one and only attempt at suicide. I did it in the stupidest, most clumsy fashion, and am still ashamed of it. I was staying in Manchester, to watch rehearsals for the new Terry productions; Julia had invited me. Watching rehearsals meant meeting my lover: so painful an occasion for both of us that I walked out of the theatre in the winter mirk and straight into the Irwell. The flat, black, filthy water reflected factory lights. It rose up to my thighs, to my stomach, to my breasts. I clasped my hand on the nape of my neck, resolved to push my head under, when, bobbing down on the obscene tide, came the swollen carcass of a cat. Oh no, I couldn't! It was too disgusting—to drown, and be swollen, and float like that poor cat. (p. 73)

It is obviously difficult as a reader not to think of Virginia Woolf's suicide in 1941, who drowned herself by filling her pockets with stones and walking into the River Ouse. Steen is possibly ridiculing her own attempt at killing herself, and seems to be indirectly mocking Woolf's death, or at least its *mise-en-scène*. The writer considered herself very separate from the elite of well-off writers of the Bloomsbury group. Still, her adequate income enabled her to regularly travel to France and Spain, where she met her future husband William Nicholson. Her first novel, *The Gilt Cage*, was published in 1927, and was followed by 40 more books.

Her first major success was *Matador* (1934), which narrates her love for Spain, particularly bullfighting. *The Sun is My Undoing* (1941), the first part of a slave trilogy,<sup>114</sup> was her breakthrough to a wider audience.

During the war, Marguerite Steen and painter William Nicholson saw their home bombed in 1940 and over the following four years they 'could never find a permanent lodging' (1968, p. 10). Unlike other writers or artists who had enough money to leave and had 'opportunities of escape at the beginning of the war', the couple remained in England. Steen states she was not an 'anglophile', but that 'the least one could do was to stand by one's country, share her pains and penalties, know what it really meant to have war on one's doorstep' (p. 43). She despised the 'conspicuous rats' (p. 44) who fled the war or her better-off friends who could afford to distance themselves from the conflict and gladly did it.<sup>115</sup> Because

---

<sup>114</sup> *The Sun is My Undoing* is the first part of the *Flood* trilogy. It is a long text of over a thousand pages. It covers a forty-year period, following characters on three continents in places as different as Bristol, the capital of the slave trading days, the Middle Passage, the Gold Coast, the African interior, Barbados and plantation life, Cuba and Creole society the Barbary Coast. The hero is a slave trader, and the author unusually focuses on how slave trading degraded the slave traders themselves. Matthew Flood is in love with Pallas Brumester, who chooses the cause of abolition over happiness, and ends up 'marrying' a Cuban lover in an obscure ceremony. The story follows the descendants of this second passion, and the consequences of the tragic slave trade on their lives. The *New York Times* praised *The Sun is My Undoing* in August of 1941: 'Only a novelist of remarkable skill and learning could have turned such a story into a period piece, so true to its time and place that most works of actual history grow pale in comparison' (quoted in *The Rotarian*, 1941, p. 65).

<sup>115</sup> Harsh criticism was addressed to very eminent writers who chose to leave England, particularly W. H. Auden, Christopher Isherwood and Aldous Huxley, who all left for America at the start of the Second World War. Each of them left in the name of pacifism, refusing to live in a country that directly engaged in killing innocent victims. Huxley actively campaigned for peace on behalf of the Peace Pledge Union in Britain, convinced that 'civilisation dies anyhow of blood poisoning the moment it takes up its enemies' weapons and exchanges crime for crime' (quoted in Isherwood, 2011, p. 100), until he moved to New York in 1937 after feeling his ideas were falling into deaf ears. Isherwood crossed the Atlantic after the Munich conference in 1938. He had redefined himself as a proactive pacifist, one that was not a 'passivist', after his German friend Heinz Neddermeyer, whom he travelled Europe with, was arrested by the Nazis in 1937. Auden left England for more unclear reasons, primarily his disappointment with the London literary scene, and felt 'an uncharacteristic ambivalence toward pacifism and would, eventually, formally disavow it' (Johnston, 2002, p. 11), stating that he wanted 'to kill people' (quoted in Mustich, 2008, para. 41). The three authors were constantly under attack from the British press, since their former colleagues saw them 'as abandoning leadership posts in wartime Britain' (Johnston, 2002, p. 11). Evelyn Waugh quipped at the time that W. H. Auden had fled to the States 'at the first squeak of an air raid warning', and on January 13, 1940, Auden and Isherwood were named in a session of parliament as examples of 'British citizens of military age who have gone to the United States' (quoted in Davenport-Hines, 1996, p. 180). It was asked in that same session whether these citizens 'will be summoned back for



her husband was a member of the Other Club,<sup>116</sup> the writer happened to know Winston Churchill himself, who she considered a 'personal hero' and fully 'trusted' in the years leading up to 1939. Yet, once the war started she was appalled by the 'squalor' (p. 6) people were reduced to live in, and even 'took to the bottle' for the first time in her life (p. 7), extremely aware of how her own harrowing experience of the war differed from that of the much poorer Londoners:

The Londoner who, at that time, was taking the tough end of the war, was not granted an extra ounce of tea, and extra sliver of butter or ten cigarettes. That did not apply to people like William and me, who could afford to feed ourselves in restaurants, but to the 'little' man and his wife, who were performing prodigies of valour and unselfishness, it would have meant a lot. Having seen whole joints of meat flung away in the garbage bins of the Forces who just then were having the easy end of the war (not the RAF, who earned every mouthful), not to speak of gallons of pink petrol forbidden to civilians abandoned in country hedgerows, I felt very bitter. The ordinary Londoner was not getting a square deal. (p. 7)

A witty, independent and talented writer, Marguerite Steen was not always praised by the critics—*The Sun is My Undoing* was deemed 'vigorous but tinselly' (Kunitz, 1955, np.)—but was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 1951. Steen's work is very understudied, featuring in next to no study of women's war writing, except for Jenny Hartley's *Millions Like Us* and Phyllis Lassner's *British Women's Writing of the Second World War*. Apart from her bestseller *The Sun is My Undoing*, none of her works, and there were dozens,

---

registration and calling up, in view of the fact that they are seeking refuge abroad?' (in Hansard, 1940).

<sup>116</sup> The Other Club is a British political dining society founded in 1911 by Winston Churchill. Members meet to dine fortnightly in the Pinafore Room at the Savoy Hotel during periods when Parliament is in session.

were ever reprinted.<sup>117</sup> Unlike Virginia Woolf or Elizabeth Bowen, Marguerite Steen started her career with 'no prospects, no plans and no money' (Steen, 1966, p. 52), yet she wrote until her very last days. Although she climbed up the social ladder throughout her life thanks to her literary successes, she always felt she belonged to the working classes.

The 1941 novel *Shelter*, written 'in a rush' (Steen, 1968, p. 23), is an interesting text both in terms of what it narrates and the publication problems it faced at first. The novel is divided in eight chapters, each ending with a 'West End newsreel', a small journalistic report giving 'quick, vivid and faithful impression of London under fire' (Bishop, 1942, p. 3). This gives the novel a literal 'bombed-out' structure, as if the book meant to illustrate the shrapnel through the several fragments of text. Marguerite Steen tells the story of Louise Mason, a lower-middle class young woman who lives with her husband in a tiny flat around Piccadilly Circus. Louise has to face a considerably stressful situation: apart from the threatening bombs falling every night, her husband is cheating on her, she has discovered she is pregnant and wishes she could have an abortion, and is desperate to find a job.

The young woman's situation in frightening blitzed London was considered unsuitable for English readers who might have been too scared and panicked by the couple's difficulties, and so was first published in America and Canada in 1941.<sup>118</sup> Steen recalls that even during

---

<sup>117</sup> Amazon has however recently released a Kindle edition of some of Steen's novels, amongst which *Shelter* and two even less-known works, *Little White King* and *The Reluctant Madonna*. The fact *Shelter* is available as an e-book shows there is a readership potentially interested in it, in all likelihood readers eager to get hold of stories written during the height of the Blitz in London. What is less evident is the reason behind the Kindle versions of the two other novels, one of which being the story about a cat's very short life and the other a romantic story set in England in the 1920s.

<sup>118</sup> Whilst there is a lack of information regarding the exact circumstances in which the book was banned, one can probably safely assume the novel was put on the prohibited list by the Ministry of Information's Book Censorship Bureau. By 1939, books were 'to be submitted voluntarily' (Holman, 2008, p. 93). Whilst the main objective of the Censorship Bureau was to avoid the communication of essential information to the enemy, it was also considered 'most undesirable that a book should take a certain line which might be used abroad to give a wrong impression of the British outlook' ('Censorship of Books', 1939, p. 601). What is interesting about this specific novel is that it was banned in Britain because it would have scared the population, but authorized for publication in the United States, where it would contribute to convincing the Americans to support the country in its struggle. This goes to show, as Sir Walter Monckton writes, that although 'many people think that "passed by the Censor" is a guarantee of truth, that is not so' (1940, np.). It should however be noted

the process of selling her text to the American publishing house Doubleday, 'there was a good deal of trouble [...] because it was a factual record of the raids on London' (1968, p. 23). Given it was far from reassuring and depicted recurring moments of despair and fear, *Shelter* was only authorised for publication in Britain a year later, in 1942, where it nevertheless received a good response from critics. The *TLS* reviewer wrote there was 'nothing more vivid [...] a place among the historic documents of 1940-1941' (1942, quoted in Hartley 1997, p. 21). Steen, who wrote the text under the pseudonym Jane Nicholson, was said at the time to have 'succeeded in conveying something of the hectic quality of marriage verging on crisis, lived against the Blitz' (ibid.), as she tells the story of a couple who does not 'take it' calmly and struggles to live up to the ideals of wartime romance.

Absent from most studies on Blitz literature, *Shelter* does appear in Phyllis Lassner's *British Women Writers of World War II* (1998) and very briefly in Hartley's *Millions Like Us* (1997). Both come to radically different conclusions on the novel, as Lassner sees it as establishing 'an atmosphere in which all assumptions about continuity and human connection are dashed' (1998, p. 156) and Hartley describes it as depicting a 'scene of fresh life, new friendship and above all community' (1997, p. 21). My interpretation of the novel combines both of these, as I believe *Shelter* is about the lack of community at national level, but about the strength of solidarity amongst the poorer population. I believe it a good example of a novel that gives a voice to the working classes in wartime Britain. *Shelter* not only literary shows ingenuity—Steen experiments with different narrative techniques, regularly switching between chapters written from the internal point view and fictional newspaper reports—but also conveys a thought-provoking social and political message.

---

that, unlike other departments overseeing the press or the radio, the Book Censorship Bureau generally passed most works. It was 'anxious not to prevent the publication of books, but rather to advise published how their books can be modified if need be' (Censorship of Books, 1939, p. 602). According to Valerie Holman, it 'came in for praise rather than criticism, and seems to have operated with good sense and efficiency' (2008, p. 93).

The prologue is certainly the most striking part of the novel, as it dares to denounce the appeasement policy of the British government in the late 1930s, first allowing the population to naively avoid reflecting on the prospect of a future war, and then increasing the British tendency to remain comfortably confident during the Phoney War, right up until the start of the Battle of Britain at the end of July 1940. The concept of an appeasement policy in international relations refers to the objective of avoiding conflict by making concessions to the enemy (generally dictatorial powers). The historian Paul Kennedy defines it more precisely as: 'the policy of settling international [...] quarrels by admitting and satisfying grievances through rational negotiation and compromise, thereby avoiding the resort to an armed conflict which would be expensive, bloody, and possibly very dangerous' (1987, p. 16). This strategy was used by European democracies in the 1930s that wanted to avoid a war with Germany and Italy, still haunted by the recent memory of the First World War.<sup>119</sup> The term appeasement is nowadays more generally applied to Conservative Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's policy towards the Third Reich between 1937 and 1939. The inaction of the Allies when facing the Abyssinia Crisis, the remilitarisation of the Rhineland and the Anschluss were an essential part of the appeasement strategy. The Munich agreement, signed in 1938 between the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Italy, symbolised the essence of appeasement, permitting Nazi Germany's annexation of portions of Czechoslovakia, for which a new territorial designation '*Sudetenland*' was coined. Chamberlain, once back in London, declared: 'My good friends, for the second time in our history, a British Prime Minister has returned from Germany bringing peace with honour. I believe it is peace for our time [...] Go home and get a nice quiet sleep' (1938, para. 4).<sup>120</sup> The policy was rooted in the legacy of the

---

<sup>119</sup> Referred to in France as '*la der des ders*', or '*dernière des dernières*', the 'very last of all wars'.

<sup>120</sup> On his side, Édouard Daladier, president of the *Conseil français*, bitter and lucid, admits on the plane back to France: '*Les cons! Ah les cons! S'ils savaient ce qui les attend*' (Imbeciles! If only they knew what was coming). This exclamation has been confirmed by his son Jean Daladier in Christine Rütte's 2008 documentary *Les dessous des accords de Munich (Die Wahrheit über das Münchner Abkommen)*.

First World War, that is to say a strong public and political desire to achieve ‘peace at any price’.<sup>121</sup> Widespread pacifism was not the ideal context in which to conduct rearmament, and many were the British politicians and upper-class socialites who admired Hitler and Mussolini, seeing them not as dangerous fascists but as strong, patriotic leaders.<sup>122</sup> As British journalist John Langdon-Davies states in 1936, ‘our Government is much more afraid of Communism than it is of Fascism’ (2007, p. 214). Since the 1930s, the term appeasement has become synonymous with cowardice and weakness, and the objective of avoiding war with Germany has been the object of a heated debate amongst academics, diplomats and politicians.

In the prologue to *Shelter*, Steen heavily critiques the (in the end ineffective) appeasement of Nazi Germany, as she describes the ‘sun-drugged’ Londoners who enjoy a very warm summer, deliberately ignoring the news of the Allies’ many defeats on the continent:

---

<sup>121</sup> It is worth noting that whilst there was a widespread desire for peace in 1938, ‘the gap between “appeasers” and “enthusiasts”’ was ‘very clear’ (Griffiths, 1980, p. 292). Most British citizens feared the start of another conflict, without however supporting Hitler’s politics. The Anschluss made this distinction even stronger. Tom Jones wrote in a letter on March 20, 1938:

Our people will not fight unless they are satisfied that fair treatment of the potential enemy has been tried; But they distinguish sharply between Hitler’s aims and his methods and the daily tale of persecution, repression and suicide arriving from Austria is having the effect of making this people determine that he shall never apply that régime here. (Jones, 1938, pp. 395-397)

<sup>122</sup> For example, Conservative MP C. T. Culverwell’s speech in the post-Munich debate:

I ask those who hate Hitler and distrust Germany [...] what has Hitler done up to now of which they can reasonably complain? [...] Do they suggest that Germany has not a great and good claim to absorb Austria into the Reich—Austria which wanted to join Germany in 1919? [...] Do they seriously suggest that the Sudeten Germans had no grievances? [...] I suggest that the methods to which Germany has been [...] compelled to resort, in order to obtain what I believe so far to be her just rights, have been forced upon her by the stupidity of the Allies. [...] It is to be presumed that a people so impoverished and humiliated as the German people were until the rise of Hitler must, at any rate, have some respect and admiration for the man who has lifted them from the depths to the position which they occupy to-day, who has put their people to work [...] rather on the lines which hon. Gentlemen opposite themselves advocate—and enabled them to enforce their will and gain recognition for their demands before the world. [...] I do not believe that Hitler is a pariah. Give a dog a bad name and it sticks to him. Let us try to forget his misdeeds of the past, and the methods which, no doubt, we all of us deplore, but which I suggest have been very largely forced upon him. (in Hansard, 1938)

It was nights when you lay with your window wide open behind the thick curtains and heard lovers saying goodnight to each other between moonlight and shadow [...]. Never, I swear, was London so lovely as it was that summer, her variations of light and colour so subtle, her open spaces so lyrically green, her skies so transparently, innocently blue. (Steen, 1942, p. 9)<sup>123</sup>

This might also have reminded the contemporary reader of the long summer of 1914 where, in particularly sweltering weather, the British population enjoyed hot days without suspecting what was awaiting them. The theme of the long summer is a recurring one in First World literature, as it underlines the shock that the war was to a European culture, which thought itself highly civilised.<sup>124</sup>

However, in the Second World War context of *Shelter*, the long summer takes place after the declaration of war, and describes a population who simply refuses to face its impending doom, a second time around. Many people fooled themselves into thinking that any idea of further expansion on behalf of the Germans would ‘conflict with the Nazi doctrine that a nation to be healthy must be homogenous—the doctrine which has inspired the extrusion of the Jews’, believing Hitler when he affirmed that he ‘ha[d] no desire to include large alien populations in the Reich’ (Phillips, 1938, np.). It is hard not to notice the irony in this nostalgic description of the summer of 1940, as the accumulation of adverbs in the final

---

<sup>123</sup> This passage reads as a reference to (or a parody of) Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) or her short story ‘Kew Gardens’ (1919), which both contain lyrical descriptions of the capital. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the main character ‘love[s] walking in London’, around the park in ‘the midst; the hum’, looking at the slow-swimming happy ducks’, an apparent moment of bliss which will then turn into bittersweet reminiscence about her youth (2005, p. 5). In ‘Kew Gardens’, the detailed description of the gardens, which resembles an impressionist painting, betrays subtle but clear references to war trauma.

<sup>124</sup> This is particularly true in French literature. Roger Martin du Gard describes the *Été 1914* in the seventh volume of the Thibault series, and, in Chapter IX of *The World of Yesterday: An Autobiography*, entitled ‘The First Hours of the War of 1914’, Stefan Zweig describes: ‘I had rarely experienced one more luxuriant, more beautiful and, I am tempted to say, more summery. Throughout the days and nights the heavens were a silky blue, the air soft yet not sultry, the meadows fragrant and warm, the forests dark and profuse in their tender green: even today, when I use the word summer, I think involuntarily of those radiant July days which I spent in Baden near Vienna’ (1964, p. 214).

sentence hint at the fact this Eden-like haven is really the backdrop of a daily routine blind to reality:

It was days when you took your basket and went shopping in Soho—an experience still novel enough to be delightful. 'This business is under British Proprietorship' plastered on the windows and sad Italian faces behind the counters; but you could still buy the warm Italian wines, the black and the green olives, the Parmesan [...] Soho was going quietly through its Gethsemane, but the fruit and vegetable barrows still yielded up their matchless aroma to the warm summer sun. At your little grocer's, ration books were still more of an amusement than a nuisance; patience, courtesy, and the will to oblige still the keynotes to the extra ten minutes or so you might have to spend in the shop. (Steen, 1942, pp. 9-10)

For this, of course, was the Briton's conception of war: the stiff upper lip, keeping the home fires burning—while our navy and Air arms kept the war where it properly belonged: on the other side of the Channel, across which the Germans were, very laughably and foolishly, talking of bombarding us! (p. 11)

The fact that Steen decides to start her war novel with this almost lyrical passage is key to understanding why it was first banned from publication in Britain. It is important to remember this text would have been read in Britain in 1942 at the earliest, that is to say after the terror of the Blitz. It is a very direct and critical description of the British behaviour at a time when the war is far from over, and Churchill is still relying heavily on the 'Keep Calm and Carry On' propaganda strategy, both to keep morale high at home and especially with the 'Great Game' between Britain, America and India.<sup>125</sup> Thus, the last sentence of this prologue, describing the start of war arriving as a shock to naive citizens, went against the public discourse of the time:

---

<sup>125</sup> The Prime Minister was keen to have the United States fight alongside Britain in Europe. Just after the attack on Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941, Winston Churchill started a widespread British propaganda campaign on American soil, making the dangerous decision of flying to the White House just a couple of weeks later. His objective as to gain 'anti-colonial America's support for its war effort

It was not until the end of that matchless summer that we woke up and realised that our time had come to claim our share of the blood and tears that a Man, of supreme realism and with utter confidence in our fundamental soundness, had promised us as his guerdon. (p. 12)

This prologue introduces the main tone of the novel, a sarcastic and ironic voice that reuses Churchill's (the 'Man') exact words to denounce the superficiality of the rhetoric of the People's War, which turns events like Dunkirk into 'glorious defeats' (p. 11). Steen questions the calm and collected attitude the British want to adopt at all times, as it implies being blind to danger. She depicts an irrational behaviour that will lead to the shock of the first bombs being even greater, just like the first sentence of the first chapter, written in much less lyrical prose, where images of the sunbathing afternoons and fruit-picking have brutally disappeared: 'The Heinkel came round for the fourth time, and bumbled overhead' (p. 13).

More importantly, the prologue followed by this first sentence provides a sense of a radical break in the long-established British social stability, especially in terms of class hierarchy. Just like the 'happy parks' and 'peaceful squares' (p. 12) are an illusion in the summer just before the Blitz, the morals and manners of the middle classes are too. The first pages of the text immediately reveal that the issue of class is central to the novel. Louise is an educated young woman who went to Oxford and has many intellectual friends—'pale, well-mannered, faintly superior young men who read Morgan and Auden and talked in controlled voices about the Left Wing' (p. 15). Yet, she also relates to her working-class husband Jos and his friends, who make her feel pleasantly 'lazy, relaxed, a little stupid and commonplace'

---

and at the same time retain its Empire' (Weigold, 2008, p. 1), particularly in India. On December 26, Churchill made his first historic address to Congress to win support for his concept of the war. Part of the strategy was to convey the British spirit of courage and resilience in the most convincing way:

All these tremendous facts have led the subjugated peoples of Europe to lift up their heads again in hope. They have put aside forever the shameful temptation of resigning themselves to the conqueror's will. Hope has returned to the hearts of scores of millions of men and women, and with that hope there burns the flame of anger against the brutal, corrupt invader. And still more fiercely burn the fires of hatred and contempt for the filthy Quislings whom he has suborned. (1941b)



(ibid.). Her parents are not firmly established in the middle classes, and Louise (not unlike Marguerite Steen herself) feels she is 'two people', 'running with the hare and hunting with the hounds' (ibid.).<sup>126</sup> The young woman marries Jos 'for sex, of course', but also 'in a sort of defiance that had to do with her own pride: because her family was inclined to despise him' (ibid.).

Yet, it seems Louise resents her choice once she and her husband start facing serious financial difficulties and she is left to spend her entire time counting her cigarettes and ounces of rice. Jos has joined the Auxiliary Fire Service and constantly reminds her that she needs to find a job too. Their economic struggle is affecting their relationship, which Louise finds increasingly frustrating, as she resents herself for perhaps making the least clever choice of a man:

We've been married seven years. It's not exciting to sleep together any longer; we'd done that for nearly a year before we got married anyhow. But it meant something. Only not ro-mance! Louise shaped the word silently, licking it with her tongue, grimacing as though it tasted nasty—and then looked to see if Jos was noticing. (p. 14)

To Louise, even sex in wartime is something that seems to be exclusively reserved to the wealthy classes, as only rich women 'have all the interesting things to make [them] frail, delicate creature[s] to be cherished, and rouse the protective frenzy in the strong man's breast!' (p. 19). Steen here directly contradicts Elizabeth Bowen who describes a London where 'everybody was in love' (1962, p. 95) in a war that was 'a prolonged passionate act' (1969a, p. 374). The sexual revolution that Elizabeth Bowen refers to in several of her works is to the author of *Shelter* a myth, or a truth that solely applies to people of a certain standing. The promiscuity that writer Quentin Crisp describes—'as soon as the bombs started to fall, the city became like a paved double bed. [...] Voices whispered suggestively to you as you

---

<sup>126</sup> Using this expression, Steen clearly highlights the essential opposition that exists between classes, as well as the impossibility to simply refuse to belong to any clear level of social stratification.

walked along; hands reached out if you stood still and in dimly lit trains people carried on as they had once behaved only in taxis' (quoted in Sinclair, 1993, p. 91)—remains a mystery for the character of Louise in *Shelter*, whose husband 'resented her touch' (Steen, 1942, p. 32). Louise, who cannot enjoy the same social outings as Camma, is confined to the boredom of married life, whilst she wants to experiment the same tender and exciting lovemaking she knows Camma and Jos are enjoying. 'The valuable people, the delicate, sensitive classes' have the time and space for pleasurable, enviable sex, as opposed to the people from 'the good old East End', 'breeding' 'in Anderson shelters, under staircases' (p. 18).

Louise's main rival Camma, Jos' mistress, is her enemy mainly because of her class. Louise has to endure her husband's cutting remarks about her not being able to secure a job, whilst Camma, who lunches 'at the Ritz most days' and goes 'home at night in long, swift cars with priority labels', did not 'have to lift a finger' and had managed to be 'bustled into the censorship'.<sup>127</sup> Camma 'had only to sit, and people showered attentions, posts and salaries on her' (p. 19), whilst Louise, who speaks four languages, is resigning herself to be a 'charwoman' (p. 30). Louise quickly comes to the conclusion that:

This war is a war for the leisured classes. If you had a private income, a husband in a position to support you, or a relative in 'high society', you could be fairly sure of getting a salaried post of some kind, probably with a uniform thrown in [...] If you needed to earn your living, you had a choice between something at thirty shillings or, in exceptional cases, two pounds ten a week, with fares, food, and personal upkeep to come out of it. It was difficult to be patriotic on those terms. (p. 20)

What Louise finds most unnerving about Camma is not that she is sleeping with her husband—in fact she even encourages Jos to go and reassure his terrified lover during violent air-raids—but the fact she is privileged and living the war in much more comfortable

---

<sup>127</sup> Camma probably carries out administrative work for the Ministry of Information.

surroundings. From December 1941, all women were conscripted into war work. However, there was a huge gap between educated women who could take up positions at the Ministry of Information or volunteer for unpaid work, and the ones who had to combine long hours in factories—where they got paid much less than men—with their busy family life and household chores. Mass Observation reports underlined this idea of preserved social stratification in wartime jobs, such as the attribution of different positions to different people in the auxiliary services: ‘the trade division was almost identical with the social division—working-class were cooks, sparking-plug testers, general duty hands, etc.—lower middle-class were orderlies, teleprinters, clerks, operators, plotters, etc.’ (MOA, 1941), whilst ‘the war may have offered adventure, travel and professional training’ to those ‘in higher ranks’, typically wealthier women (Calder and Sheridan, 1984, p. 176). Louise Mason in *Shelter* cannot, like Elizabeth Bowen did for example, volunteer to join the Ministry of Information and write reports on the Irish attitude towards war.<sup>128</sup> She has to find a paid position to be able to pay the bills.

As Lassner explains, ‘rather than war work having an equalising effect, its categories provided new ways of devaluing women’s labour’ (1998, p. 158), as ‘the thousand and one small, uncounted jobs’ are set apart from the ‘spectacular war work’ (Jacob, 1941, p. 214). The war only reinforced class consciousness, as ‘women already isolated by terror [...] are further divided by the social and economic codes implicated in expressions of traditional patriotism’ (Lassner, 1998, p. 57)

Thus, Louise describes every person she meets by what they wear, how they speak, and how much better off they might be. Class is the overriding concern in her world, and she is acutely conscious of how people might view her, ‘ashamed’ because she feels she ‘ought to

---

<sup>128</sup> In fact, Louise is denied a job as a secretary because she does not own a car. The person who interviews her seems to find extremely surprising Louise does not have her own vehicle: “‘You’ve got a car, of course’—lightly, matter-of-factly, as if all secretaries in Chesney Verne’s world had a car’ (Steen, 1942, p. 55).

be doing an active war job' (Steen, 1942, p. 120). Louise constantly tries to picture how better-off people would perceive someone like herself, who holds a lower-paid job:

A creature no better than a moron, a faulty bit of machinery, continually in need of adjustment, without initiative or intelligence, unscrupulous, unconscientious, anxious only to snatch her wages, and fritter them on trumpery. (p. 30)

*Shelter* constantly resonates with a specific anger directed at the upper classes on the one hand, and at the government on the other hand for promoting a message that distorts the reality of the class system during the war, as 'masses of [women's] potential energy' are 'wasting in shelters, because there was lacking the guiding power to direct it into useful channels' (p. 120).

The Newsreel sections that regularly interrupt the narrative—parodies of Mass-Observation reports: short, incisive, 'cheery' even when delivering 'chilling pieces of war news' (Hartley, 1997, p. 21)—give detailed descriptions of terrifying public, underground shelters, highlighting both the horrific living conditions of the poor and the striking absence of the rich:

Shelters, they call'em; but mortuaries is a better name, to my way o' thinking. The public distrust of the so-called blast, or surface shelter is increasing, and dusk after dusk finds the procession of humble people trekking with their beds and baggage towards the Tubes of the West End. Children already begin to show signs of unhealthy life—little boys in particular; the girls seem to stand up to it, but the boys on the whole are tallow-pale with dark circles under their eyes. There is not a child belonging to the upper classes to be seen in the East End. (pp. 136-137)

In contrast, in another report, the reader is invited to observe couples dining in fancy restaurants where a French woman says: '*On dirait que ces gens-là ne savent pas que la*

*guerre existe!*' (p. 40),<sup>129</sup> as people seem completely oblivious to others outside, exhausted by factory work or struggling to live off rationed food. This is evidently not the kind of information that would have figured in an actual news report at the time, and the author's sarcastic Newsreel make a point of never minimising, sugar-coating or 'heroising' the severe consequences of the war on civilians. In fact, Steen's descriptions were partly censored. Pages 185, 213, 218 of the American edition just feature the message '*Not passed by Censor*' on a blank background,<sup>130</sup> where the authorities judged her reality too harsh to read and 'too strong meat for English readers' (from the promotional blurb from the American-edition dust jacket' (quoted in Anon. Reviewer, 2017a, np.). It seems there is no uncensored version of the text, but the passages of the Newsreel which are available are probably a good indication of the tone and content of the ones that were deleted:

The Under Secretary for Dominion Affairs and head of the Children's Overseas Reception Board states that parents or guardians of 24,130 children have had their application approved by the Board up to September 2—*the day after 320 children returned to a British port, having been torpedoed by an enemy.* (Steen, 1942, p. 75)

Steen portrays a wartime society which is more class-conscious than ever, debunking Churchill's myth of overwhelming solidarity between the rich and the poor. *Shelter* juxtaposes very moving descriptions of nights spent underground and witnessing the death of young children on the one hand, and the lack of empathy and bravery of the upper-classes on the

---

<sup>129</sup> The fact that a French woman says this may be another ironical nod from the author. Although *Shelter* was published in 1941 when the war was not yet over and it was difficult to look at the events with any perspective, France had at that point already capitulated, and it seems incongruous the woman that the British would be so light-hearted:

in spite of the fact that [their] allies the French had let the Germans through at Sedan on May 14; that [their] allies the Belgians had betrayed [them] through their king on May 28; [...] and that on June 4 had taken place the most glorious defeat [...] Dunkirk. (Steen, 1942, p. 11)

<sup>130</sup> This analysis is based on the 1942 American edition. The British edition features the same 'not passed by censor' mentions in the same places.

other. On the same page, she gives a detailed account of what a shelter was like and then of her wealthy friend's reaction to it:<sup>131</sup>

There were about fifty packed like sardines in a room built to accommodate twenty. Side by side, on the floor, touching their neighbours. I'll know what claustrophobia's like myself in a minute. There were four latrines, and all through the rest of the night firemen and rescue men and wardens came in, stepping across the people on the floor, to use them. The stench, at the end of a couple of hours, was deadly. Casualties were carried into the passage outside. Some people fainted. The clothes of the helpers were plastered, as if they had been rolling in mud, and their faces were black as coalheaver's. (p. 232)

Just as they got near the door, Camma caught Louise's hand.

'I can't go in there!'

'Come along! Of course you can!'

'I can't. I shall suffocate?! I can't be shut up with hundreds of people.'

Louise set her teeth and tightened her grip. (p. 230)

Camma arrives in the shelter, after needing much convincing, looking like a '*poule de luxe*', 'ready to be amused' by the poor (p. 222). Louise is embarrassed by her friend who acts like a princess visiting the peasants of her kingdom, expecting them to entertain her. Yet, the peasants themselves are sure to retain their dignity, helping out the 'damn woman' when she is in one of her mad fits, unable to control her fear, even though she is a 'nuisance' (p. 231).

Whilst she depicts the strong class boundaries during the Blitz, the author seems to want to insist on a particular sense of community within the working class itself. When she starts working, she finds a new sense of belonging and companionship, especially amongst the other

---

<sup>131</sup> Wealthier Londoners often sought shelter in luxury hotels:

The best place to be in a raid—if one could afford it—was one of the large, steel-framed hotels. For the well-off, the Dorchester became the focal point of London after dark. The Turkish baths had been converted into a luxurious air-raid shelter, while dancing and dining went on throughout the Blitz in the downstairs grill-room. (Hewison, 1988, p. 34).

women in the same position as her—'women were, in fact, showing themselves to an extraordinary degree independent of men and their opinions. It was as if they were saying, "This is going to be our war, and we're showing you we're ready"' (p. 23). Similarly, in the shelter, Louise is surprised by the warmth that arises from terrified people, and how more reassured she feels being underground with strangers than alone in her tiny flat:

It only struck her afterwards how sensible most of them had been, kind, too, and attentive to the less sensible, knowing all the time that there was not more than a few inches of brickwork and reinforced concrete, perhaps, between them and something that most of them failed to imagine, except in terms of general horror. (p. 228)

Louise manages to transform her anger at 'our damned race of snobs and intellectuals' into admiration for 'the real people', 'these people [...] worth fighting for' (p. 176). It is in the name of these people and in the name of the new found sense of belonging amidst the terror that, after her husband is killed by the enemy, she decides to have their baby and even befriends his rich mistress. The ending offers a glimmer of hope in an unexpected reconciliation pattern to the complicated dynamics of a love triangle between an impoverished lower-middle-class woman, an AFS worker and a well-off lady. What enables this reconciliation is Louise's 'education' amongst the people of the shelter, her recognition of the moral superiority of values of solidarity and unity. It is with these in mind that she decides to befriend her late husband's snobbish lover who represents everything she is not. The end of the novel resembles a moralistic fable, particularly because the last page features Churchill's most famous speech, the one he gave after the Dunkirk defeat in 1940. Marguerite Steen chooses to include in capital letters the following extract:

WE SHALL NOT FLAG OR FAIL, WE SHALL GO ON TO THE END, WE SHALL FIGHT ON THE SEAS AND OCEANS, WE SHALL FIGHT WITH GROWING CONFIDENCE AND GROWING STRENGTH IN THE AIR. WE

SHALL DEFEND OUR ISLAND WHATEVER THE COST MAY BE. WE SHALL NEVER SURRENDER. (p. 242)

One might think this is a contradictory message, giving into the wider rhetoric of the People's War after a fierce description of class inequality, but I would argue that Steen is taking ownership of Churchill's use of the pronoun 'we' in the name of the lower classes. The 'we' here is not an all-inclusive, collective, classless 'we', it is the 'we' of the poorer classes, more specifically the 'we' of lower-class women. There is no sign of solidarity transcending social class boundaries in Steen's novel, and not one instance of inter-class mingling, apart from the circumstances that force Louise and Camma to meet. In *Shelter*, London 'taking it' is solely a result of the poorer people's resilience and acceptance.

The book ends on a return to calm and stability, as a woman who was cheated on and looked down on by so many gives birth to her 'own precious baby' (p. 241). Going from periods of despair and anger to one of newly-found peace and hope, Louise embodies the courage of the lesser-off compared to Camma who remains a frightened, vulnerable character. The title of the novel seems to not only refer to the act of taking cover from the bombs, but also to taking cover from the struggle of class inequalities and overcoming feelings of anger and unfairness; the speech's 'we' is really that of the proletarian Londoners.

In light of this, I conclude that *Shelter* is a good counter-example of Angus Calder's idea according to which Blitz writers 'could not step outside conventional discourses', and Hartley's statement on class no longer being an overriding concern for women war writers. *Shelter* is set in city governed by the concept of class, as Louise's life is tainted by her class-consciousness in every aspect, be it at work, in her friendships and even with her husband. Louise manages to overcome her resentment of the upper classes, but the socio-political situation does not change and will forever remain the same. Her newborn baby is a metaphor



for a personal recognition of who she is, a young woman forced to face the reality of financial struggle in wartime, rather than a symbol of a wider, more universal coming together of the rich and the poor in London. Using a simple storyline and very few characters, the novel shows creative experimentation with narration and thus is highly valuable both in terms of literary technique as well as regarding its depiction of social class division in London.

B) London Pride (1941), Phyllis Bottome

Phyllis Bottome is one of the lesser-known yet probably one of the most significant female writers of the Second World War in Britain. Born in 1882 in Kent to a free-spirited American father and a more conservative English mother, Phyllis grew up constantly moving between America and London and eventually spent her whole adult life travelling and working throughout Europe. A passionate writer as well as a keen student of individual psychologist Alfred Adler,<sup>132</sup> Bottome had a unique personality and made it a point until she died not to follow the conventional paths a Victorian education had imposed on her in her childhood and teenage years.

Unlike most writers who now fit under the umbrella term 'middlebrow', Phyllis Bottome was a working writer and 'did not have a private income that might have allowed her to write a handful of perfect novels' (Hirsch, 1988, p. xx). The Bottomes were middle-class, but 'there was no financial cushion' (Moore, 2010, para. 4), and Phyllis' husband Ernan went through periods of earning next to nothing. This led her to be, on the one hand, an extremely

---

<sup>132</sup> Individual psychology is a psychological method founded by Alfred Adler, involving a holistic approach to the study of character:

The aim of individual psychology is to understand the individual style of life as a part of the whole. The subject involves the understanding of the whole, the life of mankind and the social relation with the other sex. Because everybody is perceiving and judging his own way and answer, and strives to complete and to accomplish his own totality while driven by the lasting gaping blanks between solutions and the full completion of life, a feeling of inferiority is always living and stimulated. [...] Manifestations of cruelty, evading decisions, even criminal actions, are the result of a desire to attain the superiority feeling. To increase the social feeling and sense of responsibility of these individuals affected by the inferiority feeling, modern psychology and education must treat the causes and not the consequences. (Adler, 1927, p. 116)

prolific writer: in her sixty-year career she wrote thirty-three novels (some translated into up to nine languages), dozens of short stories, essays, biographies and memoirs. On the other hand, the lack of financial stability also shaped her into a woman much more grounded and aware of social disparities of her time than her better-off peers.

Alerted to social and political circumstances when she was very young, as she worked with the poor in her father's parishes, she went on to join the war effort in 1914. While her fiancé was fighting in France, Phyllis worked ten hours a day as a nurse at Hammersmith Town Hall looking after Belgian refugees, and later on assisted John Buchan at the Department of Information. World War I confirmed her lifetime intentions to dedicate her work to supporting those in need. In Vienna, in 1920, where her husband Ernán Forbes Dennis was a diplomat, she helped to procure food and medical supplies for the starving city. At the end of the war, Bottome was aware of the fact the political outcomes did not presage a good future:

Our happiness was not only based upon our confidence in each other but upon a world we believed had been set free for democracy, a world that would be for ever, by the price our generation had paid for it, at peace. What, however, we found was a chaotic, disrupted, frustrated world, each country competing wildly for what was left of its self-rifled treasures Germany and Austria, *'les deux cadavres de l'Europe'* as a French friend called them, surrounded by a ring of suspicious and irritable victors, unable to decide how to dispose of the bodies. Not much later on, Hitler made the decision for them. (quoted in Hirsch, 1988, pp. 112-113)

During her stay in Vienna, the writer published *Old Wine* (1925) in which she for the first time wrote about rising antisemitism in Europe. She described how, in Vienna, 'fallen aristocrat Count Otto Wolkenheim explain[ed] that there [were] a few hundred Jews in Wien who [would] regulate our newfound freedom and starvation to fill their pockets' (Bottome,

1998, p. 9). Her fear and anger at the growing popularity of Fascism, combined with her knowledge of psychology, led her and her husband to found a school in Kitzbühel, Austria, in 1924. Focusing heavily on teaching languages, the school aimed to cure the ills of young Europeans through psychology and educational theory.<sup>133</sup>

In 1937, Bottome wrote *The Mortal Storm*, her best-known work, later turned into a movie starring James Stewart, the novel predicted the horrific consequences of Fascism. It was first published in America in 1940, just as Hitler's troops entered Paris, and was 'arguably influential in persuading the US to abandon its isolationist stance' (Moore, 2010, para. 2) Having returned to England, Phyllis Bottome was shocked and appalled at the appeasement policy:

I had come from a Europe that was distraught and obsessed between Hitler<sup>134</sup> and Mussolini with Stalin waiting in the wings. The fate of six million Jews was in the balance. I simply could not believe in the easy nonchalance of London. When I met Conservatives, they stared at me in frank bewilderment. 'Oh, but we like Hitler!' they said. (1962, p. 258)

The writer saw Chamberlain's strategy as political immaturity and could not bear the dark irony of history repeating itself. She wrote in *Time and Tide* that 'we have strapped upon our backs today adolescent statesmen, the fathers and sons of those we lost in the War—the generation that might have saved us from the cowardice and irresponsibility that seems to be our doom' (Bottome, 1939, August 19, p. 1116). In 1938, Phyllis and her husband made the

---

<sup>133</sup> One of their most famous pupils was Ian Fleming, author of the James Bond novels. In 1960, Fleming wrote to Bottome: 'my life with you both is one of my most cherished memories, and heaven knows where I should be today without Ernan' (Pearson, 1966, np.).

<sup>134</sup> Phyllis Bottome had seen Hitler himself on a number of occasions when she used to live in Munich. She describes him as they both regularly go to the same café:

There were only a few yards between us and Hitler—that gloomy solitary whose dreams were full of hate [...] Sometimes a brownshirt pushed through the wing door of the Café Heck and stood by Hitler's table for a minute to ask a question or to give him a message. Hitler would bark out an order or simply shake his head unsmilingly. (1962, p. 193)

decision to move to America, believing that England 'was going Nazi in its sleep' under the government of Chamberlain (quoted in Pogorelskin, 2010, p. 39). From the United States, she wrote the open letter 'I accuse', in direct reference to Zola's 1894 open letter to the *Président de la République*:

I accuse Lord Halifax of invincible ignorance, for stating in the House of Lords that he sees no reason to believe in the sinister intentions of the German government while Spanish towns are being bombed to pieces by German airmen, whose fellow countrymen sit on the non-Intervention Committee.

I accuse the Prime Minister of being publicly cited in a German newspaper as 'Germany's man' and of having deserved this insult.

I accuse the 'Cliveden set' of money-conditioned thinking, in that they are deliberately using their great wealth and the power of the press which they help to control, to hand England over to the dictators I order to save their skins and their pockets. (quoted in Hirsch, 1988, p. 237)

What probably best characterises Phyllis Bottome, as underlined in the biography *The Constant Liberal: The Life and Work of Phyllis Bottome* by Pam Hirsch, is her strong sense of political and moral duty, constantly 'speaking and writing on behalf of the powerless' (Hirsch, 1988, p. xx). Through fiction, Bottome saw a world of opportunity for her to express a message of support and defence of, as the BBC Radio News commented after her death, 'the underprivileged and the misunderstood' (quoted in Talbot de Malahide, 1963). Privileging ethics over aesthetics even in her work as a writer, Phyllis Bottome might not have become part of the 'canon' yet her texts give us a detailed insight into the society she describes:

[I]t is not for sustained passages of fine writing that her work is remarkable. Fine writing, however, was for her only a secondary matter, a by-product passionately interested in human relationships and the perplexities and predicaments of her life, her

object was to record her thoughts as they came teeming from her brain, and what she sacrificed in fastidious prose she made up for by spontaneity, freshness, flashes of rare insight and dazzling phrases. And running throughout were wit, humour, pity and indignation: pity for the unfortunate and indignation at any form of inhumanity! (obituary by Frank Halliday, 1963, quoted in Hirsch, 1988, np.)

Phyllis Bottome was particularly moved by 'the plight of Jews in the thirties or the dilemma of those affected by outdated imperialism and by prejudice against people of colour' (Hirsch, 1988, pp. xx-xxi). As Hirsch writes, 'Phyllis' empathy is what marks her writing, a capacity to identify with the Other' (p. xxi).

Phyllis Bottome's non-intellectual tastes and productions make her a good example of what Virginia Woolf despises the most about the 'middlebrow',<sup>135</sup> as she was just as 'interested in the life of a peasant farmer in Austria, and the songs he sang, as she was, for example is Ezra Pound's poetry' (p. xx).<sup>136</sup> Still, although mostly unknown today and largely understudied, Bottome's work were at the time of their publication instant bestsellers, particularly *The Mortal Storm* and *Old Wine*. Vera Brittain explains Bottome's success by writing that 'more significant, perhaps, than common taste is common experience; the experience of a generation, a class, a people, a nation' (1979, pp. 96-97).

Until her death, Bottome continued to protest against, what she called 'the silliest and most arrogant of all human delusions' (1995, p. 195): racial discrimination. She was particularly concerned by the antisemitism that she was convinced still existed in Britain.

---

<sup>135</sup> See Woolf's essay 'Middlebrow' *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* (1942), also discussed in the introduction of this thesis.

<sup>136</sup> Phyllis Bottome and her husband were lifelong friends of Ezra Pound. When he was charged with 'accepting employment from the Kingdom of Italy in the capacity of a radio propagandist [...] to persuade citizens and residents of the United States to decline to support the United States in the conduct of war' (Carpenter, 1988, p. 700), she wrote to many people in the hope they would sign a letter she had drafted:

We the undersigned ask in the name of English Literature for special clemency to be shown to Ezra Pound, now under sentence of death as a war traitor. [...] We believe that an act of clemency granted to Ezra Pound by the United States, at this time, would signalise the victory of intellectual freedom throughout the civilised world. (Bottome, 1945, np.)

Bottome believed 'that laws should be passed creating penalties for antisemitism and indeed any kind of racism' (Hirsch, 1988, p. 337). She insisted that teachers:

need not show pictures of Belsen Camp or acts of passion or hatred. But they could explain that we can discourage people—as the Germans were discouraged after their first beating in the 1914-18 war—into taking readily to tyrants who promise them greater privileges than other still weaker people whom they have in their midst and can persecute at will. This desire to punish scapegoats lies deeper even than the antisemitism prejudice, and I think it must be tackled psychologically if at all. (Bottome, 1961, np.)

Phyllis Bottome died on August 22, 1963, not supposing that much of what she had written had had much 'lasting significance', but glad that *The Mortal Storm* helped the Jews in the 1930s<sup>137</sup> and that *Under the Skin* had been 'useful in removing racial prejudice' (Bottome, 1960, np.).

The novel I will focus on here, *London Pride*, was first published in November 1941, a few months after the end of the Blitz. Extremely popular, it was reprinted six times before the end of the war. The novel narrates the story of Ben, a seven-year old child in the London docks with his parents and three siblings. His mother, the charwoman Mrs. Barton,<sup>138</sup> is torn between sending her children away to the countryside as part of the evacuation plan, and keeping them with her at home where she thinks they belong. Ben's older twin brothers are sent to Cornwall, whereas it is decided he will stay in London alongside his baby sister. The

---

<sup>137</sup> Phyllis Bottome received this letter from a young teenager in 1947:

I myself am a Jewish refugee girl from Munich. I came to England in 1939. After two years of bitter separation from all that was dear to me I suddenly came across your book. And it was a true, deep joy and revelation to me. There I found alive once more before my mental eye all the things I had loved, but which had been silent for two years. [...] I have never, never met an English person who could so completely sympathise with the German psychological make-up as you have done in this book. It is not an outside, making observations; it is experienced and felt as if in the German heart itself. (Nathan, 1947, np.)

<sup>138</sup> The name might recall the Barton family in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848), which tells of the difficulties faced by the Victorian working classes. It is subtitled 'A Tale of Manchester Life'.

young boy is left to his own devices as his family keeps going back and forth between their house and the public shelter down the road. The book switches from dark comedy to moral fable as the little boy, accompanied by his friend Emily, shows an extraordinary sense of courage when facing the danger surrounding them.

Neglected by critics who, like Robert Calder,<sup>139</sup> generally dismiss it as a ‘patronising’ and ‘sentimental’ piece of propaganda (2004, p. 195), the novel is missing from most studies of Second World War women’s writing. Jenny Hartley is one of the very few critics who features it in her work. In *Millions Like Us*, Hartley writes *London Pride* illustrates Phyllis Bottome’s moral dilemma, particularly her ‘uncertainty’ with regards to how to describe the Blitz:

the high infant fatality rate is a source of moral dilemma [...]: should she join in the praise of the resourceful cockneys for “taking it”, when children’s deaths could be avoided through the official policy of evacuation? (by the time the Blitz started in September 1940, many London children had returned from the country). (Hartley, 1997, p. 26)

Hartley focuses on Mrs. Barton—‘as a charwoman, hers must have been one of the few working-class women’s voices heard by middle-class writers at the time’ (p. 27)—a mother who has to choose which children to send away and which to keep at home with her.<sup>140</sup> The critic concludes that Mrs. Barton ‘comes to recognise that in the interests of the larger

---

<sup>139</sup> See Robert Calder’s cutting review of the book in *Beware the British Serpent: The Role of Writers in British Propaganda in the United States, 1939-1945*.

<sup>140</sup> Mothers having to choose which of their children they should save is a recurring issue in narratives of the Second World War. See *Sophie’s Choice* (1979) by William Styron for example, inspired by a passage from Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951):

Totalitarian terror achieved its most terrible triumph when it succeeded in cutting the moral person off from the individualist escape and in making the decisions of conscience absolutely questionable and equivocal. [...] Who could solve the moral dilemma of the Greek mother, who was allowed by the Nazis to choose which of her three children should be killed? (Arendt, 1968, p. 452)

(The point here is not to compare the British government to the Nazi regime, but to highlight how mothers being forced to make a choice is a symbol of the attacks on the ‘moral person’ (ibid.) that stem from total war.)

community, her smaller, domestic community must be sacrificed', leading the book to ultimately convey a 'mythic mood' (ibid.). My analysis of the novel will depart from the same idea, that is to say the notion of ambiguity in the text, but will argue that Bottome's text is above all a fierce denunciation of the ineffective political and social measures put into place to support the poorer classes during the Battle of Britain and then the Blitz.

It is undeniable that, at first glance, *London Pride* is a short book that narrates the very moving story of a brave child promised to an almost certain death who miraculously survives thanks to his faith in God and in his country; a storyline which seemingly perfectly fits in with the heroic public stories of Londoners 'taking it'. The narrative constantly highlights the resilience of the working classes, as a perfect example of what Hartley would call 'literature of commitment and citizenship' (1997, p. 15), in which patriotic women name their children after 'Big Ben' whilst giving birth listening to the beautiful 'music' of the clock's strokes (Bottome, 1943, p. 10).

Yet, the possible ambiguity of the novel first resides in its title. The definition of the term 'pride' in the *Oxford English Dictionary* lists two main meanings of the word, the first one being 'a feeling of deep pleasure or satisfaction derived from one's achievements, the achievements of one's close associate, or from qualities or possessions that are widely admired' (OED, 2010, 'pride'). This, added to the fact that the book was published shortly after the release of Noël Coward's song by the same name,<sup>141</sup> leads one to believe *London Pride* is first and foremost a tribute to the courage of the Londoners, a hymn of love to the capital which 'honours the spirit of working-class people in London' (Hirsch, 1988, p. 271).

---

<sup>141</sup> 'London Pride' is a patriotic song intended to raise the spirits of the civilians in the capital.<sup>141</sup> According to Coward's account, the idea for the song came to him as he was sitting on a platform in Paddington station, watching Londoners carrying on their normal daily routine, unfazed by the threats of the bombs (Morley, 2005, p. 78). The opening lines, repeated three times within the song, are:

London Pride has been handed down to us,  
London Pride is a flower that's free.  
London Pride means our own dear town to us,  
And our pride it forever will be.

The song was also circulated after the July 2005 bombings in London (Elms, 2005, para. 8).



On the other hand, 'pride' is also defined as 'the quality of having an excessively high opinion of oneself or one's importance (OED, 2010, 'pride'). Thus, one could also read it as an ironical expression referring to the excessive British pride at the core of Churchill's speeches, which constantly highlight the beautiful unity of the people in wartime. More specifically, *London Pride* is potentially a fierce critique of the illegitimate glorification of war and a strong denunciation of social class inequalities in England. Therefore, the title's 'pride' can be interpreted in two different ways, a paradox that I believe is key to the text's message. The second interpretation of Bottome's text seems more plausible as she also chose to introduce her text with two stanzas from a poem by William Blake, 'And Did Those Feet in Ancient Times':

Bring me my Bow of burning gold;  
Bring me my Arrows of desire:  
Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold!  
Bring me my Chariot of fire!

I will not cease from Mental Fight,  
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand:  
Till we have built Jerusalem,  
In England's green & pleasant Land. (in Bottome 1943, p. 7)

This is a short poem from the preface to his epic *Milton a Poem*, printed around 1808. It is best known today as the anthem *Jerusalem*, with music written by Sir Hubert Parry in 1916.<sup>142</sup>

The use of this poem by Bottome is particularly interesting because of the ambiguity linked to

---

<sup>142</sup> Whilst England (unlike Britain) does not have an official national anthem, many people would say this is it. When played during the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games in London in 2012, Danny Boyle explained the song created 'the opportunity to include industrial workers in the Olympic opening ceremony'. For David Cameron, it was an 'expression of distinctively English nationhood' (Cox, 2012, para. 1). The song also generally concludes the yearly BBC orchestral classical music concert 'Last Night of the Proms'.

it. The text is said to refer to an imagined short visit by Jesus to the English town of Glastonbury, creating a brief heaven in the country;<sup>143</sup> before the downfall of humanity in the pits of the 'dark Satanic Mills', most probably meaning the consequences of the Industrial Revolution.<sup>144</sup> Blake's poem was little known until long after it was written (Carroll, 2011, p. 236), before being included in a patriotic anthology of verse published in 1916 (*The Spirit of Man*, edited by the Robert Bridges), at a time when morale had begun to decline due to the high number of deaths in the Great War. The poem seemed to portray what Britain needed to fight for, and was set to music by Sir Hubert Parry, 'to brace the spirit of the nation that the people of Great Britain, knowing that they are fighting for the best interests of humanity, may refuse any temptation, however insidious, to conclude a premature peace, and may accept with cheerfulness all the sacrifices necessary to bring the war to a satisfactory conclusion' (Wiltshire, 2000, para. 1). Soldiers were meant to be uplifted by verses that described England as a sacred land, which needs to be defended with 'Bow', 'Arrow' and 'Spear' against the enemy who wanted to spoil the holy soil.<sup>145</sup> However, critics of the verse have said that the fact it refers to a foreign city and its religious references make it unsuitable. More importantly, some also argue that the four questions Blake poses can only necessarily be answered by a blatant 'no':

And did those feet in ancient time

Walk upon England mountains green:

---

<sup>143</sup> This is linked to a passage from the *Book of Revelations* that describes a Second Coming in which Jesus establishes a New Jerusalem. Many legends say he came to England with his uncle Joseph of Arimathea sometime between the ages of twelve and thirty (the 'lost years'). However, some critics also suggest that William Blake could not have known these legends since 'folklorists have found no trace of the stories before about 1890, which is almost a hundred years after Blake wrote the poem' (Foley, 2012, para. 9).

<sup>144</sup> More generally, 'dark Satanic mills' could also refer to life on Earth as we know it, the 'Fallen' civilisation not yet redeemed by God.

<sup>145</sup> See more information on the use of 'pastoral' references in wartime in Chapter I, section A on Susan Ertz's *Anger in the Sky* (1942).

And was the holy Lamb of God,  
On England's pleasant pastures seen!

And did the Countenance Divine,  
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?

And was Jerusalem builded here,  
Among these dark Satanic Mills?

Christ never set foot in England, the Lamb of God did not feed on the English grass, and there is no Holy Spirit to be spotted anywhere in the country, and there is most certainly no sense of Jerusalem in the harsh living conditions of the cotton mills. The poem can therefore be understood as being as far removed from patriotism as possible, Kate Maltby even claiming it to be a 'parody of Napoleonic Era nationalism' (2016, para. 2).<sup>146</sup> The ambiguity and the two possible readings of both the title and the poem introducing *London Pride* reflect the paradox at the heart of the People's War rhetoric itself.<sup>147</sup>

Bottome's story can be interpreted as a sarcastic one at a time when the message of 'equality of sacrifice'—the idea that rich and poor alike would need to pull together, with no class distinctions—was constantly delivered by the media. Precisely debunking this idea, the writer dedicates her novel to 'The Children of Bermondsey and Bethnal Green' only (Bottome,

---

<sup>146</sup> It is important to bear in mind that Blake was an outspoken supporter of the French Revolution, and this poem seems to call for radical change.

<sup>147</sup> In *Miss Ranskill Comes Home* (1946) by Barbara Bower, the main character is irritated at the use of Parry's 'Jerusalem' by overly patriotic women:

One of the Institute members was hammering our Parry's 'Jerusalem' on a piano that needed tuning: the others were singing Blake's miraculous words and showing no hint of zest or humour [...]. 'Bring me my chariot of fire,' shouted Miss Bridge, whose nervousness on a bicycle was a joy to all the village boys. [...] the last note quivered, the last chord was thumped but no rain of arrows descended on little Miss King. [...] Miss Staples showed no sign of minding that her shout for a fiery chariot had not been answered. (Todd, 2005, pp. 263-264)

See full analysis of the novel in Chapter I, section B.

1943, p. 7) and the first part of the text heavily focuses on the problems arising from the government's 1939 considerably flawed evacuation plan, particularly in terms of what it involved for the poorer citizens.

The British House of Commons first started to devise evacuations plans in 1938, and Operation Pied Piper was launched on September 1, 1939, the day Germany invaded Poland. Three million people were transported from cities in danger of being bombed to presumably safer areas in the countryside, as Arthur Balfour had previously warned against 'unremitting bombardment of a kind that no other city has ever had to endure' (PRO, AIR 9/69, 1922). Most of these people were schoolchildren; the figures given by Titmuss are '827,000 unaccompanied children, 540,000 mothers with young children, 7,000 disabled citizens and 115,000 teachers and carers' (1950, p. 103). Two big evacuation waves also followed: one in 1940, after the invasion of Denmark and Norway by the Nazis, and one after France's capitulation. Although the evacuees were not all poor, the vast majority were. The zones to be evacuated were mostly situated around ports or in the industrial areas of large cities, where children lived in slums or run-down houses in neighbourhoods where poverty only got worse after the crisis in the 1930s. On the other hand, the hosting families who received these children, if they were not always much richer than the evacuees, benefited from a better lifestyle. Therefore the refugees were almost always seen as 'poor', and the countryside citizens 'rich'. The evacuation problem was hence less one of logistic failure (lack of available housing) than one of difficult cohabitation of the two communities. The shock between them was violent, and the actor Michael Caine<sup>148</sup> recalls that it was as if 'they were trying to evacuate black kids into Alabama white families' (quoted in Wicks, 2013, p. 178). The city children were accused of being dirty, rude and uncivilised; many of them had lice, and *hair raids* were much more frequent than *air raids* in the towns of the South West.

---

<sup>148</sup> Michael Caine was born in St. Olave's Hospital, Bermondsey, and was one of the children Bottome's novel is dedicated to.

The evacuations opened the eyes of many to the dire poverty of some urban communities. The gap between social classes was shocking to some, and even angering to others. People were quick to blame both evacuated children and their mothers for the condition the children arrived in and their lack of manners, making the refugees' experience even more difficult. Since the 1980s, the myth that all child evacuees lived in a heavenly countryside house has slowly been deconstructed, as more and more incidents of child abuse surface:

The British were not always suffused with the warm feelings of national solidarity and goodwill towards each other that are supposed to have characterised the Dunkirk spirit. Snobbery, selfishness, and bloody-mindedness were not, alas, completely extinguished by the Nazi threat. [...]

John Matthews, who was sent with another eight-year-old boy to a large seaside mansion in Devon occupied by a rich widow and her servants. "She refused to come to the door, and the maid who answered, a sour woman dressed in a black-and-white uniform, made it clear that they wanted nothing to do with scruffy urchins from the East End," he said. "The result was that we were kept locked in our bedroom when not at school. We never got any cooked meals. When we complained we were hungry, we were told to consider ourselves lucky – there was a war on." Though his letters home were censored, Matthews managed to smuggle one out to his mother, appealing to her to rescue him. A few days later she turned up and took him away. (quoted in Chancellor, 2009, para.5)

Added to the difficult situation of child evacuees was the extreme pressure on working-class women, an issue that is highlighted throughout the book. From the first political reforms in favour of supporting children and mothers, the British state had always constructed its representation of women in society in terms of them being 'mothers'. During the war, women

were considered as responsible for their family's well-being. Thus, even if they had been requested to do so and had not necessarily volunteered for it, women in middle-class families hosting evacuees were seen as the ideal British mothers, extremely generous and brave. The hosting mother was the 'heroine' of this period; in the Fabian evacuation report, Lady Sanderson congratulates the foster mothers for their patience and their willingness to teach children 'clean and tidy habits' (quoted in Joad, undated, p. 226).

Meanwhile, public opinion of working-class mothers, suddenly thrown to the front of the stage, was at times very harsh. Either accused of being selfish when getting rid of their children in order to obtain a 'good' war job or charged with solely focusing on their own feelings when risking the lives of their children by keeping them at home, poorer women could not possibly live up to society's moral expectations. Tellingly, a conference organised by the Liverpool Council of Social Service in 1945 aimed to 'begin a concerted attack on the problem of the family whose standards of living and behaviour were so far below the minimum which could be tolerated in any civilised community as to make it a menace to society' (Women's Group on Public Welfare, 1943, p: xvi). Whilst conservative critics held the working-class mothers responsible for the miserable physical and mental state of child evacuees, the socialists however focused more on the evacuation plan itself, in particular the huge disparity between the financial help received by London mothers, far inferior to that received by rural mothers. The evacuations in the end were not a source of social harmony, but on the contrary arguably contributed to increasing feelings of inequality between rural and urban populations, poor and rich, supporters and reformers of women's traditional role.

In *London Pride*, Mrs. Barton, like other mothers ('disproportionately from the most impoverished families' (Rose, 2003, p. 56)) who were forced to send their children away, is told to part with her children and send them to a place that she has never heard of, only being

told the departure date of her sons one day in advance.<sup>149</sup> Her resentment at the social class disparities is obvious, especially in the way she reacts to the visit of a 'Lady Visitor' who 'smelt like a flower shop and looked like a large golden fruit upon a kitchen plate' (Bottome, 1943, p. 19). The 'Lady', presumably a social worker sent by the government, tries to convince her to send her children away and Mrs. Barton feels 'attacked' by her: 'who was she, to give advice or reproof to a mother, who would have died where she stood to have saved her children from such a risk; and her own heart from such a parting' (p. 21)? Mrs. Barton's main fear is that her children will view her in the way the Strange Lady looks at her, that her own offspring will act with the same disdain and judgment:

'Well—there was all that talk last September when the war began,' [...] 'alf our neighbours *did* send their children orf, but 'Itler never 'as bombed nothing—except down the river 'ere and there! An' when the children came back—which most of 'em in our street 'ave done by now—granted they looked better an' 'ealthier, but that's all worn off—they didn't get on so well in their own 'omes as they used to! Always turning up their noses at things they was satisfied wiv before! Wot I says is, 'let yer children go away onct—an' they comes back strangers!' (Bottome, 1943, p. 26)

Bottome highlights the hypocrisy of a two-tier society in which the most privileged hold the poorer 'morally responsible for their own plight' (Rose, 2003, p. 58). The Strange Lady tells Mrs. Barton about her own (hardly comparable) sacrifice, since she herself had to send her children to Canada: 'You've no idea what a comfort it *is* to know that your children are safe. I *do* know how hard it is to part with them because you see I've parted with my own' (Bottome, 1943, pp. 19-20). Mrs. Barton feels 'her maternity is being attacked' (p. 21) by another mother who is either unaware of, or purposefully refuses to see the differences in their

---

<sup>149</sup> James Roffey, the founder of the Evacuees Reunion Association, asks in 2009: 'If somebody said to any parent today, "We're going to evacuate your children; we can't tell you where they're going, we can't tell you who they'll be living with and we don't know when they'll be coming home again," how many people would say yes to that?'" (in Chancellor, 2009, para. 2)

situations. The Lady's scorn for Mrs. Barton, her children, her job and her house, is very obvious when she smiles 'as if she were swallowing something nasty and pretending it was nice'. The scene describes two women who become 'suddenly belligerent' (p. 21), one of them disgusted by the other who is in turn extremely resentful. Bottome highlights the fact the Lady is not genuinely concerned with the children's future, but is just complying with the 'moral obligation' of doing her job and offering mothers the possibility to send their children away. She doubts her own words when she explains Ben will 'love' the countryside: 'After all, was she so sure what this undersized, lean and dirty shoveling, with his intelligent eyes and mysterious habits, would be likely to love?' (p. 23). The writer subtly sheds light on the superficiality of people's sudden 'benevolence' in wartime. Similarly, when Mrs. Barton needs to take her children to the station where they will be put on a train to an unknown village, her colleague agrees to give her a day off work, literally believing herself to be a 'candidate for Paradise' (p. 40) because of her good action.

In *London Pride*, Bottome insists on the 'the social question' that the country was forced to face during the evacuation, which started reactions that depicted 'a Britain not of national unity, but rather in the image of two nations created nearly a hundred years previously by Benjamin Disraeli' (Rose, 2003, p. 58): the urban poor and the country people.<sup>150</sup> The divide between the two communities is made all the clearer thanks to certain

---

<sup>150</sup> The novel *Sybil, or The Two Nations* by Benjamin Disraeli was published in 1845, the same year as Friedrich Engels *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*. *Sybil* traces the plight of the working classes of England, in what Thomas Carlyle called the Condition of England question. The book is a *roman à thèse*, which stemmed from Disraeli's interest in the Chartist movement, a working-class political reformist movement that fought for universal male suffrage and other parliamentary reforms.

In the novel, Charles Egremont, the younger brother of Lord Marney, investigates the conditions of the lower classes in the disguise of a Mr Franklin. He visits a manufacturing town in the North, where he is confronted with the bitter reality of industrialisation. Egremont meets a working-class radical, Walter Gerard, who tells him about the division of England into two nations:

'Well, society may be in its infancy,' said Egremont, slightly smiling; 'but, say what you like, our Queen reigns over the greatest nation that ever existed.'

'Which nation?' asked the younger stranger, 'for she reigns over two.'  
The stranger paused; Egremont was silent, but looked inquiringly.



stylistic choices. Bottome writes the dialogues taking place in the Dockers' families in Cockney English, reusing typical speech patterns such as h-dropping or diphthong alterations of the London dialect:

Your Dad 'e 'its you 'cos you took them things we picked up—an' my Ma she 'its me 'cos I didn't get awiy wiv' it! An' if we 'ad got awiy wiv' it—wot say they wouldn't 'ave taken our pickin's? Search me they would'nt of! (Bottome, 1943, p. 103)

Critics such as Diana Forbes-Robertson suggest that Bottome ridicules the working class and makes the reader laugh at them rather with them, as if depicting a group of monkeys (1941, p. 5), because of the purposeful misspelling of words and constant chopping of sentences in the dialogues between the poorer characters. There is a long debate, going back to the eighteenth century,<sup>151</sup> as to whether imitating dialects to communicate authenticity, is in fact demonstrating that working-class speech is basically a mutilation of 'good language'. I would respond here that the writer indeed strives to reach a certain degree of realism in her story, and seeks to let the working classes speak for themselves. By likening the characters to 'monkeys', it is Forbes-Robertson herself who associates the Cockney accent with a group of animals, simply imitating their human superiors.

Giving a voice to the most destitute is also achieved through the depiction of their emotions and feelings, emotions that more often than not sharply contrast with those generally attributed to them in stories of East End heroes. A particularly good example of this idea is the scene in which Mrs. Barton parts with her twin boys. The narrator describes the scene of

---

'Yes,' resumed the younger stranger after a moment's interval. 'Two nations; between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws.'

'You speak of –' said Egremont, hesitatingly.

'THE RICH AND THE POOR.' (Disraeli, 1845, pp. 68-69)

<sup>151</sup> Particularly since John Walker's *A Critical Pronouncing Dictionary* (1791), who refers to his 'countrymen, the Cockney; who, as they are the model of pronunciation to the distant provinces, ought to be the more scrupulously correct' (1822, p. 12).

their departure very differently from, for example, the *Daily Mirror* coverage of the evacuations of September 1939. In Britain, one of the three divisions of the Ministry of Information was the Press and Censorship Bureau, responsible for every aspect of war news. The *Daily Mirror*'s editor would probably have received an official letter outlining how the subject of evacuation needed to be treated, and what journalists should avoid commenting on. This 'widely accepted' system of Defence Notices involved 'voluntary cooperation', 'but it was generally understood that gentlemen would comply with these D-notices, as they represented the (upper-class) national interest' (Robertson, 1982, p. 75). This is how the newspaper presented the evacuation:

**No hitch on great adventure**

Evacuation of schoolchildren from London went without a hitch. The children, smiling and cheerful, left their parents and entrained for unknown destinations in the spirit of going on a great adventure. 'I wish all our passengers were as easy to manage,' a railway official said. 'The children were very well behaved.'

**And they did smile**

It was a brave little regiment, marching in step [...]. Little tots smiled gleefully and boys whistled and exchanged jokes. One boy, carrying a kitbag over his shoulder in true military style, kept humming to himself as he marched along. [...] Mr E Kingston of Vansittart Road, New Cross, who saw two of his children leave on the train said, 'It is the only sensible thing to do. I am not worrying.' [...] (*Daily Mirror*, 1939, para. 1, 16)

Here, the evacuation resembles an exciting school trip that receives the complete approval and even blessing of parents. 'Smoothly', 'splendidly', 'gleefully', it seems the government is both saving the children from the bombs and giving them an incredible opportunity to embark on a journey to a better life. In *London Pride*, Bottome paints a different picture:

Their hearts and eyes were fixed upon the fast receding Twins; and slowly, limpingly, a little as if Fate itself had trodden upon them, their empty hearts came back.

Mrs. Barton made a terrible sound, something between a sob and a snort, such as Ben had never heard anyone make before. It was the sound of a grown-up person who before the tyranny of time and space, finds himself helpless as a child. (Bottome, 1943, p. 44)

For a moment, Mrs. Barton loses all self-control and is not the courageous matron. She is a broken woman who, just like her son Ben, is reduced to the child-like combination of incomprehension and sadness. The development of Mrs. Barton throughout the novel is more of a regression, all the more emphasised by the fact the story is narrated by a seven-year old. The brave charwoman gives way to feelings of despair and anger, and, towards the end of the book, small cracks in her devotion to the city of London and what it represents start to appear, as she constantly faces the differences between her situation and that of wealthier citizens:

'Yersee 'ow it is, Ben, these rich folks, like this Lady—they're good ter their famblies, but it comes easy-like. They *can* be—an' if they ain't, there's their 'ouses going on sime as usual with meal an' all; or they can piy fer 'otels—or 'ave friends ter stiy wiv'. It's wunnerful woth money will do—one wiy or another! [...] I only got my fambly. I sort er fink it's diffrent for 'er! (Bottome, 1943, p. 197)

In this, I believe the character of Mrs. Barton breaks with the myth of the 'working-class matriarch',<sup>152</sup> which Hartley says 'presides over women's Blitz fiction, as its guiding spirit and genius loci' (1997, p. 25). Hartley refers to Henry Moore's 'Shelter drawings'<sup>153</sup> to analyse Mrs. Barton, in which, as seen below, 'a great maternal body emerges in the darkest

---

<sup>152</sup> In fact, in the novel, Mrs. Barton is a 'good-humoured woman without spite' but 'with no desire to dominate her household' (Bottome, 1943, p. 127).

<sup>153</sup> Moore was recruited as an official war artist in 1939, yet the Shelter drawings series was not a commissioned work. In fact, it is after the sketches came to the attention of his friend, Kenneth Clark, chair of the War Artist's Advisory Committee (WAAC) that he was employed by the British government.

of spaces' (Mellor, 1987, p. 22). I however would tend to argue that Mrs. Barton could be linked more closely to the tortured female figures imagined by Francis Bacon, which feature kneeling, desperate bodies.



Henry Moore, Shelter Drawing, *Seated Mother and Child* (1941).  
Richard Green (Fine Paintings) ©



Francis Bacon, *Seated Woman* (1961).  
The Estate of Francis Bacon ©



Henry Moore's *Woman* next to Francis Bacon's *Untitled (Kneeling Figure)* at the AGO's *Francis Bacon and Henry Moore - Terror and Beauty* exhibition. Estate of Francis Bacon © and Henry Moore Foundation ©.

Henry Moore and Francis Bacon—who ‘knew each other, but it was a guarded affection’ (Francis Warner quoted in Alberge, 2013, para. 4)—both depicted human suffering, particularly in wartime, in radically antithetical ways. In the 2013 University of Oxford Ashmolean exhibition, titled *Francis Bacon Henry Moore: Flesh and Bone*, as well as in the 2014 *Francis Bacon and Henry Moore - Terror and Beauty*, held at the Art Gallery of Ontario, the artists’ paired works illustrate their different approach to their shared encounter of Second World War trauma:

With its distinctive solid and natural forms, the work of Henry Moore (1898-1986) suggests a redemptive and stabilising response to the traumas of the 20th century. Francis Bacon (1909-1992), on the other hand, places his figures in alienated colours and settings, developing imagery that generally tends toward the tortured. (Parsons, 2014, para. 2)

In *London Pride*, Mrs. Barton kneels and sobs, resembling Bacon’s figures more than the calm, stoic ones of Moore’s drawings.

Another aspect that makes Bottome's novel particularly interesting is her treatment of the physical consequences of the violent bombings. *London Pride* does not shy away from gruesome details about the victims of the Blitz, especially working-class casualties, a side of war news that propaganda and censorship preferred to largely avoid so as to not maintain the image of Londoners bravely 'taking it'. In the following scene, Ben, his younger sister Mabel, his friend Emily and her baby brother Sam are playing in an old abandoned house when a bomb falls right on it:

She had just strapped Sam safely inside, and got the pram pointed towards the doorway, when the siren started with a heat-shuddering yelp, as if London was a dog that had been suddenly stepped on by a Prussian boot. Ben put out the oil stove just before a monster bang shook the house upside down.

All Ben saw before the darkness shut him in, was Sam's face when the blast caught him—and carried him out, pram and all—to meet the bomb itself. He was sitting in Mabel's pram, his mouth slowly opening to scream; and that was the last anyone saw or heard of Sam. [...]

He left Mabel where she was, and crawled carefully over heaps of rubble, so as not to upset anything more, till his hand touched a piece of torn skirt; and reaching further down over the edges of broken bricks, a foot; and then he knew that he had found Em'ly. Bricks, and a piece of ceiling had fallen on her. (Bottome, 1943, pp. 110-112)

The baby's silent scream is I believe a metaphor for two important concepts. The first one is the idea of the unspeakable, the senseless violence that Londoners, especially children, were confronted with. It stands against the government's dithyrambic speeches about the nation's pride and ability to take it, by conveying a terror that is beyond words and silences the people. The image of Sam's open mouth may remind a present-day reader of the similar emotions in the famous 1972 photograph taken by Nick Ut of Phan Thi Kim Phuc, the naked girl running

up the highway when the South Vietnamese air force mistakenly dropped napalm on the village of Trang Bang. At the time when the novel was published, a contemporary reader could also associate it with Edvard Munch's 1893 painting *The Scream*. In the scenes describing the most violent bombings, Bottome chooses to not mention any kind of sound, be it cries of pain, the sounds of the bombs, or fire-watchers' warning, as 'speech is too dear and wise a substance to be used while human butchery is going on' (p. 50):

There was nobody in the street nearby. Most of the doors were open; and some people were lying flat on the pavement so that Ben had to step over them; but it was quite easy because they never moved. [...] The few people who flitted past Ben on their way to the shelter weren't talking. (p. 50)

Secondly, the baby's silent scream could be interpreted as the silencing of the working classes' voice, the minimising and almost denial of the suffering by the public discourse of the time, as children who are buried alive for days are expected to come out of the rubble with a calm smile on their faces.<sup>154</sup> There is no space allowed in the public sphere for pain and hardship. In fact, in the novel, Emily's stoic attitude after being rescued is not due to her being brave or resilient, but mostly because of the drugs the doctors put her on:

When Em'ly realised that they were being rescued, she stopped dying. [...] the doctor rubbed her arm with something, and then stuck in a needle. It was wonderful what happened afterwards. A slow, ponderous peace stole over her whole body. (p. 123)

When Emily is told her whole family has died when their house was blown to pieces, she contemplated dying too, and is overcome by despair: 'would it not be more sensible [...] to give up this dull unaided business of living?' (p. 149), but feels much 'stronger' moments later, 'through some kind of dope having been jabbed into her arm' (p. 151).

---

<sup>154</sup> One of the most famous pictures of the London Blitz is one of children evacuees from Bristol, who have arrived at Brent railway station near Kingsbridge in Devon, 1940. They all look clean, well-equipped and above all very cheerful. In *London Pride*, it seems children are themselves aware of the responsibility they have to put on a brave face, as Ben tells his baby sister: 'Don't yell, Mabel, you've gotta take it!' (Bottome, 1943, p. 113).

During the Blitz, in an attempt to ‘prevent civil insurrection amongst a population psychologically unhinged by the enemy’s air force’ (Rawlinson, 2000, p. 71), propaganda (not so) discreetly kept quiet about the physical damage to the urban population and focused on landmarks like St-Paul’s Cathedral or Big Ben. The wounded body is absent from the radio and the newspapers in order not to feed imaginary, potentially catastrophic scenarios. Instead, the appeal to communion and unity around the fight for victory is centred on the fear of monument destruction.<sup>155</sup>

However, in Bottome's novel, violence permeates the text. From houses destroyed—‘to run away is an adventure but to have your home run away from you is a disgrace’ (Bottome, 1943, p. 83), babies dying—‘shaken and un-nerved by having swallowed more dust and plaster than at his early age he could appreciate’ (pp. 68-69)—to children amputated ‘who cried from pain, or because their hearts were broken’ (p. 128), the writer does not shy away from depicting physical pain. There is no will in *London Pride* to lessen the horror of the Blitz or to minimise the impact it had, especially on the more destitute communities. The detailed bombing scenes and the moving images of families mourning their lost ones enhance the courage of the working classes, whilst highlighting the government’s incapacity and/or unwillingness to protect them.

The third essential aspect of class-consciousness is its strong religious dimension. Phyllis Bottome, who was not a particularly religious person but did write about having found ‘Faith’, chooses to inscribe her story in a context that presents the working classes as being ‘sacrificed’ on the altar of absurd cruelty.

In public discourse, the war against the Nazis was increasingly described as a war to defend a ‘Christian civilisation’ based on values of fairness and freedom (Churchill, 1940b). Religion was actively recruited by the government's propaganda to maintain morale and

---

<sup>155</sup> I will deal with this specific subject in greater detail in Chapter III.



justify war aims. Winston Churchill relied on religious rhetoric in his speeches, in which he identified Britain as 'serving a cause for the sake of which a trumpet had sounded from on high' (Churchill, 1941, August 24, p. 252). The Religious Division of the Ministry of Information made tracts and movies and issued the paper *Spiritual Issues of the War* that, according to Callum G. Brown, 'churned out stories on the state of European churches and the war' (2006, p. 164). In contrast, in *London Pride*, the author seems to place religion and faith as enemies of war itself rather than allies to any of the involved belligerents, let alone England.

Bottome saw herself as a Christian after she had a 'strange spiritual experience' that led to her 'conversion' (1962, pp. 166-167), yet she writes in her autobiography that she finds it very difficult to define what she believes in:

I dismay and often infuriate the religious, because I cannot accept dogmas that seem to me to have no bearing on actual life as it is today, or any foundation in fact as we can apprehend it, with minds apparently developed for this purpose, equally I revolt militant atheists because I seem to them—and to many humanists, to cling to outworn fallacies. I can only say that I believe in a basic law of love which, if skilfully used, answers all our main problems; that I see no reason against, and many for, the idea of an infinite and beneficent creator, since this law of love really works; and presupposes a Lawgiver. As for the founder of Christianity, I cannot think there has ever been a better exponent or way of life. (ibid.)

In *London Pride*, characters show courage that carries a strong religious dimension, a 'courage linked with love for his fellow man, and used as St. Francis used it, [which] truly shines like "a good deed in a naughty world"' (ibid) Mrs. Barton rescues little Emily in the name of Christianity, since God says to 'look after children in wot wiy yer can-an' anyone's children

that's got no-one else ter do fer 'em" (Bottome, 1943, p. 181), and little Ben finds refuge at the end of the novel in 'the abbey of a Merciful God' (p. 207).

The characters of *London Pride* do not go to Church: 'no-one ever suggested that [Ben] should go; nor had the desire to do so ever occurred to Ben' (p. 17). Yet, God is constantly present in the little boy's 'Life', which is governed by God's will, 'Providence'. Ben first starts to reflect on God's existence when his sister tells him about Jesus' crucifixion, 'hung up on a Cross of wood, by his hands and feet [...] to save us from our sins' (p. 98). What shocks Ben the most about the story is the lack of help Jesus received when he was murdered by the Romans: If they *did* pin 'im up like, 'adn't 'e any mates? [...] 'Uns them people must er been wot did 'im in fer trying to 'elp them' (p. 105). Despite his struggle to understand why Jesus had to die alone on the cross, Ben feels a strong bond with God, and 'a great awe and joy' fill his 'silent heart' when he hears Big Ben's clock, which 'must be God' (p. 108). Later when his friend Emily gets trapped between two wooden beams during bombing, Ben remembers Jesus and strives to help her. Emily is compared to Jesus: 'When she woke, she found she was crucified like Jesus Christ. Her leg lay in a cradle; and one arm and shoulder were pressed out upon a board. It hurt her less than she had supposed being crucified could' (p. 124). This comparison, even if related through the eyes of a child, is not insignificant. In the novel, the neglected poorer citizens are being sacrificed to the bombs, not receiving practical, tangible help from the government. Their only salvation comes from Faith.

The people who rescue the children are nuns working as nurses, who come down from the sky like angels as they carry babies down the emergency stairs of burning flats (p. 161). Most interestingly, the nurse who rescues Ben's baby sister Mabel is Sister Job. In the Bible, Job takes his name from the challenges Satan, with God's permission, forces him to face. Job bears with resignation the loss of everything he owns, of his children, as well as suffering

from various illnesses.<sup>156</sup> He has to face the anger of his three friends, who are baffled by his resilience, but Job never once denies God, never once accuses Him of being unfair. God later explains to Job that one should not request explanations for or doubt His decisions, before blessing him with more children and a fresh start. More importantly, Job's story implies that there is no immediate correspondence between crime and punishment

This is a telling symbol for the wider significance of the novel. Bottome metaphorically describes how the poorer classes in *London Pride* are being sacrificed by an absurd war, at the mercy of an enemy they are not even able to picture properly. This is reinforced by the fact the novel is told from the point of view of a seven-year old, who 'did not really know who Hitler was' (p. 27). Yet, Mrs. Barton and her family do not give up, do not question God<sup>157</sup> and do not yield to despair when facing the unfair situation they are trapped in. The government will not help them, there is no solidarity coming from the better-off, and still, like Job, they trust in God. Job becomes a representative of modern concerns about suffering in a cruel world, as in *London Pride*, in which the bombs become a test on an innocent population who have done nothing to deserve 'sore boils from the sole of their feet unto their crown' (Job 2: 7). The novel advocates a return to essential values of love and faith (and, as in *The Bible*, integrity) as opposed to senseless pain and suffering caused not only by Germany but also by Britain.<sup>158</sup> A 'merciful God' (Bottome, 1943, p. 207) transcends matters of war, and thanks to Him Ben is 'unafraid of darkness' (p. 208).

Whilst this can seem excessively sentimental, studies which asked older people about their memories of religion in wartime indicate 'a strengthening position of [it]' during the

---

<sup>156</sup> So horrendous was Job's suffering that the epilogue of the Book of Job (chapter 42, 'Repentance and Restoration') was added later, in prose, seemingly to tone down a particularly harsh lesson from God.

<sup>157</sup> Ben's brother tells him he should trust in the Lord, since 'E's got ter know a lot more'n we do about most things' (p. 99).

<sup>158</sup> An idea also highlighted in Marguerite Steen's *Shelter* (1941): 'You can't tell the difference between the English and the German—not really' (Steen, 1942, p. 241). See full analysis of the novel in Chapter II, section A.

conflict (Brown, 2006, p. 165). One study conducted in Birmingham concluded that 'spirituality operated to strengthen the resolve of the people in their daily war effort. Wartime Britain, in many ways, was tangibly and self-consciously religious, and generally assumed itself to be Christian' (Parker, 2006, p. 60). This highlights another ambiguous aspect of Bottome's novel, who reuses one of the fundamental values of the 'People's War' propaganda to directly question the British government's wartime policies.

To conclude, *London Pride* is both an ode to working classes of the capital and homage to what they had to endure during the war as well as a fierce denunciation of the class differences that were only exacerbated during the Blitz. Bottome's novel might be seen as 'patronising and sentimental' by critics, yet it is undeniable that 'the book gets you. [...] her pictures of air-raid shelters, looting, evacuations, and so forth have a sharp veracity' (Calder, 2004, p. 196). Most importantly, as the issue of social class lies at the heart of her text, the writer sheds light on what propaganda strove to hide. The novel does very obviously reuse some perhaps overdramatic devices in fashion at the time, yet the bravery and solidarity referred to in *London Pride* are not those of the 'People' of the 'People's War'. The 'people' here are the working classes, not an imagined united British community of all backgrounds. The pride of London is exclusively the one that comes from the strength of the poor, and one that is more related to the people themselves than to any notion of nation—in fact, Mrs. Barton is 'ashamed' of 'what [is] left of London' (Bottome, 1943, p. 56). On the other hand, the pride of the British government takes the form of arrogance based on an illegitimate and superficial sense of community solidarity, a value that scarcely existed. Bottome denounces the utopian representation of a calm and collected wartime Britain. As the last sentence of the novel asserts: 'Tis a quiet night, seemingly' (Bottome, 1943, p. 208).

C) *The Heat of the Day*, Elizabeth Bowen (1949)

Elizabeth Bowen led a very different life to Marguerite Steen and Phyllis Bottome, well settled in the world of the English upper-middle class and the Anglo-Irish ascendancy, and always sheltered from financial struggle. As a child, she was educated by governesses—her mother explained that ‘she kept a governess because she did not want to scold [Elizabeth] herself’ (1962a, p. 29)—and at day schools. Later, she attended Elizabeth Downe House boarding school near Orpington, Kent, before entering the London County Council School of Art in 1918. Marrying Alan Cameron, assistant secretary for education in Northampton, in 1923 and buying a flat in Regent’s Park, Bowen used to regularly dine at the Ritz and often mingled with the members of the Bloomsbury Group. To Bowen, money was not important, since she never lacked it (d’Alton, 2017, para. 8). In light of this, I focus on Elizabeth Bowen’s novel *The Heat of the Day* in an attempt to understand how differently she depicted social-class division in London. In this section, I hope to provide an additional example and add some precision to the literary category Jenny Hartley describes as middle-class writers ‘reacting with nostalgic regret’ to the war (1997, p. 52), for fear of losing their privileges.

As I also argue in the first chapter of this thesis, when considering her short story ‘Mysterious Kôr’, most of Elizabeth Bowen’s work shows conflicting discourses in terms of her description of wartime society, in her essays and non-fictional texts, as well as in her novels and short stories. As Kristine Miller rightly remarks, ‘Bowen’s self-conscious ambivalence about her war writing is what most critics miss in discussing her work’ (2009, p. 33), and studies generally only emphasise the over-simplistic dichotomy between the ‘private passion’ and public ‘context of one’s past, one’s family, one’s other relationships, of work, duty and society’ in her texts (Coates, 1987, p. 494). I agree with Miller that Bowen’s ambivalence in terms of how she approaches political and social issues goes beyond the public/private sphere division. The writer worked for the Ministry of Information reporting on

public opinion in Ireland, and at times produced propaganda essays for the government, all the while producing her own fiction as an independent author. The writer herself recognises ‘the limitations of her war stories’ and ‘the difficulty of describing without bias the “mythical intensity” of the Blitz’ (Miller, 2009, p. 33).

Most critics analyse Bowen’s wartime fiction focusing on her reflection on ‘the effect of the Blitz on conventional gender roles’, arguing either that the strong female relationships she depicts replace ‘male phallogocentrism’ (Hoogland, 1994, p. 6), or on the contrary that ‘women, in [her] vision, are inherently outsiders to discourse, unless they turn traitor and defect to the other side’ (Chessman, 1983, p. 70). This strong disagreement between critics reflects what Miller described as the omission ‘of the possibility of ambivalence (2009, p. 33). Bowen’s fiction by definition is never straightforward, never generalises, and rather ‘examines critically the disparate experiences of women from various social classes even amidst wartime propaganda that promised social equality and gender equity’ (ibid.).

My purpose here is to further Miller’s argument on the writer’s propensity for ambivalence towards social class issues in her fictional work, focusing on the novel *The Heat of the Day*. Elizabeth Bowen’s wartime prose is essentially representative of a middle-class experience of the Blitz, as it was written by a woman torn between her excitement at ‘living life with the lid off’ at the warden’s post and being part of the People’s War, and on the other hand the acute awareness of being part of the privileged few, quite content to go back to her ‘life with the lid on’<sup>159</sup> at the Savoy after her shifts.<sup>160</sup> She ‘enjoyed the wartime freedom to

---

<sup>159</sup> Bowen used these expressions about Jane Austen: ‘The constraints of polite behaviour serve only to store up her characters’ energies; she dispels, except for the very stupid, the fallacy that life with the lid off—in thieves’ kitchens, prisons, taverns and brothels—is necessarily more interesting than life with the lid on’ (1944a, p. 246)

<sup>160</sup> This new, exciting lifestyle is partly what allowed Bowen to find ‘creative impetus’ (Lassner, 1997, p. 150) during the war, a creative energy that women in less-privileged positions did not necessarily have the luxury to experiment:

Walking in the darkness of the nights of six years (darkness which transformed a capital city into a network of inscrutable canyons) one developed new bare alert senses, with their own savage warnings and notations. And by day one was always making one’s own new maps of a

connect with people from outside the boundaries of [her] previously sheltered [life]', but also 'wished to safeguard the privileged backgrounds that led to stimulating war work' (Miller, 2009, p. 43).

One of her essays, 'London 1940' (1950), perfectly illustrates this idea. The piece was requested to her by the Ministry of Information as propaganda to reinforce the collective feeling of unity and solidarity between Londoners during the bombings. Bowen reuses in it the same rhetorical devices as Churchill, notably the constant reoccurrence of the pronoun 'we' to represent an idealised (but imagined) community of people, where social barriers have broken down and individual differences no longer matter in the fight for victory:

In the last six months, our British class-consciousness took a severe challenge and has not stood up to it. The spell of the Old School Tie doesn't act any more. [...] We have almost stopped talking about Democracy because, for the first time *we* are a democracy.<sup>161</sup> We are more, we are almost a commune. It is true that what we see, from day-to-day, acts as a leveler. All destructions make the same grey mess; rich homes, poor homes, the big store, the one-man shop make the same slipping rubble; the Louis Seize furniture, the instalment suite raise the same dust from their splinters and rags. [...] It is the people's war, for the people's land, and what we save we rule.  
(Bowen, 1950, pp. 53-55)

Still, Bowen's text was not accepted by the Ministry of Information, and was not published until after the war. The writer shortened her original draft as several parts of it were not passed by the censor, changing the original title 'Britain in Autumn' to 'London 1940', probably because 'she may not have wanted to extrapolate the Blitz in London to a general experience of warfare in Britain' (Hepburn, 2008, p. 421).

---

landscape always convulsed by some new change [...] through the particular, in wartime, I felt the high-voltage current of the general pass. (Bowen, 1945, p. 99)

<sup>161</sup> 'Bowen writes "Democracy" and "democracy" to indicate the differences between the political ideal and its manifestations' (Hepburn, 2008, p. 422).

The problematic parts of the essay were those which too graphically depicted the disastrous consequences of the Blitz, but also its many cutting remarks at the still existent class disparities between citizens. Bowen highlights the ‘theatrical safety’, as middle classes do not seem to want to acknowledge how worse off people might be in the East End. People with more money ‘*can* go underground but [...] for practical or nervous reasons, prefer not to’ (Bowen, 1950, p. 49). The writer is very aware that her position during the war, even though her own house got bombed, was a privileged one. The worries of her entourage are more often than not trivial compared to those of poorer people:

We are none of us [...] the very poor: our predicament is not a great predicament. The lady otherwise dressed, in a fur coat, has hair in two stiff little grey plaits. She appeals round for hair pins: most of us have short hair—the pins are drawn for her from the Poles’ heads. Girls step further into the light and look in pocket mirrors. ‘Gosh,’ they say. (p. 50)

Bowen is aware of the paradox at the heart of her work, and Miller sees her 1942 ‘Mysterious Kôr’ as the projection of her idea that ‘political idealism about the home front was often a privilege directly to class status’, as the story ‘argues that the People’s War was transformative only for those in positions of social privilege’ (2009, pp. 40-41).

Another telling example would be a letter to Charles Ritchie in which Bowen commented on the victory of the Labour party in the 1945 general elections:

[T]he Tory campaign was being conducted with [...] a tactlessness, a sheer psychological ineptitude, that was shattering. Keeping on telling the people Churchill had won the war for them. Of course he had, but it was not the thing to say. His moment of genius was the ‘This is your victory’, from the balcony. [...] The people



are firmly convinced that they won the war [...]. It now seems clear their voting was a reflex of indignation at being told anything to the contrary.<sup>162</sup> (1945, July 29, p. 53)

The writer was very conscious of Churchill's success in creating a powerful myth that 'the people' willingly accepted to believe in. She clearly highlights the superficiality of the idea that 'everyone won the war', but also specifies that it was mostly the poorer classes that bought into the idea, whilst middle and upper classes were more lucid. Bowen states that she felt 'what a terrific advantaged it is to be Anglo-Irish' (p. 54), and was very conscious of being 'an awful paradox, a dowdy snob' (1950, January 5, p. 152).

I argue this 'awful paradox' is the main idea of Bowen's only war novel, *The Heat of the Day*. Although she wrote many stories during the war, Elizabeth Bowen only wrote one longer text, which she published in 1949 after working on it for eleven years. In 1945, she tells her lover Charles Ritchie that 'any novel [she has] ever written has been difficult to write and this is being far the most difficult of all [...] it presents every possible problem in the world' (1945, March ?, p. 43). *The Heat of the Day* was a success and sold forty-five thousand copies 'almost at once' (Christensen, 2001, p. 20) when it came out. It was particularly praised for the way it very accurately described the atmosphere of wartime London.<sup>163</sup> The *New Statesman* critic wrote: 'unerringly, exquisitely, Miss Bowen has caught the very feel of her period. [...] The novel is the most completely detailed and most beautiful evocation of it that we have yet had' (quoted in McCrum, 2015, para. 9). Angus Wilson concurred: 'there

---

<sup>162</sup> The underlined words were underlined in the original text too.

<sup>163</sup> Angus Calder, in *The People's War*, used a long quotation from it to start his chapter 'Through the Tunnel: from October 1940 to December 1942'; a passage which describes the tense feeling of both grief and anxiety in 1942, after the Blitz and the fall of France, but still far from the end of the war:

The first generation of ruins, cleaned up, shored up, began to weather—in daylight they took their places as a norm of the scene; the dangerless nights of September two years later blotted them out. It was from this insidious echoless propriety of ruins that you breathed in all that was most malarial. Reverses, losses, deadlocks now almost unnoticed bred one another; every day the news hammered one more nail into a consciousness which no longer resounded. Everywhere hung the heaviness of the even worse you could not be told and could not desire to hear. This was the lightless middle of the tunnel. (Bowen, 1962, pp. 92-93).

will only be two English writers who convey what life in blitzed London was like—Bowen and [Henry] Green' (quoted in Bowen, 1999, p. ix). *Time Out* also agrees, stating that *The Heat of the Day* is 'one of three quintessential London "war" novels, the others being Patrick Hamilton's *Hangover Square* and Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair*. No other novel conjures the spooky solemnity of the Blitz so adroitly' (quoted on the Penguin website).

Critics tend to analyse *The Heat of the Day* focusing on two different aspects of the text: on the one hand, issues of patriotism, mainly because of the specific position of Stella being in love with an enemy spy (see Ellmann, 2003), and, on the other hand, gender identity, as the novel 'transforms a traditional male genre into a female-centred plot' (Lassner, 1990, p. 125). Here, I consider *The Heat of the Day* from a different perspective, in terms of its depiction of class-consciousness during the Blitz, which, I argue, writes against the propagandist rhetoric of a classless wartime Britain.

Because it is one of Bowen's only texts in which one of the main characters is from a working-class background, many have said *The Heat of the Day*'s narration of wealthy Stella and factory worker Louie's friendship is a metaphor of the social unity of 1940s' London. For example, Lassner explains that '*The Heat of the Day* suggests the mutability of women's character in a fleeting connection between two women of different classes' (1998, p. 151). Yet, Céline Magot suggests, on the contrary, that Bowen's text 'aims to shatter the illusion of a fraternal and united home front' and 'underlines the resistance of class division despite the official discourse that wanted to impose the myth of a united war effort' (2008, np.)<sup>164</sup>. Kristine Miller shares Magot's view, stating that '*The Heat of the Day* calls into question social identities founded upon either the nostalgic fantasy of a remembered past or the utopian

---

<sup>164</sup> My translation of: '*Ce livre s'emploie cependant à briser l'illusion d'unité et de solidarité du front intérieur*' and '*Bowen souligne ainsi la persistance de la division des classes malgré le discours officiel qui veut faire croire à l'effort de guerre d'une nation unie, et qui se manifeste par une mise à distance géographique symbolique*'.

fantasy of a revolutionary present' (2009, p. 42). This idea of debunking the 'fantasy of a revolutionary present' is precisely what I focus on here.

The novel is particularly revealing because of its realistic description of British society, and even more because of its very obvious lack of desire for, and even fear of, progress or change regarding social class division. Through the main character Stella Rodney, Elizabeth Bowen clarifies what she meant when she left London and wrote to William Plomer in 1945 that she could not 'stick all these middle-class Labour wets' (1945, September 24, p. 207), contrasting what she had written only months earlier reusing Blitz-time eulogy of community: 'Marylebone is my village' (1950, p. 51). My analysis will focus on the obvious dichotomy between the characterisation of upper-middle class Stella Rodney and factory worker Louie Lewis, their failed encounter and quickly aborted friendship, and on the novel's closure.

Stella Rodney is a wealthy woman who lives a privileged life in wartime London. As William J. McCormack states, 'it is tempting to see Elizabeth Bowen in the character of Stella Rodney' (1993, p. 215), as the resemblance between both women is striking. Stella does war work for the government,<sup>165</sup> just like Bowen wrote reports for the Ministry of information. Both have a strong link with Ireland, Stella's ex-husband being Anglo-Irish and her son inheriting the big family house Mount Morris, and the writer inheriting Bowen's Court. Stella Rodney sees her house being bombed in London, just like Bowen did, both having to relocate

---

<sup>165</sup> Stella obtains a comfortable position in an 'organisation called Y. X. D' (Bowen, 1962, p. 26) because of her useful network:

In the years between the wars she had travelled, had for intervals lived abroad; she now qualified by knowing two or three languages, two or three countries, well—having had some idea what she might most usefully do she had, still better, known whom to ask to support her application to do it. She had in her background relations, connexions, and at least former friends. (pp. 25-26).

to a rented property where their main struggle is the fact the furniture and decoration have been done by ‘somebody else’<sup>166</sup> (Bowen, 1962, p. 24).

Physically, Stella Rodney is not beautiful. She is very plain-looking and nothing about her is ‘striking’ as she ‘wears a sort of hardness’ on her face (Bowen, 1962, p. 25), similarly to Elizabeth Bowen, who was described by her lover Charles Ritchie as being ‘slightly put off’ by her ‘cruel, witty mouth’ (Ritchie, 1941, February 10, p. 22). Virginia Woolf also wrote that her friend Elizabeth had ‘a very honourable *horse-faced*, upper class hard constricted mind’ (my italics, quoted in d’Alton, 2017, para. 12). Yet, both Stella and Bowen are extremely attractive in terms of their presence, and their looks can ‘grow on you’, even ‘grow *for* you’ (Bowen, 1962, p. 25). The first time the reader meets Stella, she is standing at her window playing with the cord of the blind which is throwing ‘a nightlike shadow’ on her face (p. 22). The blackout effect of the blind is ‘harsh’, even ‘*méchant*’, which is ‘in some way part of her mood’ (ibid.). Her attitude is however mesmerising, and most men go to great lengths to try and get her to notice them. It seems her beauty is based not on her looks, but on a certain elegance and *allure*, in the same way Woolf described her friend referring to her ‘mind’:

She had one of those charming faces which, according to the angle from which you see them, look either melancholy or impertinent. Her eyes were grey; her trick of narrowing then made her seem to reflect, the greater part of the time, in the dusk of her second thoughts. With that mood, that touch of *arriere-pensée*, went an uncertain, speaking set of the lips. Her complexion, naturally pale, fine, soft, appeared through a pale, fine, soft bloom of make-up. She was young-looking—most because of the impression she gave of still being on happy sensuous terms with life. [...] Her clothes

---

<sup>166</sup> Both women also have a fear of their flat resembling a ‘common’ property. In a letter to Ritchie, Bowen writes that her ‘idea of squalor is un-emptied ashtrays and glasses with dregs of drink in them all over the place, or discovering there is dust on a table when one turns a lamp on’ (1950, January 5, p. 154).

fitted her body, her body her self, with a general air of attractiveness and ease. (pp. 24-25)

Stella is a multi-faceted Mona Lisa, both sad and calm, and her intellectuality is the essential part of her beauty, reminding us of how Ritchie wonders about his love for Bowen: ‘Would I ever have fallen in love with her if it hadn’t been for her books?’ (1941, September 2, p. 23). Stella’s appearance is inseparable from her feelings and her psychological state. She is stunning because she emits mystery, and strikes one as a woman who is constantly reflecting on her surroundings. She is the embodiment of harmony, in peace with her body, herself and the city she lives in, she moves in the world on ‘happy sensuous terms’ (Bowen, 1962, p. 25). The fact Bowen repeatedly uses French words to refer to Stella undoubtedly endows the woman with qualities of sophistication and elegance, as well as notions of culture and knowledge, the very things that are denied to Louie.

Indeed, Louie Lewis is described solely in terms of her body, and precisely in terms of her lack of intellect:

He confronted a woman of about twenty-seven, with the roughened hair and slightly upward expression of someone who has been lying flat on the grass. Her full, just not protuberant eyes looked pale in a face roughly burned by summer; into them the top light of the roofless theatre struck. Forehead, nose, cheekbones added no more than width. Her mouth was the only feature not to dismiss; it was big; it was caked round the edges, the edges only, with what was left of lipstick inside which clumsy falsified outline the lips turns outwards, exposed themselves—full, intimate, woundably thin-skinned, tenderly brown-pink as the underside of a new mushroom and like the eyes once more, of a paleness in her sun-coarsened face. [...] Halted and voluble, this could be but a mouth that blurted rather than spoke, a mouth incontinent and at the same time artless. (Bowen, 1962, p. 11)

Louie is graceless and gauche, an aspect reinforced by the voluntarily awkward sentence structure, with misplaced commas and overwhelmingly long subordinate clauses, give the impression of an unpolished, unrefined woman. Unlike Stella, whose 'hardiness' is appealing, Louie's 'hardiness failed her' (p. 12).

Whilst Stella is 'harmonious', harmony is exactly what Louie does not have. Apart from the very unflattering general description, the most interesting feature of this passage is the depiction of Louie's mouth. Her mouth is 'big' and can only project loud and ugly language. In fact, the first time she appears in the text, she opens her mouth 'abruptly' (p. 10), interrupting Robert's tranquillity. Hers is not a 'speaking set of the lips' like Stella's, it is one that does not have a voice, it can only 'blurt'. What is more, it very noticeably resembles a vagina, it being 'tenderly brown-pink', 'full, intimate', 'incontinent' and 'its lips turned outwards'. Louie immediately becomes and is limited to being a sexual object, 'exposed' and betrayed by her own physical appearance. She is a woman whose sole role in society is to be penetrated, 'entered' (p. 247) as she repeatedly fails to establish a deeper relationship with men: 'it was the lips which struck him and could have moved him, only that they did not'. Louie's physical appearance essentially guarantees her the inability to assert 'her self not her sex' (yet again an ambiguous term which refers to both Louie being and a woman and her sexual organ) (p. 12), and her name often 'remains unasked' (p. 14).

Even more strikingly, Louie seems to be devoid of any capacity to reason. She is constantly described as childlike, the narrator highlighting her 'graceless preadolescent strength' (p. 11), 'infant like of stereotypic vision' (p. 17) and 'nonchalance of a ten-year-old' (p. 146). Unlike Stella, Louie never reflects on anything, her mind 'is blank', she 'passively gazes'; in fact she cannot even speak her mind properly as she has 'no words' (p. 245). 'The blanks in Louie's vocabulary' (p. 306), her 'silly' (p. 237) mind contrasts with her well-read husband:

He had been accustomed to spend his home evening frowning at some technical book, or frowning because he was thinking something technical out. It had been Louie who—chair tilted back, tongue exploring her palate, mind blank of anything in particular—had hour-long passively gazed at Tom. (p. 146)

The narrator here is consciously reusing clichés associated with working-class women, harshly judging Louie in the same way she feels judged by the newspapers describing her as a flighty, fickle woman to be wary of. Whilst Stella being in a relationship yet still regularly seeing another man is depicted as something natural and exciting, Louie enjoying male company whilst her husband is on the front is heavily frowned upon. It is not only people surrounding her that tell her she ‘ought to be ashamed’ of herself (p. 19), it is also the harsh narrating voice that describes her as being ‘disobliging’ (ibid.). Louie is sex, and only sex. Her lack of intellect is only superficially alleviated when she strikes up a passion for newspapers, and starts reading the news every day, in an almost obsessive manner. She becomes addicted to reading every single page of every paper she can get her hands on. This is however not an image of a young woman educating herself and opening her eyes to the world and the situation her country is in, but again simply a way for the author to show the limitations of the character. Louie has a sensual relation to the object of the newspaper itself, as newspapers ‘infatuate Louie out-and-out’:

Louie came to love newspapers physically; she felt a solicitude for their gallant increasing thinness and longed to feed them; she longed to fondle a copy still warm from the press, and, in default of that, formed the habit of reading crouching over the fire so as to draw out the smell of print. While deferring to Connie’s *droit du seigneur* over any newspaper entering the house, Louie hated to see her use it with that sensual roughness. She was unable to watch a portion of fish being wrapped up in newspaper without a complex sensation in which envy and vicarious bliss merged. (p. 153)

Again Louie is not able to progress and evolve in any way, any one of her enterprises solely reinforcing her weakness as a lower-class woman. She does not use information to formulate an opinion, as she simply absorbs whatever the news tells her to, the editors even helping her focus on the right things as headlines ‘decide for you every event’s importance by the size of the prints’ (p. 152). The young woman easily falls for the most obvious pieces of government propaganda, pleased that ‘once you looked in the papers you saw where it said, nothing was so bad as it might look’ (p. 151).

The main difference between Stella and Louie is that Stella seems to be able to consider London wartime society in terms other than Churchill’s. Stella is aware, like Bowen, of the ‘ghostly social pattern of London life’ and the fact that ‘the conventional pattern one does not easily break’ (Bowen, 1945, 98). Louie, on the other hand, ‘had no notion that Mrs. Rodney lived so far from her’ (Bowen, 1962, p. 292) and was convinced that what she read in the newspapers, ‘war now made us a big family’ (p. 152)—was true. She rejoices in reading propaganda articles that make her feel like a war hero, as journalists praise a ‘lonely soldier’s wife, a war orphan, a pedestrian, a Londoner, a home—and animal—lover, a thinking democrat, a movie-goer, a woman of Britain, a letter writer, a fuel-saver and a housewife’ (p. 152). Louie looking to be ‘inspired’ by the newspapers is pathetic, and what is paradoxical here is that Bowen is confirming what she herself dismissed as ‘war myths’. The writer here is not giving a voice to the working classes but contributing to their silencing.

*The Heat of the Day* ‘reuses caricatured identities exacerbated by a stereotypical vision of women during the war’ as Magot says, yet I contend it does not offer ‘another point of view of them’ as she then states, or at least only partly, and by using harsh double standards.<sup>167</sup> Bowen shows acute awareness of part of the People’s War rhetoric by implicitly highlighting the absurdity of the articles Louie is reading, all praising the prowess of

---

<sup>167</sup> My translation of: ‘*il rend compte des identités caricaturales exacerbées par une vision stéréotypée des femmes pendant la guerre*’ and ‘*un point de vue décalé*’.



idealised, fictionalised women, or scolding the immoral behaviour of certain lonely women. Yet what is paradoxical is that the writer chooses to describe the only working-class character in her only war novel as exactly fitting these stereotyped descriptions, a factory worker who cannot think for herself and only serves to satisfy passers-by's sexual pleasures. On the other hand, Stella Rodney is a victim of an unfair patriarchal society, first as a divorcée then as widow, as men constantly try to debate 'whether her eyes, with their misted askance look, were those of a victim or a femme fatale' (Bowen, 1962, p. 83). Depending on the man looking at her, Stella is placed into one category or the other, trapped in a paralysing discourse. She is essentially controlled by Harrison who manipulates her and controls her by constantly repeating to her how hypnotising she is. Magot interestingly talks about 'textual harassment' referring to Harrison constantly confining Stella to her 'feminine nature' in his sarcastic comments about her lack of discernment (2008, np.):<sup>168</sup>

'It's more, to put the thing in a nutshell, that I'm not a woman.' (Bowen, 1962, p. 131)

'I said I'd got no time for this.'

'But a woman takes time. I could take twice the time you've got.'

'In that case I should be twice the man.' (p. 138)

'Your being a woman [...] cuts both ways. [...] Whether you want to or not, you don't miss a thing—except, if I may say so, what's right under your nose.' (p. 131)

There is a world of difference between the person Stella is and the person society wants to force her to be, as she transcends the stereotypes imposed on her; whilst Louie is limited to being only what the newspapers say about her.

The fact Stella and Louie do not bond in the novel deserves attention. In fact, they only meet once, a very brief encounter that Stella initiates and Stella aborts. Stella is having dinner with Harrison in a crowded restaurant when she sees Louie for the first time. She is in the

---

<sup>168</sup> My translation of: '*harcèlement textuel*' and '*nature féminine*'.

middle of a conversation that makes her feel extremely uncomfortable, she has just been put on the spot by Harrison who is explaining he knows she ‘tipped Robert off’ and, as she powders her face, ‘not knowing whether her hand would shake she did not take the risk of applying lipstick’ (p. 232). It is solely for distraction, to save her face, that she turns to Louie, and the first comment she makes about the young woman is about her poorly-kept appearance: ‘One girl, I see, has got her stocking-seams crooked’ (p. 233). She then insists on Harrison talking to Louie, not because she is interested in meeting someone new, but because she is intrigued, curious. The war is for her an exciting period of history that interrupts the monotony of her routine, and Louie is simply an exciting novelty. Stella seems to feel the same way as Elizabeth Bowen, who in the 1940s was excited about living ‘in the village of Marylebone’ (Bowen, 1950, p. 51).<sup>169</sup>

Stella’s attitude contrasts with Louie’s, who is in search of genuine companionship: ‘People to be friendly, that’s what war’s for, isn’t it?’ (Bowen, 1962, p. 239). Working-class women during the war had a very different perspective on what the higher classes described as social unity, as the following comment from a young female pilot describes:

I was a working-class girl who learned to fly to make a living. There was a clique of rich girls who had all learned to because it was the ‘in’ thing to do. They owned their planes, had their own friends, and you were never invited to their homes or parties. (Saywell, 1985, p. 16)

Because she knows Robert is not interested in striking up a conversation with Louie and solely wants to talk to her, Stella brings Louie into their space in an attempt to rebel against him, not with the desire to form a new friendship. When Louie finally comes forward to their table, Stella cannot help noticing that ‘everything ungirt, artless, ardent, urgent about Louie

---

<sup>169</sup> Similarly, upper-class service woman Diana Barato Walker’s account shows she was thrilled by the new opportunities her job opened up to her:

We met a lot of people we wouldn’t have met otherwise. In those days England was very stratified. One only met people from one’s type of upbringing. Here we were all doing the same thing, without distinction. It was wonderful. (Saywell, 1985, p. 16)

was to the fore: all over herself she gave the impression of twisted stockings', and definitely did not 'look as smart as she hoped' (Bowen, 1962, p. 235). The conversation the three of them have is a tense one, in which Louie is being judged whilst being blissfully unaware of it. Only introducing herself as 'Mrs. Lewis' she surprises Stella who 'found herself glancing for confirmation at Louie's wedding-ring finger' (p. 237), wondering how a woman such as Louie could possibly be committed to anyone, let alone have anyone wanting to commit to her.

At the end of this encounter, Louie apologises for her behaviour without having anything to be sorry for, and the two women walk home. Stella and Louie never meet again. Interestingly enough, Stella forgets about Louie as soon as she gets home that night—she merely used the young woman as a pretext to get out of an awkward conversation. However, Louie dreams of her:

Louie, back on her back again, clasped her hands under her head and stared up at nothing [...] wondering how Stella had done her hair. But how were you to tell? —there had been the hat. Most of all, there had been the effect—the effect, it said, was what you ought all to go for. Black best of all, with accessories, if you were the type. The effect of this person... Invisible powder, mutiny, shock, loss; sparkle-clip on black and clean rigid line of shoulders; terror somewhere knocking about inside her like a loose piece of ice; a not-young face of no other age; eyes, under blue-bloomed lids, turning on you an intent emptied look, youth somewhere at the back of it like a shadow; lip shaped, but shaping what they ought not. (p. 247)

The narrator says that Louie, in her bed at night, feels 'entered', 'affected', 'infected', by 'something foreign' (pp. 247-248). The young woman is fascinated by Stella, by the allure of the wealthy woman, by her attitude and *prestance*, and is filled with 'addiction' and 'desire' at the thought of her (p. 248). During her walk home with Stella, 'she felt what she had not felt

before' (p. 248). In what can be read as a very intimate erotic moment, Louie is obsessed by the memory of Stella wishing her goodnight, and, losing control of her body as 'her lips seemed bidden', she repeats: 'a soul astray', 'with awe, aloud' (pp. 247-248). This scene of Louie aroused at the thought of Stella functions as an ambivalent climax because, in her lust for Stella, Louie also becomes aware that they are essentially different. Louie realises she is the Other—'Oh no; I wouldn't be *her!*' (p. 247)—and that Stella's 'fancy taken to Louie' is only 'some sick part of a mood' (p. 248), not genuine nor sincere. That particular moment is the one in which Louie ceases to be the naive factory girl who believes in classless generosity.

Petra Rau argues that *The Heat of the Day* explores 'the perilous space along the common frontier between the self and the perceived other', the Other being constructed by mythmaking propaganda (2005, p. 38). She adds that Bowen is 'fascinated by the conflicts of interests and the crises of identities that come with betrayal, secrecy and lies' (ibid.). She applies this idea to Stella's complex relationship with her lover, who she knows to be an enemy spy, as she is torn between her feelings for him and her loyalty to her nation. Rau's argument is that 'ultimately, we always remain strangely familiar with this other, who does not exist other than as an uncanny version of the self' (p. 38), since, focusing on Stella and Robert Kelway, 'lovers become enemies and enemies lovers' (p. 51). However this idea of 'character in flux' (1990, p. 134) that Phyllis Lassner also refers to is a concept that I don't find so relevant when considering Stella and Louie. There is no space for mobility in their relationship, as Bowen constantly highlights the essential, inflexible differences that define both women. The only attempt to break down this 'otherness' comes from Louie in the most intimate scene of the novel, but it is immediately met with the realisation that bonding with Stella would be part of a childish dream. Whilst ideological mobility seems possible as Stella loves Kelway, class hierarchy is insuperable.

*The Heat of the Day* is a perfect counter-example of Hartley's idea according to which 'class diminished as a structuring principle and an overriding concern in women's fiction' (1997, p. 52) during the Second World War, since class is the issue that lies at heart of the book. It contradicts the People's War rhetoric of a classless society by underlining the lack of genuine, lasting and fruitful relationships between social classes. Yet, it is not a novel urging for social progress or highlighting the need for a change. The ending is particularly telling in this aspect, as it seems that until the last pages of the book the moralising voice of the narrator still values Stella more than Louie. Both women experience a 'fall' and both are put on moral trial by society. Louie is made to disappear, forced to leave the city because of her shameful pregnancy, and her hidden maternity that imprisons her in a paralysing guilt, as 'her passiveness bigge[ns] with her body' (Bowen, 1962, p. 326). The young woman moves to 'a Midland country', where she learns to become 'an orderly mother', isolated from the world in a place where 'no other soul passed; not a sheep, even, was cropping anywhere nearby' (pp. 329-330). In the meanwhile, Stella remains in London, where she manages not to be convicted for her relationship with a spy. After her lover's suicide, she recovers from the ordeal of the world becoming aware she is 'not virtuous'<sup>170</sup> (p. 306) by reaffirming her love for her nation. She earns 'one kind of reputation, that of being a good witness' (p. 305) and marries a distant relative.

In short, Bowen not only shows how war exacerbated social-class division despite the government's effort to insist on 'proletarian heroism' (Poirier, 1995, p. 221) to engage the

---

<sup>170</sup> Louie tries to make out how Stella is doing from the information she gets in the press.

[Stella] had not been too good. Here, and not in one paper only, was where it said about her, the bottles, the lover, the luxury West-End flat. She had had other men friends; there nearly had been a fight: It all only came to a matter of expensiveness; there was no refinement. A nicer look and a nicer voice, but there she was with someone she was not married to—who had he not run out on the roof, tight, would be still here. She had seemed so respectable—respectable as one of those lost Seale faces—but there she had stood in court, telling them all. (Bowen, 1962, p. 306)

whole of society in the war effort, but even more importantly how *attached* she is to the traditional social hierarchy. This novel to a certain extent supports the idea that England is ‘the most class-ridden country under the sun’ (Orwell, 1941, p. 33), its underlying message being that this is how it should remain. *The Heat of the Day* is not a story about the need for the liberation and emancipation of the working classes, it is not like *London Pride* a text attempting to give a voice to the poor, but rather a conscious affirmation of the complacent arrogance of the middle classes. When Bowen writes that ‘all writing is resistance writing’ (1999, p. 97) because writing resists a myth, it does not resist a harsh social order, but the false idea of the opposite, a ‘utopian fantasy of a revolutionary present’ (p. 42). As Miller writes, ‘recognising the persistence of these social divisions, Bowen critiques her own temptation to define herself through the fantasy of a People’s War’ (Miller, 2009, p. 40).

### General Conclusions

The Second World War in Britain can be closely associated with the idea of a ‘crisis of the family’. As Geoffrey Field puts it:

In wartime propaganda, wartime Britain was commonly depicted through two contrasting myths, as one big family: weakened in the 1930s by family division, and mutual suspicion (or, as Orwell put it, with the wrong relatives in control) and reunited in the 1940s by common danger and invigorated by a spirit of greater egalitarianism and social compassion. Popular memory of the war, reinforced by books, broadcasts and films, also emphasised family, both as a social metaphor and as the key institution that enabled Britons to surmount the crisis. The pluck and self-sacrifice or wartime mums, the closeness of family, kinship and neighbourhood networks, and the abatement of class criticism are all basic to this mythic picture. (1990, p. 4)

A 'closer examination of the war years', like the ones that have been conducted by several scholars since the 1990s, 'conjures up a very different picture', as 'negative images of family life abounded' (ibid.). This metaphor of the 'family crisis' to describe the 1940s easily fits in with the analysis of the three novels I focused on in this section.

In *Shelter*, Louise's marriage falls apart, unable to resist the stress of wartime work and constant coming and goings to the public shelter. In *London Pride*, a family is ripped apart as a mother is talked into sending her children away to an unknown place. In *The Heat of the Day*, the idea of a family is constantly present through its very absence. Stella's husband died after he left for a younger nurse, and she lives alone while her son Roderick, with whom she has what seems to have a very distant relationship. Louie's husband also dies, and she is just as alone in her London flat, seeking the fleeting company of soldiers passing through the capital. The three novels describe broken families and broken homes, as metaphors for the lack of social unity in Britain, the precise feeling that wartime propaganda so insisted on promoting.

Marguerite Steen's *Shelter* and Phyllis Bottome's *London Pride* both to some extent participate in the rhetoric of the People's War, inasmuch as they refer to concepts of solidarity and unity, but it is essential to note how much they differ from the publications of the Ministry of Information. The most interesting aspects of both novels are the striking pressure of class inequality and the obvious need for social reform, a situation that contradicts Churchill's utopian representation of wartime Britain in which class boundaries broke down. Whilst there is a feeling of companionship within the working classes, a feeling that arises from being forced into sharing misery under bombed houses or in public shelters, there is very little inter-class solidarity. Lower and upper classes appear as distant and unable to relate to each other in both novels, and the better-off are mostly the object of anger and jealousy.

In the 1940s, the People's War was an expression that could be understood in the consensual term, as a nation pulling together, or it could be seen as entailing a 'coercive realignment of ideas and national identity' (Ward, 2008, p. 107), the drive for social change. In *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius*, George Orwell suggests that a revolution of the common people is necessary for the war to be won and socialism to be established (1941). J. B. Priestley (relieved from his duties at the BBC soon after the war)<sup>171</sup> also tied the needs of the nation to the needs of the people, 'Britain is the British people's home... it is before anything their home' (1941, p. 45), the people are 'the true heroes and heroines of this war, it's among the byways of the humble folk who live in them, that you see and hear things that give you renewed hope and confidence in our species' (1940, p. 93). It is precisely this idea of the People's War that the reader is left with after finishing *Shelter* and *London Pride*, both odes to London and the people, but both urging for a change.

Ultimately, Churchill's inclusive and classless patriotism refers to that of an elite, with the 'people' only admiring the 'courage of a few' (1940c). Whilst he governed in coalition with the Labour Party during the war, he went back on the need for social reform and branded Labour as foreign and un-British after it (ibid.). Norman Howe, who lived through the Blitz in the South of England, suggests that the idea of breaking down class-consciousness and universal solidarity in the face of adversity is 'more of a myth than a reality' (2016, np.). To him, the elections following the war only prove the British people's bitterness at the lack of social reform:

The idea of the Blitz being remembered with nostalgia as a time when class barriers were forgotten is new to me and frankly also incredible - if anything the war years only served to enhance the rigidity of the English caste system. To this day social mobility is more a myth than a reality; the fact that Churchill was defeated in the first

---

<sup>171</sup> According to Ward, the Prime Minister himself had a strong desire to ban Priestley from broadcasting (2008, p. 107).



election after the war vividly demonstrates the layers of resentment felt about a class system that had helped to perpetuate Empire and therefore initiated continental warfare. [...] Throughout the Blitz a privileged elite clung to every scrap of advantage gained from social standing. The reason Mosely gained credibility in the East End was precisely because social division was so evident.

[...] In truth the Second World War is a tiny blip on the face of English social history; when Thatcher and Scargill squared up during the confrontations of the Miner's Strike no one paused to think of a moment when they might have shared a platform on the London Underground! (ibid.)

This statement corresponds to what is depicted in *The Heat of the Day*, a novel that does not advocate the need for class equality but focuses on the fundamental, essential and unavoidable antagonism between the rich and the poor. Whilst the three novels put forward different social messages, they show that class was *indeed* the main 'principle and an overriding concern in women's fiction', contrary to what Hartley suggests. Fiction of the time should not simply be divided between upper class fear of losing status and lower-class enthusiasm for newly found community, but rather as a more global feeling of resentment at a government imposing a superficial, moralising discourse on very different individuals.

Despite what Angus Calder argues, there is abundant evidence in Blitz literature that writers could step outside conventional discourses and question the main strands of the People's War rhetoric. These novels show an awareness of the fact the Blitz experience was not the same across classes, and that there were few genuine demonstrations of inter-class solidarity.


LATE WAR NEWS SPECIAL

FOR KING AND EMPIRE  
 TUESDAY, DECEMBER 31, 1940

**Hitler Planned Monday Swoop**

London was to blaze first

**HITLER** meant to start the second Great Fire of London as the prelude to an invasion.

The plan was held in confidence by Hitler's top advisers in London.

The plan was to start the fire on Monday, December 11, 1940, at 11 o'clock.

The fire was to be started by incendiary bombs which would be dropped from German bombers.

The fire was to be started in the City of London, near the Bank.

The fire was to be started in the City of London, near the Bank.

**WAR'S GREATEST PICTURE: St. Paul's Stands Unharm'd in the Midst of the Burning City**



**London Flat Mystery**

SEARCH FOR THE MURDERER OF THE LONDON FLAT MURDERER

SEARCH FOR THE MURDERER OF THE LONDON FLAT MURDERER

**Cherhill Sees London's Ruins**

CHERCHILL SEES LONDON'S RUINS

CHERCHILL SEES LONDON'S RUINS

**100 to 1 Backing for Roosevelt**

100 TO 1 BACKING FOR ROOSEVELT

100 TO 1 BACKING FOR ROOSEVELT

**Arms Flow Has Begun**

ARMS FLOW HAS BEGUN

ARMS FLOW HAS BEGUN

**HAVOC COULD HAVE BEEN SAVED**

HAVOC COULD HAVE BEEN SAVED

HAVOC COULD HAVE BEEN SAVED

**Fire Spotter Off: Firm Fined £20**

FIRE SPOTTER OFF: FIRM FINED £20

FIRE SPOTTER OFF: FIRM FINED £20

**LONDON LULLABY**



**Morrison in Battle To-night**

MORRISON IN BATTLE TONIGHT

MORRISON IN BATTLE TONIGHT

**The King Goes On**

THE KING GOES ON

THE KING GOES ON

**Arms Flow Has Begun**

ARMS FLOW HAS BEGUN

ARMS FLOW HAS BEGUN

War's Greatest Picture: St. Paul's Stands Unharm'd in the Midst of the Burning City. Cover, *Daily Mail*, December 31, 1940. *Daily Mail* ©



## **Chapter III: Body at War**

### Introduction

The picture of Saint Paul's Cathedral surrounded by burned-out buildings is one of the best examples of Mark Connelly's argument that 'the Blitz is very definitely a visual memory' (2004, p. 131). The photograph, taken on December 2, 1940 by Herbert Mason has become an 'iconic' image, emblematic of 'both the British Blitz experience and the bombing war in Europe' (Allbeson, 2015, p. 534).<sup>172</sup>

Tom Allbeson explains in detail 'the cultural impact of Mason's photograph in Britain' (ibid.), linking his analysis to Benedict Anderson's reflection on 'the role of vision in the creation of imagined communities' (p. 536). Anderson states that modern commodities, such as newspapers, radio broadcasts or photographs, 'made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways' (2006, p. 36); and Robert Hariman and John Louis Locates write that 'the daily stream of photojournalistic images [...] defines the public through an act of common spectatorship. When the event shown is itself part of national life the public seems to see itself' (2007, p. 42). Hence, during the Second World War, the media was an important means through which the government aimed to foster feelings of community and patriotism, using carefully chosen images to reinforce the idea of British invincibility.

Saint Paul's Cathedral was a perfect wartime symbol for different reasons. First, it was a place of worship, and the threat of it being destroyed was seen as 'an instantly recognisable sacrilege (Overy, 2011, p. 17), therefore making the enemies 'godless vandals' (Allbeson, 2015, p. 541). Second, the building not only represented London as the capital of England, but London as the capital of the British Empire. Third, 'the building's own genesis gave impetus

---

<sup>172</sup> The photograph was reproduced many times immediately after its first publication in the *Daily Mail*, but is still used today, featuring for example on the cover of Lara Feigel's 2013 *The Love-Charm of Bombs* or Richard Overy's 2014 *The Bombing War*.

to its wartime symbolism’, considered a ‘phoenix from the ashes’, having been built after its predecessor burnt in the Great Fire of 1666.<sup>173</sup>

Thus, when the Blitz began, St. Paul’s was [...] a multifaceted symbol. It stood for Christian rectitude, for resilience, for the nation, and for its imperial power. To a British audience, the building was potentially a visual token of nothing short of civilisation itself. (ibid.).

The photograph was published on the front page of the *Daily Mail* two days after it was taken. It is interesting to note how the newspaper presented the image: the overlapping adverts on its right side hides part of the destroyed buildings, some of which had already been cropped out of the picture, drawing the spectator’s attention to what is still standing after the air raid. As Allbeson writes, the photograph ‘directs the audience to view the image as one of resilience rather than one of endangerment’ (2015, pp. 546-547), as does the accompanying commentary: ‘the cathedral itself, its cross above the dome calm and aloof above the sea of flames, stood out, an island of God, safe and untouched’ (*Daily Mail*, 1940, cover).

This picture perfectly exemplifies what many scholars have highlighted in historical and sociological studies of the wartime Britain, that is to say the government’s attempt to completely obliterate the wounded or dead body from visual representations of the conflict, in order to maintain high morale and the will to fight for victory. Through the ‘romancing of destruction as a symbol of transhistorical Englishness’ (Rawlinson, 2000, p. 89), scenes of devastation omitting both aggressors and victims inscribe the bombings in a heroic narrative of supreme strength and power.<sup>174</sup> Plenty were the photographs of churches, tall buildings or

---

<sup>173</sup> The *Daily Herald* even referred to the Blitz as the Second Great Fire of London: ‘The first Great Fire of London blazed for days. The second, started by German planes on Sunday night, was well under control yesterday’ (Webb, 1940, np.).

<sup>174</sup> Paradoxically and ironically, the very same photograph of Saint Paul’s Cathedral was reused on the cover of *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* on January 23, 1941 with the title ‘The City of London Burns’ (*Die City von London brennt*):

When circulated in Germany, Mason’s image ran with a caption directing attention to the flames that lit up the night sky rather than to the cathedral. The clouds, rather than wreathing

long-standing monuments in the newspapers, all forming a ‘depopulated view of war damage’ (Allbeson, 2015, p. 556) as they never featured individuals.<sup>175</sup> Physical damage to the population itself is absent from the press and the radio in order not to feed eventual imaginary catastrophic scenarios.

Since well before the Second World War, aeronautical technology ‘had fascinated the popular and literary imaginations’ (Rawlinson, 2000, p. 57), as literature dealing with an apocalyptic future of aerial warfare had created a ‘general climate of “air-mindedness”’ (Paris, 1992, p. 17). *War and Peace* describes the ‘balloons that were to destroy the French’ (Tolstoy, 1991, p. 891) and in H. G. Well’s *War of the Worlds*, London is decimated by gas, a ‘Black Smoke’ which is ‘death to all that breathes’ (2005, p. 88). Rawlinson explains that ‘panoramas of urban ruin were being represented publicly long before the first raids on London’ (2000, p. 68). When the actual bombings started, the British had a whole background of imaginative visuals to associate them with. Wartime London ‘saw Gothic tropes become literal’ (Wasson, 2010, p. 4). The previous century’s fears of a destructive modernity and evil industrialisation leading to racial decline were confirmed in the 1940s. Deserted streets were plunged in darkness, people sought refuge underground, children were buried alive in their homes. Thus, propaganda aimed to counterbalance fears and transform them into the certitude that Britain would win the battle. Instead of showing human casualties, the appeal to communion and unity around the fight for victory centred on the fear of monument destruction.

---

the cathedral, were said to obscure the extensive damage. The domes and spires were described as blackened with soot and smoke. The Great Fire of 1666 was mentioned not to celebrate Wren’s cathedral, but as a comparator by which to gauge the destructive impact of the German attack. Where British editors had evoked imperial references by placing the emphasis on the cathedral, the emphasis on the city here stressed its associations with finance. Thus, the editors of the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* effectively inverted almost every one of the reference points used in the *Daily Mail* and the *Illustrated London News* to frame the photograph positively for British audiences and to construct the point of view it offered on St. Paul’s in wartime. (Allbeson, 2015, p. 549)

<sup>175</sup> See J. M. Richards’ *The Bombed Buildings of Britain: A Record of Architectural Casualties, 1940-41* (2011).

Allbeson is right in saying that ‘the Blitz as an aspect of British culture is most helpfully (if wordily) characterised as a cultural memory in the construction of which visual material including photography is particularly prominent’ (2015, p. 576), yet another important cultural aspect heavily influenced the shaping of war memory. Unlike what could probably be assumed, reading was extremely popular during the war, and, despite paper shortages, British authors did not write or publish less in wartime than they would have done before.<sup>176</sup> My purpose in this chapter is to consider Blitz fiction in the light of Allbeson’s idea of a ‘depopulated view of war damage’ (2015, p. 556), according to which physical violence was more often than not absent from any cultural representation of the war in the 1940s. I take as a starting point for my reflection the works of Angus Calder, Mark Rawlinson and Sara Wasson.

As explained in the introduction to this work, Angus Calder and Mark Rawlinson both agree that British Second World War writers did not dare to step outside the conventional discourses of the People’s War and that their work actively contributed to building a mythical image of wartime Britain. Calder states that literature’s ‘extraordinary mythmaking power’—as was the case in the First World War with Wilfred Owen’s poetry, ‘whose effigy and imagery still domineer over conceptions [...] of what the Great War was like’<sup>177</sup>—only contributed to fabricating a heroic memory of the war (1991, p. 152). He does highlight the exception of Louis MacNeice, who was in fact Irish, whose poem ‘The News-Reel’<sup>178</sup>

---

<sup>176</sup> See Introduction, section B) 2.

<sup>177</sup> Although Wilfred Owen certainly aimed to highlight the incorrect glorification of war, critics, such as William Kevin Penny, have argued that ‘the poet’s reliance on biblical imagery and on notions of transcendence involving the tragically ironic show adherence to the idea of war as sacrificial, but also as mythopoeic in nature’ (Penny, 2011, p. 166). The ‘subsequent return to ritualistic and mythic language and imagery as a form of closure was the inevitable result of portraying his subject matter in heroic terms’ (ibid.).

<sup>178</sup> The poem was first published in MacNeice’s 1944 collection of poems *Springboard*:

Since Munich, what? A tangle of black film  
Squirming like bait upon the floor of my mind  
And scissors clicking daily. I am inclined  
To pick these pictures now but will hold back

describes how his visual memory of the war has been shaped by images that were carefully selected by film-makers for more specific purposes than the simple truth (p. 143). The poem ‘encapsulates MacNeice’s own struggle to disentangle a politically enabling meaning from the cumulative snarl of hyperreal images and personal memories’ (Williams, 1996, p. 128). MacNeice is ‘inclined’ to wait before finalising his personal ‘newsreel’, to allow the ‘organism’ behind the fact to appear.

To Calder, Louis MacNeice is one of the very few writers aware of the efficient manipulation of the individual by the media. Willing to step outside the paradigms of the myth of the Blitz, the poet also dares to portray violence and death by ridiculing, in Calder’s eyes, ‘familiar elements of Myth’. In the macabre ‘The Streets of Laredo’,<sup>179</sup> ‘the fireman, the Cockney, the architectural past, and the literary heritage [...] are virtually burlesqued’ and the minimising of violence heavily critiqued (p. 144). The poet dares to express ‘with both eloquence and caution the challenge and hope involved for citizens as they tried to order their war experiences’ (Calder, 1991, p. 143), which contrasts with propaganda’s objective to

---

Till memory has elicited from this blind  
 Drama its threads of vision, the intrusions  
 Of value upon fact, that sudden unconfined  
 Wind of understanding that blew out  
 From people's hands and faces, undesigned  
 Evidence of design, that change of climate  
 Which did not last but happens often enough  
 To give us hope that fact is a façade  
 And that there is an organism behind  
 Its brittle littleness, a rhythm and a meaning,  
 Something half -conjectured and half-divined,  
 Something to give way to and so find. (MacNeice, 1979, pp. 203-204)

<sup>179</sup> ‘The Streets of Laredo’ was written for his wife, who would sing to an arrangement of the traditional American cowboy song. The streets of Laredo become the bombed streets of London, and the last two stanzas are whispered by the Angel of Death:

O late, very late, have I come to Laredo  
 A whimsical bride in my new scarlet dress  
 But at last I took pity on those who were waiting  
 To see my regalia and feel my caress.  
 Now ring the bells gaily and play the hose daily,  
 Put splints on your legs, put a gag on your breath;  
 O you streets of Laredo, you streets of Laredo,  
 Lay down the red carpet —  
 My dowry is death. (MacNeice, 1979, p. 218)



‘exclude war’s human calamities’ (Rawlinson, 2000, p. 83) as the media avoid lingering over the physical damage to the urban population.

Calder also refers to Francis Bacon, one of the only artists who held ‘in his vision’ the horrors of the wars: ‘what it does to human bodies, minds and emotions’ (p. 143). He takes as an example Bacon’s 1944 painting ‘Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion’ (see below), of which the ‘half-human, half-animal figures cramped into a strangely shaped, low-ceilinged space’ are to him a representation of the ‘extremely claustrophobic’ Morrison shelters, suggesting ‘mutilation, anguish, hatred and gluttony’ (ibid.).



© Estate of Francis Bacon. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2018

As mentioned previously, Angus Calder believes it necessary to critically rethink our collective memory of the Blitz, stating that we have been ignoring ‘how frightening and confusing the period from April 1940 through to June 1941 was for the British people’ since ‘the Myth stands in our way, asserting itself, abiding no questions’ (p. 18). To him, as explained in the introduction to this thesis, this process is rendered all the more difficult by the fact that ‘very few writers during the war, or in nearly half a century since, have come close to the radicalism of Bacon, or even matched the side-step of Louis MacNeice’ (p. 143), paralysed by their inability (or *unwillingness*) to narrate the true story of the Blitz.

Mark Rawlinson's study *British Writing of the Second World War* theorises that same idea, focusing heavily on the argument that British wartime writing is 'related to the negation [...] of apocalyptic projections' (2000, p. 71) and participates in the construction of the mythical national memory in the way it mobilises 'the manpower and morale on which the defence of [the country's] sovereignty depend[s]' (p. 2). In an attempt to 'prevent civil insurrection amongst a population psychologically unhinged by the enemy's air force', the wound's invisibility is a feature of artistic productions of the time, along with the 'focus on buildings, not bodies' (p. 71).

Rawlinson takes the example of James Hanley's novel *No Directions*, in which the artist Stevens disregards the 'great shuddering arse' of an agonising bombed victim to enjoy the view of 'the city rocked with outrageous power' (1943, p. 139). Interestingly, Rawlinson also refers to Louis MacNeice, who wrote he was 'half appalled' and 'half enlivened' by a 'fantasy of destruction, in the face of 'a spectacle [...] on a scale which [he] had never come across' (1941, p. 118). The aesthetic spectacle of a city in ruins stirs a sense of patriotism as well as astonishment and marvel. The translation from the human to the architectonic is a way to make war more apprehensible to people as 'war's delight of the senses veiled atrocity' (Rawlinson, 2000, p. 78). For the government, not lingering over the lost lives or heavily wounded victims of the bombings was also a way of reinforcing the validity of war actions and war aims in popular consciousness. Violence on architecture is turned into resistance and 'brings home', connotes social cohesion, as even though millions of civilians' homes are damaged, a sense of pride is constructed around the still-standing monuments. The possible destruction of buildings like Saint- Paul's cathedral leads to an 'ideology of spectacle and the legitimisation of state violence' (Rawlinson, 2000, p. 77). Taking this idea even further, Alan Ross writes that 'London became a world capital [...] an emblem of freedom and culture'

(1950, np.), to the point where provincial towns ‘appeared to be jealous of London bombs’ (Calder, 1941, p. 108).

Allyson Booth defines as ‘corpselessness’ the British’s government erasure of the dead in World War I, in which ‘corpses would not be shipped home for burial and that photographs of corpses would not be circulated’ (1996, p. 11).<sup>180</sup> The Second World War saw the same principle applied, as ‘even official War Artists [were] barred from representing dead human figures’ (Wasson, 2010, p. 135). Julia Kristeva links this negation of physical violence to the notion of ‘abjection’, ‘what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules’ (1982, p. 4):

Refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. [...] the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. [...] In that compelling, insolent thing in the morgue’s full sunlight [...] I behold the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders. [...] The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost abjection. It is death infecting life. (pp. 3-4)

Critics (Robert Miles, Anne McClintock) have used Kristeva’s theory to explain how communities ‘defin[e] themselves and [establish] their boundaries by imaginatively expelling the abject’ (Wasson, 2000, p. 134), and therefore why the absence of hurt bodies in the media was an essential part of war propaganda.

Whilst it is true a heavy focus on the aesthetics of buildings and landscapes instead of human casualties is a recurrent device in many Blitz novels, one should not fail to notice the much more sceptical views of Britain at war in perhaps lesser-read works. Sara Wasson, in *Urban Gothic of the Second World War*, worked on the representation of the dead body in Second World War British novels, precisely examining ‘how the wartime writing of John

---

<sup>180</sup> Although the invention of halftone blocks made it possible to print photographs in newspapers, it was forbidden to take photographs of corpses and, in 1916, amendments to the Defence of the Realm Act made ‘any expression of opposition to, or criticism of, the war in any art from [...] a criminal offence’ (Hynes, 1992, p. 80).

Piper, Graham Sutherland and Mervyn Peake does not distance and tame corpses into a straightforward story of national triumph', unlike most war memorials which 'recuperate war deaths into a narrative of national glory' (2010, pp. 130-131). Similarly, the study *Conflict, Nationhood and Corporeality in Modern Literature* (2010) edited by Petra Rau raises interesting questions on 'Bodies-at-War' and insists on 'the disjunction between the official ways of obscuring the physical destruction of human life and artists' and writers' insistence on representing the vicissitudes of the body-at-war is striking' (Rau, 2010, p. 1).

I aim to extend Wasson's argument, first by considering women's work instead of men's work. Indeed, the representation of violence in women writers' work has scarcely been studied. Jenny Hartley in *Millions Like Us* dedicates a chapter to women's narration of 'War Wounds', yet focuses on 'not so much the physical damage as the less tangible harm done to and by the self in war' (1997, p. 161). Her analysis solely concentrates on either political violence, as she considers the rise of fascism in Storm Jameson's dystopia *In the Second Year* (1936), or violence taking place on the frontline, as in Sylvia Townsend Warner's war stories. Hartley's study would therefore suggest that home front violence receives little attention from women writers.

Furthermore, unlike Wasson who solely focused on poetry and prose fragments—she considers that 'when the corpse is recognised as material fact [...] it cannot sustain story' (2000, p. 137)—I will be looking at fiction, as I have done in the two previous chapters. I aim to broaden Wasson's analysis of the description of the 'corpse' to that of the hurt or wounded body, focusing on how physical and psychological war violence in the context of the Blitz is an essential part of women's war writings. My main argument here is that women's texts did not shy away from representing the reality of wartime violence, implying both physical wounds and mental trauma, without necessarily embellishing it or inscribing it into a 'heroic' discourse. My objective is to confront these texts with Calder and Rawlinson's arguments,

particularly the statements they make on the depiction of violence in Second World War British literature.

The texts I will consider here are Vera Brittain's novel *Account Rendered* (1945), Norah Hoult's *There Were No Windows* (1947), and Gladys Mitchell's *Sunset Over Soho* (1943). I have chosen to group these three texts together in the intention to study a corpus made up of texts as diverse as possible. Whilst *Account Rendered* is a novel, *There Were No Windows* is a fictional biography and *Sunset Over Soho* is a crime story. One of my aims is to be able to draw conclusions on Second World War women's literature based on a variety of different works in order to highlight how the 'Myth', or at least the People's War propaganda, was a construct of which many different writers working on many different texts were aware of and reflected on.

#### A) *Account Rendered* (1945), Vera Brittain

In 1937, Vera Brittain 'converted', to use her own words, to pacifism. After working as a Voluntary Aid Detachment nurse for much of the First World War<sup>181</sup>—in which she lost her brother Edward Brittain, his best friend Victor Richardson and her fiancé—the British writer explained how she came to the intimate conclusion that 'the suffering and service' that war entails systematically 'fail completely in their purpose' (Brittain, 1939, p. 19):

I do remember the period at which I ceased to take the Great War for granted as an 'act of God', and my service in it as my unquestionable duty to the British Government. [...] In August 1917, [...] when I had just finished the gruesome and complicated dressing of a desperately wounded prisoner, a disturbing thought struck me. Wasn't it odd that I, in Etaples, should be trying to save the life of a man whom my brother up at Ypres had perhaps done his best to kill? And didn't that argue the existence of some fundamental absurdity in the whole tragic situation? (pp. 18-19)

---

<sup>181</sup> First trained at Buxton, Brittain then worked in London, Malta and France.

After joining the Peace Pledge Union,<sup>182</sup> Brittain dedicated most of her life to ‘acting [as] a perpetual evangelist for peace and conciliation’ whilst also completing ‘relief and reconstruction work under such unofficial organisations as the Society of Friends’ (p. 20).

During the Second World War, the author travelled around Britain collecting funds for the P.P.U. and regularly wrote pieces for her series *Letters to Peacelovers* and the pacifist magazine *Peace News*.<sup>183</sup> In 1944, she spoke against saturation bombing of German cities in her essay *Massacre by Bombing* and later compiled an anthology with her husband entitled *Above All Nations* (1945).<sup>184</sup> Despite her heavy involvement in political activism<sup>185</sup> and her job as a fire warden, Brittain was still prolific throughout the war. Having already acquired literary recognition after the publication of her memoir *Testament of Youth* (1933), followed by *Testament of Friendship* (1940); the writer published another autobiographical work in 1941 entitled *England's Hour*, of which the title is an ironical reference to Churchill's famous speech ‘this was their finest hour’ (1940b). She wrote little fiction and only worked on one novel during the whole period of World War II, this time not autobiographical as her previous *The Dark Tide* (1923) or *Honourable Estate* (1936) had been, but was still very much inscribed in her pacifist advocacy.

---

<sup>182</sup> The P.P.U. was an initiative of the canon of St Paul's Cathedral Dick Sheppard, who published a letter in the press in 1934, inviting men (but not women) to send him postcards pledging never to support war (Rigby in Brock and Socknat, 1999, pp. 169-185). 135,000 men responded and became members.

<sup>183</sup> She eventually became a member of the magazine's editorial board and during the 1950s and 1960s was writing articles against apartheid and colonialism and in favour of nuclear disarmament.

<sup>184</sup> *Above All Nations: Acts Of Kindness Done To Enemies, In The Present War, By Men Of Many Nations* (1945) recorded a wide range of instances in which people, including many Germans, obeyed a superior moral rather than the State, be it by providing medical assistance or offering shelter. Ironically, the book was published just ten days after the shocking truth of the concentration camps of Belsen and Buchenwald was revealed.

<sup>185</sup> In fact, Brittain's name was a ‘prominent’ one on the Gestapo's list:

This list, of British people (approx. 3000) to be shot [or] imprisoned by the Gestapo when the Nazis landed in England, was discovered by the Americans in Berlin and published in British newspapers in mid-September when I was in Holland.

Finding my name on this list, together with G.'s and those of many prominent pacifists who like myself were under a cloud and almost ‘suspects’ in 1940, gave me a remarkable experience of catharsis. (Brittain, 1945b, p. 271)

*Account Rendered* was published in 1945, shortly before the end of the war. It tells the story of Francis Keynsham Halkin, a British ex-soldier who, after serving in France during the Great War, returns from the front suffering from what was known at the time as shell-shock (and what would most probably be called today Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). Destined to be a great musician, Halkin starts to show symptoms of amnesia and panic attacks during his time in France, which only get worse once he comes back home. Following a particularly bad anxiety fit during a piano performance, Halkin is forced to stop his music career and takes on his father's paper factory in Staffordshire instead. After a few years of reasonably stable mental health, the start of the Second World War and the constant threat of bombings in England revive his trauma and, during a very severe mental breakdown, Halkin murders his wife. The novel focuses on his trial, in which his lawyer pleads the ex-soldier suffers from serious psychological trauma and cannot be held responsible for his actions.

Although the story is fictional, it is largely based on the real experiences of Leonard Lockhart, a shell-shocked doctor that Vera Brittain personally knew and who was convicted for the murder of his spouse. The writer testified in court as a witness for the defence before Lockhart was convicted as 'guilty but insane' and sentenced 'to be detained as a criminal lunatic during his Majesty's Pleasure' (Brittain, 1939, November 18, p. 35).

Not half as well-known as her other works, it was deemed 'slow-paced and often superficial' by *The Times* when it came out (1945, np.). More recently, it was described by one of the rare critics who do not dismiss<sup>186</sup> or consider it pure pacifist propaganda as 'poorly constructed' and the result of a writer who 'on the evidence [...] is not a good novelist' (Simmers, 2016, para. 3). I personally would also say Brittain's *Account Rendered* characters are mostly two-dimensional, the narration full of very noticeable repetitions and the dialogues often lacking plausibility, causing the whole text to come across as very 'didactic'.

---

<sup>186</sup> Victoria Stewart does dedicate a short section to the novel in *Narratives of Memory, British Writing of the 1940s* (2006).

Still, I argue that this text is a very good example of Vera Brittain's 'dissenting perspective of the Second World War on both the international and the home front' (Bishop and Bennett, 1989, p. 12), particularly because of her focus on the psychological and physical consequences of war on both soldiers and civilians. The writer describes the main theme of her book as 'the importance of psycho-therapeutic treatment for battle casualties' (on the front line as well as on the home front) (Brittain, 1947, p. 195), a subject she researched thoroughly in 'about four years' psychological reading' (Brittain, 1979, p. 309). The novel is interesting especially because it links the First World War to the Second, considering the 1939-1945 conflict as a continuation of the first, through the prism of insanity. The Second World War bombings in *Account Rendered* reactivate mental health troubles initially caused by the ones in the Great War. Few novels during the war were able to look at it from such a distance and reflect on the long-term consequences of the conflict. *Account Rendered* concentrates on a taboo subject in British wartime society: the severe psychological struggle and disorders as a result of overwhelming fear. I contend here that Brittain's novel is a valuable study case for the wider objective of this chapter, as it gives a detailed description and analysis of the trauma of war that was unspoken in a society pressured by ideals of high morale.<sup>187</sup>

The first interesting aspect of Brittain's novel is her acute awareness of the taboo that prevails around the subjects of fear, anxiety and panic in a context of war, particularly during the Blitz. The writer is interested in the unhealthy, debilitating and even maddening pressure on citizens to maintain 'high morale' during periods of violent conflicts. In her Second World War diary, *Wartime Chronicles*, she constantly asserts her dread of coming across as cowardly if she shows how scared she is of being bombed:

---

<sup>187</sup> Brittain reflects on the term 'morale' in *England's Hour*:

Some years ago, when he still described himself as a pacifist, Dr. C. E. M. Joad defined civilian morale as the 'willingness to die quietly'. In those days his epigram seemed witty and amusing. It is less amusing now, when hundreds of civilians, for no fault except that of failing to oppose with sufficient vigour the policy of weak provocation pursued by successive British governments, have suffered with precisely the measure of grim resigned patience that Dr. Joad foresaw. (2005, p. 142)



How well I know the ‘anxiety conflict’ between standards of decent conduct & the instinct of self-preservation. It is because I know fear & despise myself for it that I get a ‘guilt’ complex when out of dangers that others have to endure—and therefore tend (as in the Blitz) to go into them deliberately, for no purpose but the maintenance of self-respect! G. [George Catlin] doesn’t understand this; having less fear than most people he has no guilt & therefore doesn’t mind doing things that *look* cowardly. (1942, October 4, p. 181)

The fact of putting one’s self in danger is assimilated to a sense of dignity in Brittain’s own memoirs shows the direct impact of forceful propaganda on all classes of British citizens, as civilians become home front soldiers and have to follow very similar stereotypical values of self-confidence and bravery.<sup>188</sup> The author highlights the detrimental aspect of overwhelming ‘People’s War’ values, as she depicts Halkin driving himself sick with worry at the idea that he might be a ‘coward, and disgrace himself’ if ever he could not ‘bear the strain’ (Brittain, 1945, p. 120). In *Account Rendered*, his ‘fear of fear’ itself is what paralyses him more than the fear of war. Francis is the victim of a ‘War of Nerves’ organised by his own country on its own people, as he is constantly asked to reach ‘an unattainable ideal of fortitude’ (Brittain, 1945, pp. 120-121).

In the novel, psychiatrist David Flint holds the governments of belligerent countries (including Britain) responsible for ‘The War of Nerves’: ‘the diabolical skill of those who conduct that kind of warfare lies in the fact that they don’t make people frightened of the actual enemy, but of monstrous phantasies in their own minds’. His colleague Professor

---

<sup>188</sup> Here, Brittain echoes an essay on ‘The Differential Diagnosis of the Psychoneuroses of War’:  
[i]n the last war it was said that soldiers broke down because they could not stand the strain of war, but it was really the strain of the conflict between self-preservation instinct and the demands of the ideal they had set themselves in respect of duty and self-respect. Such a conflict, whatever it be, will induce a severe sense of insecurity with its attendant emotion of anxiety. (‘R. G. G. and Hargreaves, 1940, p. 86)

MacLaren adds: ‘in modern war [...] you get the tensions created by the propaganda added to the greater range and damage-capacity of the weapons used’ (pp. 221-222).

Brittain had already explained in *England’s Hour* her vision of the sad reality behind the Britons’ apparent high morale, stating that bravery and courage were the forced response to a coercive public discourse which would only later lead to severe collapses:

Day after day, men and women working in offices, in factories, or in their own homes, fight their human fears with a brave show of cheerful indifference. Even the children sing in their shelters, subjecting themselves prematurely to adult self-control—with what long-range effects on their nervous systems, we do not yet know. [...] We need not suppose that the courage and gaiety in disaster so often publicised by the newspapers is invented or exaggerated by a government-inspired Press. This type of abnormal jubilation exists in all calamities. As most of us who have been through crises of fear or sorrow know, the first reaction when some dire experience has been survived is one of abnormal calm or hysterical cheerfulness. I realised this anew on September 7<sup>th</sup>, just as I realised it on many occasions twenty-five years ago; *I also know how acute is the reaction that sets in a day or two afterwards. If people who have lost their homes, been blown up, injured, burned, or buried were to be interviewed forty-eight hours later, the result would not always be so useful to the Sunshine Press.* (Brittain, 2005, pp. 142-143, my italics)

Whilst the government was not responsible for the fantasies created by late nineteenth and early twentieth century fiction, which triggered terrifying images of apocalypse in popular imagery, propaganda did put an enormous amount of pressure on people in terms of socially acceptable public behaviour, producing extreme tension in individuals already weakened by the First war. The British authorities had already faced the delicate problem of ‘shell-shocked’

returning soldiers in the Great War, and thus from the beginning aimed to limit, suppress and even censor any expression of psychological suffering.

Following the First World War, one in four soldiers<sup>189</sup> returned from the front showing symptoms such as amnesia, aphasia, tics, stomach cramps, vision loss, debilitating nightmares or even temporary paralysis. Their condition was at first associated with that of hysterical women (as described by Sigmund Freud in his 1895 *Studies on Hysteria*), before English physician Charles Myers coined the term ‘shell-shock’ and published the first paper on the subject in 1915. His theory was that shell-shock was the result of an attempt ‘to manage a traumatic experience by repressing or splitting off any memory of a traumatic event’, most often exposure to concussion blasts (Jones, 2012a, p. 18).

Myers requested that specialist clinics be set up to treat shell-shocked soldiers in France but later returned to the U.K., deterred by constant criticism from those ‘who believed that shell shock was simply cowardice or malingering’ and that ‘the condition would be better addressed by military discipline’ (ibid.). Both during and after the war, sympathy towards sufferers was rarely forthcoming. Men saw their reputation of archetypal good, strong soldiers severely affected, as their symptoms were a sign of ‘emotional weakness’ and cowardice. The *British Medical Journal* for example still stated in 1922 that ‘a poor morale and a defective training are one of the most important, if not the most important etiological factors [of mental distress]; also that shell-shock was a “catching” complaint’ (‘Shell Shock’, 1922, p. 322). While he was at Craiglockhart—one of the most famous hospitals for curing officers with war neuroses—Siegfried Sassoon wrote a poem entitled 'Survivors' in which he describes the shame felt by confused, distraught and sometimes mute ‘shell-shocked’ soldiers:

---

<sup>189</sup> Jay Winter estimates between ‘20 and 30% of all First World War casualties [...] were psychiatric in character’, in other words that in the British case ‘roughly one quarter of all soldiers who were unable to return to active service suffered from psychiatric, neurological or emotional disabilities of one form or another’ (2014, 18:00-18:30).

No doubt they'll soon get well; the shock and strain  
Have caused their stammering, disconnected talk.  
Of course they're 'longing to go out again',  
These boys with old, scared faces, learning to walk.  
They'll soon forget their haunted nights; their cowed  
Subjection to the ghosts of friends who died,  
Their dreams that drip with murder; and they'll be proud  
Of glorious war that shatter'd their pride...  
Men who went out to battle, grim and glad;  
Children, with eyes that hate you, broken and mad. (1917, p. 131)

In 1940, with Britain again at war, Myers wrote his memoirs *Shell Shock in France 1914–18, Based on a War Diary* in which he described his theories about shell shock and its treatment. These were not well-received, particularly by the military, as the *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps* argued that the book revealed a ‘lack of understanding and conviction’ (quoted in Jones, 2012a, p. 18). Jones states that the military ‘may have felt that Myers' criticisms of the army's medical services were unpatriotic and defeatist’ and ‘revealed the inability of a mass, hierarchical organisation to accommodate the nuanced policy recommendations of an innovative clinician’ (ibid.).

In *Account Rendered*, Brittain cleverly links World War I veterans’ shell-shock symptoms to the distress caused by the bombings during the Blitz, highlighting the government’s inherent fear of facing once again acute emotional distress in the form of panic or ‘shelter mentality’. As Matt Brosnan explains, ‘the government was worried aerial bombardment could destroy civilian morale’ and seriously affect the communal effort (quoted in Harby, 2015, para. 20). German historian Dietmar Süß notes that ‘the idea that masses in a state of terror ceased to behave humanely and became transformed into a violent mob verging

on the bestial was a widespread assumption' (2014, p. 21). Thus, both national and local newspapers strived to deny rumours of people breaking into hysterical fits, and Mass-Observation reports underlined the admirable absence of panic.<sup>190</sup> Yet, in her novel, Brittain dares to depict what the public discourse constantly aimed to minimise. The Second World War for the pacifist writer is not a new, different and more legitimate one, it is simply the absurd sequel to the First, thus civilians endure the same ordeal as soldiers at the front. Francis Halkin feels the same way he did in the trenches when listening to the news in 1939:

Hitler's recent annexations of Czechoslovakia had revived the host of sinister, half-formulated fears which six months ago had begun to prey, like mordant vultures, upon his mental and physical vitals. (Brittain, 1945, p. 61)

Brittain's is one of the very few Blitz novels that describes the horrific repercussions of the bombings without focusing on architecture. *Account Rendered* depicts the very rapid deterioration of a man's mental health, a man whose anxiety and panic are inherently linked to both the fear of warfare and the tremendous amount of pressure he is put under.

This social pressure to be brave, courageous and imperturbable in the face of the enemy is precisely the reason why the writer faced difficulties with the publication of her novel. First, she feared for the 'real' Francis Halkin (Leonard Lockhart)'s wellbeing. When he moved to Carbis Bay where she knew most people read her books, Brittain doubted he would be 'tough' enough to bear the stigma he would most certainly be the victim of after everyone read the novel (Brittain, 1943, April 5, p. 225). The writer believed it was not 'really wise to go to a village with a past like his' and did not 'want to add to the difficulties of one who ha[d] suffered so much' (1943, April 6, p. 225). Unsure if she would obtain the full consent of Leonard Lockhart to publish her novel, Brittain was 'much depressed by growing certainty' that her work would not be accessible to the British public, even though much of it had 'real

---

<sup>190</sup> See Calder's chapter 'Day by Day' in *The Myth of the Blitz* (1991), in which he deals with this issue in detail.

beauty'. She still hoped it could be released in the U.S.A., Canada and Sweden (1943, April 8, p. 225). What is interesting is that Lockhart himself did not seem to be aware of the potential harm the novel could do to him, he 'obviously ha[d] no idea or suspicion of the book problem', but Brittain was extremely aware of the potential social repercussions on the doctor's life (1943, April 12, p. 227). Because of the advice she received not to include Lockhart's real name in order for him not to be publicly shamed, Brittain rewrote the novel changing the doctor's name and fictionalising part of his story by making him a musician and therefore less recognisable.

The novel was indeed first published in America in the final months of 1944, where it 'sold badly' and got 'tendentious' reviews (Bishop and Bennett, 1989, p. 258). It was only made available in August 1945 in Britain, where on the contrary the first edition was immediately exhausted just by the 'pre-publication sale of 50,000 copies' (Brittain, 1945, August 24, p. 268). The novel might have been more successful in Britain for the simple reason that it convinced a readership victim of nearly daily air raids during the Blitz, a readership who probably welcomed a story that could be seen as cathartic to those who had lived through both wars.

The second interesting aspect of Brittain's novel is her very detailed description of 'war neurosis'. The novel is especially remarkable in the sense it is able to reflect on the mental distress caused by bombing. The writer started to reflect on the inherent link between war and mental health when she read *The Neuroses in War* by Emanuel Miller in 1944. The work described symptoms that reminded her of her own experience in World War I:

Began to read *The Neuroses in War* & found it fascinating. Got my ideas from it for my book. Continued it til bedtime. It is illuminating about our own family history & my own temperament—neurotic both by heredity & childhood environment. (Brittain, 1942, October 4, p. 181)

Still fascinated by *The Neuroses in War*. Gave me various ideas for conversations etc. [...] Thought as I walked over the bits of *Testament of Youth* which I re-read this afternoon, & which bears out so much of the psychology as clinically defined in *The Neuroses in War*. Thought how all my life had really been a battle against fear, both inherited & environmental. (1942, October 8, p. 182)

As Andrea Peterson argues, Vera Brittain used *Account Rendered* as ‘a kind of therapy’ (2006, p. 185), both for the suffering she endured as a nurse during the First World War and on the home front in the second. The main argument of the novel is that the Second World War produced just as devastating psychological consequences for soldiers as for civilians, and was only made worse by the lack of acknowledgement of the serious mental distress some were under: ‘in an Army you do at least try to train people for what’s coming. With civilians, it’s nothing but the survival of the fittest—and the luckiest’ (Brittain, 1945, p. 124). Brittain herself had a severe breakdown after the Great War, which led to symptoms of depression, ‘hallucinations and dreams and insomnia’ which she thought made her drift ‘to the borderland of craziness’ and physical changes (1978, p. 496). According to Peterson, ‘the most striking manifestation of her trauma’ was her skin (2004, p. 33); in *Testament of Youth*, Brittain confessed experiencing ‘the horrible delusion [...] that [her] face was changing’ and she ‘was ashamed, to the point of agony, of the sinister transformation’. She wrote she was ‘developing a beard’ and ‘turning into a witch’ (1978, pp. 496-497). At the onset of the Second World War, these symptoms came back again, as the war progressed from its quiet early stages to the actual bombing of Britain:

[...] went on to skin specialist, Dr Bran (passing two houses completely wrecked in Harley St) & learnt that what I had was ‘chronic dermatitis’, aggravated by the effect of the bomb blast He gave me a sedative X-ray treatment, prescribed some drugs. (Brittain, 1940, October 5, p. 59)

In *Account Rendered*, the first trigger of Francis' anxiety is his appointment as ARP warden, more precisely the fact he is put in charge of overseeing the construction of shelter facilities in his town. From the day he is handed the plans of the shelters, Halkin enters a very long phase of being constantly 'semi-conscious' as he is trying to make out his past memories of times in the trenches from his 'daytime problems' (Brittain, 1945, p. 122). The narration jumps back and forth between 1917 and 1939 as the main character becomes prone to reoccurring nightmares and hallucinations, making it difficult even for the reader to keep track of Halkin's thoughts. At first unaware of the real object of his debilitating fear, wondering why he is feeling so tense, Francis realises after a conversation with Labour M.P. Ruth Alleyndene—who assures him a conflict is ineluctable—that the idea of war itself is what he fears, more particularly the bombs:

Francis had gone to bed to sleep restlessly and to dream about the dreaded return of war, which he saw as a monstrous Frankenstein whose clutching hand stretched like a cloud from a far horizon, and gradually lengthened till it blotted out the sky. (p. 112)

Months later, as spring moves into summer and 'Neville's guarantee to Poland in the House of Commons' (p. 119) becomes more and more likely to have to be acted upon, Halkin's 'inward feeling of fear and distress' increases (p. 120). The more he helps with the logistics of obtaining sandbags, fire buckets and stirrup pumps, the more he finds himself unable to cope with his returning memories:

Exactly what he dreaded, he could not have explained in words, but it was something monstrous...horrific...a chaos of panic and wound and death. [...] He began to sleep badly and the half-submerged recollections of the Arras battlefield mingled with nightmares of gruesome damage to familiar people and places. Vividly, in the silence of the small hours, memories had come back to him of men on the wire... men with blackened limbs, or sightless eyes starting fixedly at the sky; disembowelled men; men



without faces. As the wet summer dragged on against the rumble of war rumours and the clash of ‘incidents’ in the Danzig corridor, these phantasies had no longer been confined to the long-dead soldiers on the Western Front, nor even to Halkin’s employees for whose safety he was responsible. The pictured casualties began to wear the faces of his intimate friends—of Wesley Bates, or Alfred Hunchback, of his faithful servant the Kiddlemores. (p. 121)

On September 3, 1939, the day France and Britain declare war on Germany, Francis is told by colleagues he should take a break from work as he is ‘looking absolutely done-up’, especially considering ‘his unusual pallor and the lines of strain round his eyes’ (p. 125).

On June 14, 1940, when Paris falls, Halkin’s anxiety culminates in a terrible seizure that leaves him in a distraught, confused state for several hours. On that evening, he kills his wife:

Now that catastrophe, so long anticipated, seemed really to be about to descend on them, he felt more than ever doubtful of his ability to bear the increasing strain that he would have to carry. Already, even since the news bulletin, a strange feeling of unreality was coming upon him. [...] He shuddered violently. A feeling of breathlessness seized him; an unwonted pain cramped his chest, and for a few seconds he became conscious of palpitation. [...] The sense of unreality of gradually dissolving into spaces, which he had noticed indoors, seemed to be growing upon him, eclipsing memory and dulling awareness. (pp. 138-140)

The main link connecting Halkin’s breakdowns during the First and the Second War is the bombings. Halkin was buried alive for several hours by a bomb whilst fighting in France in 1918, and consequently developed a paralysing fear of re-experiencing the deafening noise and blinding darkness.

Brittain highlights the specificity of the fear of bombs, a fear that took on a new intensity in the inter-war period as it ‘loomed large in the writing of contemporary

anthropologists, psychiatrists, sociologists and novelists' (Burney, 2012, p. 50). The threat of aerial bombardment had been developed in particular by a number of British aviation writers since the end of the previous century. Collectively, 'they argued that the coming of aviation had fundamentally changed war, making it faster and more destructive and—crucially—aimed principally at civilians rather than soldiers and sailors' (Holman, 2011, p. 291).<sup>191</sup> The Zeppelin raids on Britain from 1915 and the heavy Gotha raids of 1917 and 1918 seemed to 'show that bombers could always get through any air defence' and contributed to the making of a powerful myth of unbeatable, indestructible bomber planes which could even potentially deliver lethal poison gas (ibid.).

Thus, reports by twenty-first century historians, who use phrases such as 'the age of anxiety', 'the age of insecurity' and, most recently, the 'morbid age'<sup>192</sup> to characterise the period. The legacy of shell-shock and political, scientific and military accounts of a new era of 'total war' (based largely on the situation in Spain) contributed to the notion of civilian vulnerability to air raids (Patterson, 2007). People were terrified by the prospect of a Second World War in which 'psychic casualties were widely expected to outnumber physical ones' (Burney, 2012, p. 50). As the London-based psychoanalyst Edward Glover stated in a BBC radio broadcast:

[...] the whole atmosphere of modern war is likely to revive those unreasoning fears that the human race has inherited from its remotest ancestors; gas masks that make us look like strange animals; underground shelters; [...] enemies overhead and unseen; wailing sirens; screaming air bombs. [...] Small wonder, then, that we are afraid lest in the face of a real danger our first impulse should be to behave like little children. [...] We are afraid of being afraid. (Glover, 1940, pp. 21–22)

---

<sup>191</sup> Brett Holman quotes as examples 'Lord Montagu of Beaulieu, F.W. Lanchester, Claude Grahame-White and Harry Harper before and during the First World War, and P.R.C. Groves, J.F.C. Fuller, Basil Liddell Hart and J.M. Spaight during the 1920s and early 1930s' (2011, p. 291).

<sup>192</sup> See *The Morbid Age: Britain and the Crisis of Civilisation, 1919-1939* (2010) by Richard Overy.

Articles in medical journals predicted a high degree of panic and called for a ‘psychological ARP unit’, and an Emergency Mental Health committee was indeed constituted, as ‘wards in a few London hospitals were readied to take in civilian psychological casualties’ (Burney, 2012, p. 50). There was no expectation of the ‘Blitz spirit’, but exactly the contrary.

However, when the German bombing campaign began in earnest in the summer of 1940, despite some early reports of panic, emergency stations for mental casualties were closed, and Glover and his colleagues turned to reflect on the ‘remarkable capacity for human adaptation in times of tension’ (Glover, 1942, p. 28). Vera Brittain, like Angus Calder sixty years later, explains this shift from an intense fear preceding the war to an apparent lack of panic during it by the overwhelming influence of propaganda.<sup>193</sup> To her, people did panic, but were ignored. *Account Rendered* describes how the mystified power of the bomb and the anxiety it provoked was not accompanied by the necessary psychological help.

Interestingly enough however, one of the very few critical analysis of *Account Rendered* argues that whilst the novel is original in the sense that it focuses on the importance of war neurosis, it does a disservice to women on the home front by minimising their suffering at the expense of a man’s: ‘ultimately, Brittain would seem to be privileging the suffering of male combatants over that of their (pre-dominantly) female non-combatant counterparts’ (Peterson, 2006, p. 186). Andrea Peterson writes that the novel ‘gives scant

---

<sup>193</sup> Still, although it made little impact on the public discourse at the time, Dr. Aubrey Lewis did warn that the full effect of ‘war-related stress’ might be delayed and that ‘the evil harvest may be reaped afterwards’ (1943, p. 27). Similarly, Dr. C. P. Blacker found that many directors of psychiatric clinics believed a ‘latent neurosis’ existed in the civilian population (1946, p. 175).

Edgar Jones, historian in the Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience department at King’s College London today, conducts research on the somatic disorders that civilians developed during the Blitz. Jones explains that whilst there is today a clear narrative for shell-shock in World War I and P.T.S.D. in later conflicts such as the Vietnam or Iraq wars, there is none for World War II. He suggests that trauma from the bombings was very probably expressed in bodily form rather than distress because of the social pressure of a very ‘stiff-upper-lip culture’; and the stigma associated with mental illness. Jones published ‘“The Gut War”: Functional Somatic Disorders in the UK During the Second World War’, which tries to link the rise in the number of peptic ulcers to the stress caused by the air raids. He argues that psychological wounds very often took form in intestinal problems, which probably contributed to giving the illusion that people were not excessively disturbed by the bombings (2012b).

indication of her commitment to feminism’ and only shows ‘her superficial acknowledgment of women’s suffering’, particularly because of the fact the man character, and main sufferer of P.T.S.D, is a man, and ‘Brittain makes only a passing reference to one female civilian victim’ (ibid.).

Peterson argues that, had she wanted to, Brittain could easily have written her narrative around a female protagonist—and could have even retained the factual basis and the ‘exciting’ narrative surrounding of a murder trial in her novel, as at least two women were tried for infanticide as a direct result of war trauma during the First World War (ibid.). For the critic, this would have served much better a purpose by shedding light on women’s war trauma.

I find this argument unconvincing. On the one hand, the writer’s story is not entirely fictional and is based on a trial she was personally involved in, which explains why the main character is a man. On the other, I believe it necessary to consider the point that Brittain’s objective might have been three-fold: to draw attention to psychological distress caused by bombings and the lack of support given to sufferers, highlight the inherent link between the two wars to question the idea that World War II was a necessary one and, more subtly but just as prominent, to participate in the wider reflection on masculinity which had started shortly after the Great War.

In reaction to the horrors of the First World War, the period of 1920-1940 was characterised by a distaste of ‘the romantic languages of national pride’ that produced a ‘realignment of sexual identities’ (Light, 1991, p. 8). ‘Little men’, ordinary people became representatives of the British nation and took on qualities previously regarded as distinctively feminine, such as domesticity. During the Second World War, on April 24, 1941, the ‘little men’ of the home front were described as followed on the BBC radio programme that discussed the topic ‘What is an English Man?’:

We've all been giving examples of men we've admired [...] all the men we've singled out have been quiet men. I won't say soft, but quiet stay-at home, good, ideal husbands, good neighbours, but not forceful and not leaders. ('What is an English Man?', 1942, p. 8)

As Sonya Rose explains, in World War II; 'the virility of the "good citizen", and masculinity itself, were tempered' (2003, p. 153). Stereotypes of masculinity combined the 'anti-heroic mood' of the inter-war years and 'those long associated with the soldier-hero—that most clearly exemplified by the combat soldier' (ibid.).

Yet, while 'a politics of masculinity was infrequently overt in World War II Britain, the means of manliness were everywhere', 'portrayed in the iconography of workers and their work, in armed service recruitment posters and in wartimes advertisements aimed at men and at women' (p. 152). Whilst the press 'lauded British sense of humour and camaraderie as a national and masculine characteristic' in opposition to the 'hyper-masculine', brutal and cruel "Jerry" (p. 154); 'emotional reserve' still remained the quintessential attribute of the respectable British man (p. 157). The British 'stiff upper-lip' has a long history, and John Tosh suggests that it originates from the Victorian era, in which the dissociation of gender virtues led to 'affection and tenderness' being associated with mothers, while fathers were supposed to be 'stern and undemonstrative' (1991, p. 65). In the Second World War, 'if a man lost control of his emotions, he was not being manly' (Rose, 2003, p. 157).<sup>194</sup>

In light of this, Halkin's character offers a strong alternative to the stereotypical 'emotionally reserved' home front soldier. Halkin is essentially a victim of overwhelming

---

<sup>194</sup> Journalist Beverley Nichols highlights this in a piece entitled 'Is Your Child Your Own or the State's?':

How many grown men [...] achieving heroism [...] realise that their toughness and their endurance stretch back [...] back into the mists of childhood, when they ran crying to mother with a cut finger and she said [...] 'Brave little boys don't cry!' How many women keeping a stiff upper lip during [...] danger and difficulty, carrying on calmly during a raid when they feel much more like bursting into tears, realise that their behaviour was determined for them long ago by a quiet voice saying, during those childish tantrum, 'That's not a pretty face to make, darling [...] and if the wind were to change it might stay like that'. (1941, p. 2)

sadness, fear and anxiety, all exacerbated by the very pressure he feels not to express them. The character experiences such frustration that the narrator describes him as a man with 'several personalities': 'Francis the musician had first put into coherent words the social ideals which Francis the employer was to follow' (Brittain, 1945, p. 75), and 'he [was] struggling to emerge from the overburdened manufacturer and air raid warden, the murderer, the prisoner, the criminal lunatic' (p. 291). Physically, Halkin also contrasts the criteria of the soldier-hero. He is extremely changed by his ordeal, 'his back was bent and his shoulders crouched like the shoulders of a hunchback' (p. 144) and his face constantly shows 'an expression of apathy' (p. 227). The main character is torn and confused between his individual feelings of fear and anxiety and the emotional restraint he knows he should show, thus often experiencing a sense of loss of identity. A good example of this idea would be when he regains consciousness after first being hit by a bomb: "Where on earth am I?" He asked, relieved to have found his voice, which at least established his identity with himself' (p. 36).

Halkin does not live up to the perfect home front hero, and the author specifically highlights the importance he places on his relationship with women, who complement his own qualities of 'sensibility' and 'tenderness' which at the time were seen as solely feminine attributes. Francis Halkin is a character based on a real person but also largely modelled on a woman. Vera Brittain decided to create a life for her character that bears many parallels with her own. Both her father and Francis' father are paper manufacturers; both go to Oxford and are awarded excellent degrees; both share very similar childhood fears; both have their palm read and are predicted a life of doom; and most importantly of all, both internalise their fears instead of expressing them, as Halkin is conscious that 'whatever happened he must never allow that terror, that potential desertion, to become apparent' (p. 17). As Peterson writes, 'there are many other incidents concerning Halkin's life that clearly recall *Testament of*

*Youth*' (2006, p. 193). Most tellingly, Halkin describes himself as 'a damaged piece of wartime wreckage' (Brittain, 1945, p. 302), just as Brittain had declared herself to be 'nothing but a piece of wartime wreckage' too (1978, p. 490).

What is more, Halkin is also constantly surrounded by women. The book starts with him thinking about his mother, carries on with him falling in love, following his female piano mentor's advice, and marrying again after his wife's death. All of his emotions are triggered by the potential consequences certain events could have on his relationship to the women around him, be it disappointing them, hurting them or losing them. They are the ones who support him and in the end save him from prison and help him redeem himself, his second wife being the one who helps him reaching a stage where 'his final fear was conquered' (p. 327). The last chapter ends on Francis asking heavily pregnant Enid to sing the *Morning Hymn* as tribute to his mother and as a loving welcome to his future daughter. It is through the voice of a woman and with the thought of more women to come that Francis finds peace:

*Soon night will pass;  
Through field and grass  
What odors sweet the morning sendeth;  
O'er vale and height,  
"Let there be light!"  
Thus saith the Lord, and darkness endeth.*

*From heaven's expanse,  
Through all the lands  
The angles soar in rapture glorious;  
Sun's light unfurl'd  
Flames through the world;*

*Lord, let us strive and be victorious.* (p. 4, in italics in the text)

I thus disagree with Peterson who argues that Halkin's portrayal sustains the idea that 'men should bravely face both the physical and psychological horrors of armed combat whilst in contrast their female counterparts [are] less able to cope [with the War]' (2006, p. 187). I, on the contrary, see *Account Rendered* as furthering the representation of a new, evolving and far less traditional masculinity, in which men are necessarily complemented by women and not systematically opposed to them. Although Francis Halkin's crime and later his absolution by Brittain certainly does look peculiar and might go against our expectations, Brittain's main argument here is that shell-shock and war trauma, when ignored, cause the most heinous atrocities.

Although *Account Rendered* is not considered by some critics Brittain's best work, it is an excellent example of a novel that steps outside the conventional discourses of the Blitz. Despite what Calder and Rawlinson assert when referring to World War II British writers, Vera Brittain did not shy away from describing extremely severe war neurosis that led to a man killing his wife. A fervent pacifist, Brittain inscribed this book directly into her wartime pacifist activism, and placed as an epigraph a sentence taken from French writer Léon Bloy's novel *Le Pèlerin de l'Absolu*: '*Souffrir passe, avoir souffert ne passe jamais*' (suffering disappears, having suffered never does) (Brittain, 1945, p. iii).

Brittain herself explains in 1925 that her 'literary and political work' were entwined: 'The first [...] is simply a popular interpretation of the second; a means of presenting my theories before people who would not understand or be interested in them if they were explained seriously' (quoted in Anon, undated, para. 5). Later on in her life she maintained that 'the power of ideas to change the shape of the world and even help to eliminate its evils.



[...] Contemporary writers have the important task of interpreting for their readers this present revolutionary and complex age which has no parallel in history' (ibid.).

B) *There Were No Windows* (1944), Norah Hoult

Despite having been a particularly prolific writer who wrote twenty-five novels and four short-story collections as well as an autobiography, Norah 'Ella' Hoult is a long 'forgotten outsider in the canon of Irish writing' (Gleeson, 2015b, para. 1). There is scarcely any information available on Hoult, apart from her work itself. Born in 1898 in Dublin to a Catholic mother and a Protestant father, she lost her parents very early on and was sent to live in England with family friends. She was married for a few years and lived with her husband Oliver Stonor at The Cottage in Windsor Great Park but, 'upon realising she was expected to cook and do domestic chores', the author 'walked away' and the relationship ended in 1934 (ibid., para. 9). She then moved to London and there regularly attended parties and mingled with other writers in the most prominent literary circles of the time. Norah counted James Stephens and Oliver St John Gogarty among her friends, as well as Yeats, who she used to say 'upon seeing her at a party asked someone "who is the woman with fine eyes?"' (ibid.). She also corresponded actively with Irish authors such as Brigid Brophy, Sean O'Casey, and Sean O'Faolain.

Hoult was one of Ireland's most censored writers under the Censorship of Publications Act of 1929. Ten of her books were banned, judged 'obscene', like many other works by writers who 'were found offensive' and 'officially regarded as agents of decadence and social disintegration [...] striking at the roots of family life and moral decency' (Collins, 2008, para. 4).<sup>195</sup> President Éamon de Valera in particular felt that the artistic sphere in Ireland was to be

---

<sup>195</sup> Hoult was known for her disregard of conventional social manners. Interviewed by Sinéad Gleeson, a close friend of hers named Nuala Nally recalls the following:

I called on [Norah] every two weeks over a period of three to four years. She never mentioned that she was a writer at all, but I knew. We'd go for a drink – she loved whiskey – but was banned from a couple of pubs because she was outspoken and rowdy. She was also an

rewarded for observing the 'holiest traditions', and censored when it did not live up to this ideal (Kennedy, 1990, p. 23).<sup>196</sup>

Nevertheless, Norah Hoult was considered an 'absolutely brilliant writer' and was admired and 'well-known at the time in a way she isn't now' (Beauman quoted in Gleeson, 2015a, para. 2). Her first collection of short stories *Poor Women!* (1928) received considerable critical acclaim and was reprinted several times. Mainly, her works focus on class, disability, office politics and working women's lives (Gleeson, 2015b, para. 9). Heather Ingman in *Irish Women's Fiction: From Edgeworth to Enright* says Hoult 'employed the popular novel for feminist protest' as she focuses mainly on the struggles of female characters, often single, independent women (quoted in Gleeson, 2015a, para. 4). The writer's next two books, *Holy Ireland* (1935) and its sequel *Coming from the Fair* (1937), depict Irish family life before World War I. Hoult eventually left Britain and returned to Ireland in 1957, where she wrote and published several more novels before dying in 1984.

Recently, four works have been published as different initiatives to resurrect Norah Hoult's forgotten work. Evelyn Conlon and Hans-Christian Oeser edited an anthology of short stories by women writers entitled *Cutting the Night in Two* (2001), and Sinéad Gleeson published *The Long Gaze Back: An Anthology of Irish Women Writers* (2015); both works include one short story by Hoult. More importantly, in 2016, Kathleen P. Costello-Sullivan

---

inveterate smoker, and smoked in bed so her blankets were full of cigarette burns. The cottage was pretty but old-fashioned, and overrun with mice. Once she offered me a biscuit with my tea, and there was dead mouse in the tin. Without flinching she said, 'Oh, I think rigor mortis'. (Gleeson, 2015b, para. 8)

<sup>196</sup> Several Irish writers contested the decisions of the Censorship of Publications Boards and some left the country. The author Mervyn Wall explains that during the 1930s there was:

a general intolerant attitude to writing, painting and sculpture. These were thought dangerous, likely to corrupt faith and morals. [...] One encountered frequently among ordinary people bitter hostility to writers. [...] Obscurantism had settled on the country like a fog, so of course anyone who had eyes to see and the heart to feel, was rebellious. (1971, np.)

The Academy of Letters established by William Butler Yeats also strived to fight censorship with solidarity among writers. Sean O'Faolain, perhaps the most vociferous critic of the censorship laws, wrote: 'Our Censorship [...] tries to keep the mind in a state of perpetual adolescence in the midst of all the influences that must, in spite of it, pour in from the adult world'. (1936, np.)

brought out *A Critical Edition* of Hoult's short story collection *Poor Women*, and London's Persephone Books issued a new edition of her novel *There Were No Windows* in 2005.

Despite these attempts at uncovering Hoult's work, the writer's oeuvre attracts very little attention from critics and is solely mentioned in passing, in one sentence only in Phyllis Lassner's *British Women's Writers of World War II* and Jenny Hartley's *Million Like Us*. I however believe her novel *There Were No Windows* offers an original and very valuable point of view on the home front in London. Furthering the positive criticism it received after its recent re-edition,<sup>197</sup> I argue here that this novel is a particularly good illustration of a woman writer daring to question the People's War popular discourse on resilience by depicting the slow physical and mental deterioration of a woman's body as a metaphor for the destruction of the city during the war. I contend it is a good example of an author giving a voice to, as opposed to silencing, the hurt and wounded body in wartime society.

*There Were No Windows* was first published in 1944. The story is located in the English capital during the Blitz, somewhere in Kensington in a year that is not specified.<sup>198</sup>

---

<sup>197</sup> In *The Tablet* Isabel de Bertodano praised *There Were No Windows*':

strangely contemporary air [...]. In spite of her grim subject, Hoult's story, though sad and raw, is never gloomy and often funny [...]. In spite of her eccentricities the reader falls slightly in love with Claire, a romantic character who is here exposed in all the vulnerability of old age. It could easily become too depressing, but *There Were No Windows* has a lightness of touch, is beautifully written and Norah Hoult has produced an honest, compelling account of Alzheimer's without ever betraying her friend. (quoted in 'Our Reviewers Write', 2006, p. 7)

The novel was also chosen as a *Spectator* book of the year by Alan Judd. He considers it 'intelligent, unsparing, generous, ironic and funny [...]. Written with nice social observation, it deals with sadness but it's not depressing' (2005, p. 27).

<sup>198</sup> In fact, the exact date not being mentioned reinforces the feelings of confusion, fear and loneliness that the main character experiences, trapped in her dark hose and disconnected from the outside world. In the first chapter of the novel Miss Temple realises that she loses control over her life and over her own mind when she forgets what day it is:

Yet there were still dates, and it was important—since that woman had had the audacity to come right out with the statement that she was *mad*—that she should know what date it was. No doubt that was one of the questions they would ask. And if she didn't know, they might consign her straight away to Bedlam. There must be a calendar or almanac of some kind in the house. She would go from room to room and search for one.

Upstairs and downstairs she wandered, her eyes going round the four walls of every room. It was extraordinary that there shouldn't be a calendar somewhere [...]. She was looking for a date, but what date? If someone asked her suddenly, what are you looking for? she would say more prettily: 'I am looking for time'. (Hoult, 2005, pp. 24-25)

Claire Temple, an ageing aristocrat who used to hold popular literary meetings and parties in her large Victorian house, is slowly losing her memory and showing worrying signs of dementia. Victim of attacks of paranoia but mostly of desperate loneliness, Claire finds herself locked in her own failing body, overtaken by a situation beyond her control. The novel is narrated by an external narrator who presents the story from the different perceptual and experiential points of view of Miss Temple and other people in her entourage.

The character of Claire Temple is based on the life of Violet Hunt (1862-1942), a relatively successful author in her time, also known for her literary salons, where one could mingle with Rebecca West, D. H. Lawrence, Somerset Maugham, Ezra Pound, Joseph Conrad, Henry James, and her lover Ford Maddox Ford. It was with Ford that she founded *The English Review* in 1908, a literary magazine created ‘in a rage that there was no place in England to print a poem by Thomas Hardy’, and as a venue for some of the best writers available (Pound and Spann, 1964, p. 326). Though she married, Hunt maintained several relationships with older men, amongst whom H. G. Wells. Moira Hodgson writes that Hunt was ‘sexually and professionally emancipated long before the notion of the new woman became popular’ (1990). The author liked to think of herself as a ‘female rake’ who ‘snubbed eligibles on principle’ and preferred married men because ‘no one could imagine that I wanted to catch them’ (quoted in Hodgson, 1990, para. 3). Moira Hodgson adds, however, that ‘the business of home wrecking [...] interfered drastically with [Hunt’s] other ambition: to be a respectable Victorian gentlewoman’ (para. 4). More than her novels, it is Hunt’s diaries<sup>199</sup> that are the most interesting in terms of the stark contrast between a woman with ‘an extravagant personality, sharp-spoken and a consummate flirt’ and the ‘Victorian vixen who ended up bitter and rejected by men’ (ibid.). This last idea of a ‘bitter’ spinster is one that

---

<sup>199</sup> See Barbara Belford’s *Violet—The Story of the Irrepressible Violet Hunt and Her Circle of Lovers and Friends—Ford Maddox Ford, H. G. Wells, Somerset Maugham, and Henry James* (1990) for an excellent reviews of Hunt’s diaries and more detail on her other works.

Hoult particularly insists on in *There Were No Windows*, an aspect that some contemporary readers find irritating. The Persephone website writes:

[Claire's] treatment of her servants, and everyone else she considers to be her social inferior, shocks us now, perhaps somewhat more than it shocked readers in the 1940s, to whom it may have seemed old-fashioned but not unusual in a woman of her age and class, who had enjoyed her heyday before the *First World War*. (Persephone Website, 2015, para. 5)

My main argument here is that the author of *There Were No Windows* uses the deteriorating mental and physical condition of Claire Temple as a metaphor for the destruction of London during the Blitz. As the first sentence of the novel implies, Miss Temple's mind becomes particularly vulnerable after the explosion of a time bomb: '[s]he had been living quite happily because quite importantly in the old house, when a sudden loud explosion arrested her attention, and tugged it to that No Man's Land territory in which she found herself marooned between the new, the past and the present' (Hoult, 2005, p. 3). This time bomb is what symbolically signals the slow descent into madness of Claire, whose ineluctable death is expected but painfully delayed. Julia Briggs states that 'the noise caused by the bomb [...] anticipates Claire's own final explosion of terror and anger at the end of the novel' (2005, p. 330).

The link between the war and Claire's health is established through three clear strategies. The first one is the most central to the book, giving it its title, the darkness and enclosure in Claire's mind as a parallel for the imposed blackout on a claustrophobic city. Secondly, the woman's frustrated sexual desire reinforces the image of an increasingly conservative society. Lastly, Miss Temple's rapidly failing body, particularly her incontinence and her haggard appearance are a good illustration of the idea that the Blitz was 'absorbed' by the civilians' bodies, as their minds were controlled by public narratives of resilience. The

external hell that surrounds Claire's Kensington house is inseparable from the hell that is pervading her own mind and her own life. The deteriorating ageing body of a once beautiful and appreciated woman who sinks into paranoia and senility offers a radically different alternative to the People's War paradigm.

One of the main features of Hoult's novel is referred to in the title itself, the absence of windows, more explicitly the enforced blackout in Britain in the war years. Blackout regulations were imposed on September 1, 1939, two days before the start of the war; the country was plunged into darkness until April 30, 1945, the day Hitler committed suicide. It was thought that navigation and targeting would be made considerably more difficult if all the lights on the ground were extinguished, and civilians were thus required to cover all windows and doors with heavy curtains, paint or cardboard. All streetlamps were switched off or dimmed and headlights on cars were fitted with covers so that their beams deflected lights downwards.<sup>200</sup>

Although this was not the first time the blackout was implemented in Britain (a milder version had been introduced during the First World War) and people were trained for several weeks in 1938 to check for light leaks, citizens had to readjust to living in a dark and perhaps even sinister city. Felicity Goodall compiles civilians' reactions to their first evenings in total obscurity in an article on 'Life during the Blackout'. This is what *Daily Herald* journalist Mea Allan wrote in 1939:

I stood on the footway of Hungerford bridge across the Thames watching the lights of London go out. The whole great town was lit up like a fairyland, in a dazzle that reached into the sky, and then one by one, as a switch was pulled, each area went dark,

---

<sup>200</sup> According to Goodall, 'tests by the RAF revealed the extent to which lack of lights on the ground confused even British pilots attempting to find landmarks' (2005, para. 5). Yet, interestingly, Michael Richard Daniell Foot writes that blackouts do not effectively impair navigation by bombers as these usually focused more on reflected bodies of water, railroad tracks, or large highways. He explains that the main objective of the blackout was rather to mobilize an entire population into the war effort, and provide a test to make sure they were following new regulations (1995, pp. 134-135).

the dazzle becoming a patchwork of lights being snuffed out here and there until a last one remained, and it too went out. What was left us was more than just wartime blackout, it was a fearful portent of what war was to be. We had not thought that we would have to fight in darkness, or that light would be our enemy. (quoted in Goodall, 2009, para. 1)

Londoner Phyllis Warner described a similar reaction in her diary: ‘For the first minute going out of doors one is completely bewildered, then it is a matter of groping forward with nerves as well as hands outstretched’ (para. 9). Frank Forster explains that, four years after the beginning of the blackout, he still finds it easy to become disorientated walking round his hometown of Chester: ‘Every journey one makes across the city during the blackout, especially on a very dark night, is a great adventure—although one is aware of certain landmarks, many of them are no use whatever, unless one is possessed of a good torch. One never knows what is in front of one beyond a distance of about three feet’ (para. 10). As Marc Patrick Wiggam states, ‘darkening the streets to make people safe from enemy aircraft had the paradoxical effect of making people feel less safe from each other’, in a country where ‘crime figures rose during the war’ (2011, p. 137).<sup>201</sup> Thus, fear and anxiety are the feelings that dominate personal accounts of the blackout.

Despite this, and bearing in mind that the cultural effect of wartime regulations was diverse, the blackout still resonates today as one of the most resilient narratives of the popular memory of the Blitz, since ‘neither the questionable veracity of popular perceptions nor significant criticism from historians have diminished the endurance of this dramatic and easily understood episode as the dominant means of understanding wartime civilian experience’ (Greenhalgh, 2017, p. 187). Several historians have reflected extensively on the subject, particularly focusing on the fact that ‘while the blackout had a constitutive role for the

---

<sup>201</sup> It is essential to note here that the figures available today regarding the rise in crime in wartime Britain ‘have to be contextualised within a political and social climate that had sharpened against wrong-doing’ (Wiggam, 2011, p. 137).

wartime community through the system of obligations it imposed on individuals', it also exacerbated 'tension between the private and public worlds' (Wiggam, 2011, p. 200). According to Wiggam the blackout could act, paradoxically, 'as an inhibitor of public life, causing individuals to withdraw into themselves' (ibid.).

While much has been written about the effects of the blackout on public life, especially on the rise of crime, sexual assault and road accidents during the Blitz, little has been written on its impact in the domestic sphere. James Greenhalgh has given particular attention to this issue and published a study on 'The Threshold of the State: Civil Defence, the Blackout and the Home in Second World War Britain' in 2017. Using a range of testimonies, Greenhalgh argues that 'a crucial element of the way the blackout was experienced was that it altered the perceived intrinsic qualities of the home' (2017, p. 201). He quotes E.M.E. Oakley: 'The aspect of war that presses itself most on us is the gloomy interiors brought about by the generous use of black paper and other makeshifts which can not [sic] be removed by day' (MOA, 1939). Greenhalgh suggests that 'the space of home had been rendered undesirable by the lack of light' and that 'the frequency with which this relatively minor detail features in personal testimony hints at the importance of an adequately illuminated living space', not only in terms of comfort, but also physical and mental health (2017, p. 202).

Reviewing the different studies that have been published recently on the subject of the blackout, Greenhalgh implies not enough significance has been attributed to civilians' altered relationship to their own home during the war: 'situating the home and domesticity within the wider city necessitates expanding upon the relationship between the interior of the home and the urban environment, yet histories of the mid-twentieth-century British home have tended to end their analysis either side of the dwelling's front door step' (p. 190). Whilst my aim is not to contradict this, it is my argument that Norah Hoults's *There Were No Windows* precisely reflects, in 1944, what Greenhalgh states in 2017: 'home may be a place of comfort, safety,

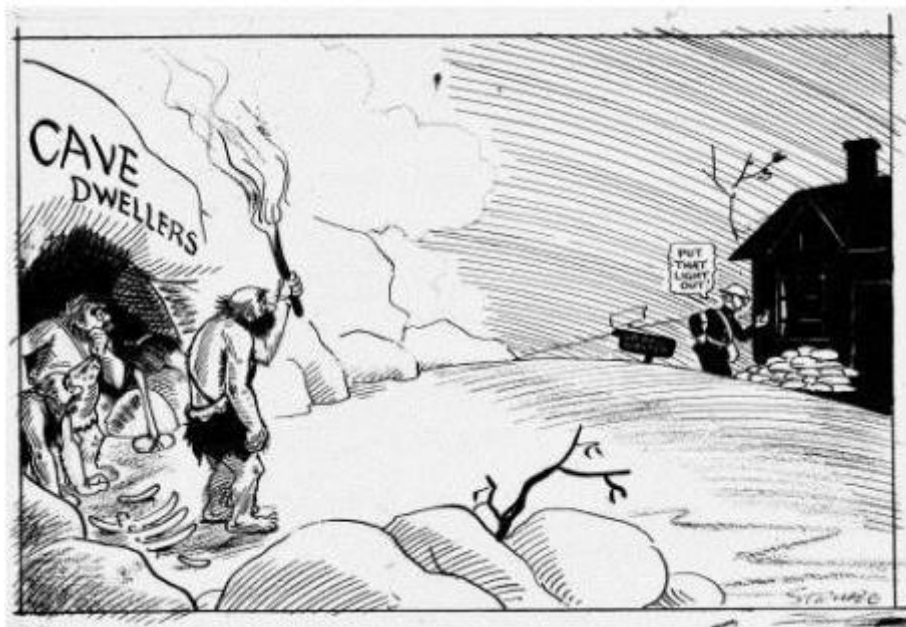


warmth and familiarity, but if one is trapped within it and stripped of various elements of one's control of the environment then it shares rather more in common with a prison cell than a dwelling' (p. 203). In Hoult's novel, the blackout is synonym of fear and paranoia, reinforces a desperate feeling of loneliness, and brings about confusing identity crises. Most importantly, the blackout is inseparable from the shadow of dementia slowly taking over Miss Temple's mind because it is a 'mad', absurd, illogical measure.

The blackout is metaphorically strong if considered as the complete reversal of the Age of Enlightenment: a measure which highlights 'the worst excesses of war', but more importantly the 'failure of Reason' (Wiggam, 2011, p. 172). Aside from the fact the darkness was unpleasant, impractical and scary, there was also 'an imaginative, political, or more existential response' to it (ibid.). Within the Western tradition, 'light', and more particularly 'enlightenment', is the driving force of Reason in the eighteenth-century literary and cultural movement whose aim was to overcome obscurantism and promote knowledge. The Age of Enlightenment became thus through the metaphorical light of scientific knowledge as opposed to the divine light imposed by religious dogma. Philosophers were seduced by this symbol of transmission of knowledge, and reused the image of a chain of light battling ignorance, the light for them being reason. Denis Diderot wrote: 'lost in an immense forest during the night I only have a small light to guide me. [...] If I renounce reason I no longer have a guide. I have to blindly accept a secondary principle and suppose that which is in question' (1964, pp. 59-60).

In *There Were No Windows*, the blackout does not hold any logical meaning, its purpose is unclear to civilians (who nevertheless diligently respect it). The 'black-out' is everybody's obsession in Miss Temple's entourage, she hesitates to ask questions about the new rules in her own house because she knows 'the "black-out"' is unmistakably going to be 'her answer'. The blackout is what everybody is 'always doing' as it becomes a vague yet

overwhelming concept in itself (Hoult, 2005, p. 220). Because of her failing memory, Claire repeatedly demands an explanation as to why the curtains constantly have to be drawn, forcing her servant Kathleen to realise she does not herself have a satisfying explanation as to why everyone needs to live in the dark. In his 2011 PhD thesis, Marc Patrick Wiggam highlights a similar idea to Norah Hoult in 1944: ‘it was a paradox of the blackout that reason and science could at once lead to mankind’s discovery of flight, yet make the blackout necessary’ (p. 174). The character of Edith Barlow in *There Were No Windows* is a good illustration of this. Miss Temple’s rather unpleasant friend is described as ‘a faithful camp follower for so many years of the glorious age of Reason and Enlightenment’ whose ‘writing days are over’ since the darkness of the war ‘finally put *finis* to her literary work’ and led her to be obsessed with time management and ARP regulations (Hoult, 2005, pp. 92-93). *The Daily Express*’ cartoonist George Strube presented a similar idea in 1939 by drawing a family of torch-bearing cave dwellers baffled at their modern neighbours in their darkened houses, where an ARP warden yells ‘put that light out!’:



‘Time marches on’: George Strube cartoon, taken from *The Daily Express*, 7 September 1939.  
*The Daily Express* ©

There is an interesting parallel between London being plunged into an uncalled-for, absurd obscurity, and Miss Temple's mind slowly descending into madness. Claire's mental issues are described as 'shadows' (pp. 21, 252). These 'shadows', the various mental troubles the ageing lady has to face, primarily revolve around fear and paranoia. Whilst the consensus was that the blackout was ultimately a safety measure for civilians, the darkened domestic space became a threat to its own inhabitants during the Blitz. Claire Temple constantly complains and feels extremely uneasy at her loss of control in her own house, in line with what environmental psychologist Irwin Altman will later explain when he defines the home as a 'primary space', highlighting the exclusive and (relatively) permanent control of the home by the people who live in it as a fundamental factor separating the domestic space from other environments (1975). When Claire insists that she does not 'want the curtains drawn', her cook responds. 'I'm sorry, but it's not what you want these days, but what the government says'. These words arouse 'a misgiving, a shadow of fear' in Miss Temple, who replies: 'Why, I'm not ruled by the government. I'm in my own home, aren't I?' (Hoult, 2005, p. 76).

This mirrors Greenhalgh:

the blackout challenged assumptions about the home and what this meant in the modern city, by making people aware of how their most private spaces functioned at the whim of the state. Perhaps most importantly, the blackout shows us just how far and how permanently the state was able to encroach into the private home. The home was no longer merely a dwelling, incidental to the functioning of the city, but a component part of a technological machine city. (2017, p. 205)

This loss of control on her own house, reinforced by the fact the A. R. P. warden often comes in to remind her about the blackout or tell her off about peeking behind the curtain, is echoed in Miss Temple's loss of control over her own body. Claire is 'incontinent', which leads her

to regularly have accidents, and she becomes ‘very upset when she realises’ (Hoult, 2005, pp. 186-187).

In the ‘certainly oppressive’ atmosphere of her house (p. 269), Miss Temple’s general feeling of helplessness leaves her disoriented, and she imagines the darkness is made up of ghosts. She feels she is being driven out of her house by evil, unknown forces. Spirits and gloomy apparitions often surface in Blitz literature,<sup>202</sup> yet in *There Were No Windows* they take on a new meaning. Associated to the specific idea of the blackout, the ghosts are the loss of domesticity and the destruction of the sheltering, familiar space. The war is the damning entity that perverts the individual mind and most intimate spaces:

She moved into the back room, and there it seemed so much darker and so, so much more deserted that she was seized by a macabre fancy. Since this room was never used [...] was it no more than probable that its emptiness contained an invitation to spooks? [...]The impulse had flickered up: write a story about a woman left alone in a house to which the damned came. At first they entered timidly. She saw them at the back door, peeping as she went to take up the bottle of milk which the milkman had left. [...] Gradually, they would become bolder; gradually they would [...] start their childish tricks. [...]. When she went to bed they hid in her nightgown....the next night they were in her bed, and there was no room for her. In the end there was no room in her house at all for her; the damned children had taken complete possession. (pp. 74-75)

What is interesting here is that Hoult sheds light on the government’s incapacity, or even unwillingness, to deal with the anxiety of people who feel that ‘allied with the fact that once night had fallen the interactions available with the world outside the home had become limited, the home emerges as a potentially oppressive environment’ (Greenhalgh, 2017, p. 203). Miss Temple is the victim of severe paranoia attacks in which she imagines her help

---

<sup>202</sup> See my analysis of Elizabeth Bowen’s ‘Mysterious Kôr’ in Chapter I, section C.

wants to poison her and therefore refuses to eat the food she is served, and is convinced ‘she ha[s] to be very careful...all the time she ha[s] to be most careful’ (Hoult, 2005, p. 12).

Whilst the authorities were particularly concerned with ‘troglodytism’ amongst deep shelter users, nothing was done to help people deal with their concerns about their family’s physical and mental conditions.<sup>203</sup> During the blackout, it was not only the use of light and curtains that was regulated but also that of sound and noise, particular through the 1939 Control of Noise Order, which contributed to transforming the familiar into the unfamiliar and triggered reactions like Miss Temple’s paranoia in her own home:

The shadow spoke urgently to that present. It was ever at her side warning her: ‘If you’re not careful, they’ll put you into a mental home [...]’. Forced into an existence where she sat generally for breakfast, always for lunch, tea and dinner; with Miss Jones, it became her constant preoccupation to wonder if she, if Kathleen, knew of the shadow. She had to watch them all the time, so the shadow warned her. (p. 252)

Miss Temple’s fear and anxiety ultimately lead her to feel very alone. Surrounded by her dark surroundings and the shadows of her own mind, Claire finds it impossible to connect with the ‘masked’ faces of other Londoners, such as Kathleen whose face is ‘veiled’ by a ‘curtain of demureness’ (Hoult, 2005, p. 93). Previously a *femme du monde* who used to throw parties several times a week, Claire is now alone, so much so that she hires a paid companion after she finds that obsessively petting her cat does not satisfy her ‘urgent desire for company’ (p. 216).

As a letter to the British Medical Journal stated in 1939, too gloomy a home could create ‘neurasthenic states’ and be ‘ample cause for melancholy [...] which may intensify depression’ (Batteson, 1939, p. 831), which is precisely what Claire feels:

---

<sup>203</sup> Interestingly, Richard Titmuss explains that advertisers did take advantage of people’s problems when it came to living in airless, dark homes (1950, p. 342). A range of consumer products such as the Colt Blackout Ventilator or Sanizal and Vim were aimed at housewives concerned by the cleanliness of their blacked-out homes.

I am dying of loneliness now. Like one of those neglected pot plants outside the windows of a slum tenement. You see them when the trains go out from Waterloo. [...] She saw the picture he intended her to see of the house quite empty except for herself, wandering from room to room, her feet echoing in a silence that grew increasingly menacing. There was a parable in the Bible about it, seven more devils entered, worse than the first. With the tears pouring down her cheeks, she answered: 'I should die of grief and loneliness'. (Hoult, 2005, p. 263)

Loneliness is the worst of all of Claire's mental struggles, or 'shadows':

Was she alone then? Was she quite alone in the house without a soul near her? Oh, pray God, it wasn't so, she appealed, her hand going to her heart. For this was the most fearful bogey, the worst shadow of all, the mainspring at the back of all the shadows, colouring them, making them gibber before her. (p. 21)

Antonia Lant writes that the blackout had an unequivocal impact on Britain as a wartime community, as the government 'addressed the entire population through the representation of a shared British reality: [the blackout] signaled national experience and so spoke to its audience as a national group' (2014, p. 114). However, rather than a feeling of solidarity and trusting support network, this shared 'while the blackout was generally an aspect of the home front that elevated the community over the individual, and by extension the war-fighting state over the individual citizen, it also left space for people to draw into themselves, away from public life' (Wiggam, 2011, p. 172).

On the rare occasions lonely Miss Temple leaves her house to reach out to other human beings, in 'the dark that brought bewilderment which must be controlled or else it would become panic' (Hoult, 2005, p. 240), 'no answering gleam' reward the light of her torch and she is 'all alone' (p. 245). Just as in the first part of the book entitled 'Inside the House', where not light ever enters because of the omnipresence of thick 'dark plum-coloured

curtains' (p. 56), the second part, 'Outside the House', is a mirror of the first one as Miss Temple is just as solitary in the streets of the capital. She befriends a homeless woman and invites her to come stay with her in a desperate attempt to converse with another person for just a moment, but even this fails, as Claire is faced with 'silence' and 'profound indifference': "'I'm very unhappy. Are you?'" No answer' (p. 227).

London's obscurity is impenetrable and invincible, and paradoxically brings a feeling of stifling loneliness rather than being a symbol of fraternal, communal war effort. The rare cracks of light Miss Temple notices and hopes for, the cracks from the outside darkness into the private sphere, onto what she hopes would be fraternal humanity, only lead to more despair: 'the clock that said ten-past four had opened a crack in her world through which she viewed with horror for a few moments an abomination of desolation that was all about her' (p. 221).

This dark confinement from without and within is summed up in the title of the novel and at the end of the novel: 'She was all alone in the darkness, now that to please Mr Mills she had left her torch turned off. There were no windows. Everyone was shut in upon themselves' (p. 245). As Briggs suggests, 'the novel's epigraph, quoted from the mystic German philosopher Hermann Keyserling, insists that "Man is not a windowless monad"; yet few of the novel's characters escape from their own thoughts or concerns for very long' (2005, p. 333).

This last idea of the gap between what Miss Temple hopes to discover in the rare cracks of the blackout and what she is actually faced with, her own miserable condition, can also be interpreted as the writer giving a deeper meaning to the blackout. As cartoonist David Louis Ghilchick implies in the drawing on page 264, the blackout during the war could also have served for 'the concealment of atrocities in the concentration camps', or more generally the 'Truth' (Lant, 2014, p. 131). Whilst Truth here holds up a mirror to a German man, this

idea seems to be transposed and reversed in *There Were No Windows*, where the characters seem to be blinded by the blackout (and by extension the press and the radio), and do not seem to be aware of, or care about, the wider implications of the conflict they are experiencing.<sup>204</sup> When the only Jewish character finds out about the camps, the narrator heavily implies her reaction is largely hypocritical:

The war, she felt, was the vindication of her race—a race that in the piping days of peace she had only half-acknowledged, keeping, as it were, on nodding terms with it, but being careful not to fraternise overmuch. She felt towards her people as if they were poor relatives who mustn't be encouraged too much in their claims towards one. But now the great might of the British Empire had risen in its wrath to avenge the cause of these poor relatives, and had thereby placed them on the visiting list of the most socially powerful and respectable. One might be excused in normal times for overlooking some of the family, who, after all, lived in ghettos, or who insisted on being 'orthodox' when it was no longer done to be 'orthodox', but now, of course, one

---

<sup>204</sup> Here, this idea of the blackout 'covering' the truth could also be linked to Plato's allegory of the cave, which explores the tensions between what one imagines to be reality and what reality truly is, highlighting the effect of education (or lack thereof) and (erroneous) transmission of knowledge in human nature. More importantly, Plato refers to whether people really want to look at the light, or whether they strive to remain in darkness not to face an uncomfortable truth.

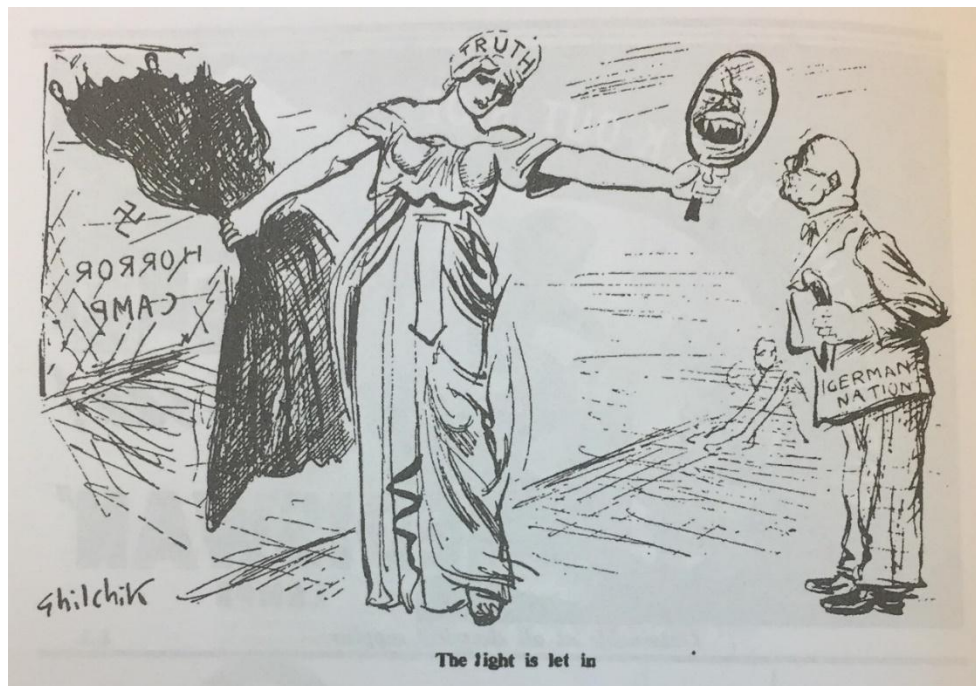
This is a parallel that has already been made by Francis Stewart Leland Lyons who, referring to the government policy of neutrality in *Ireland Since the Famine*, wrote:

The tensions—and the liberations—of war, the shared experience, the comradeship in suffering, the new thinking about the future, all these things had passed [Ireland] by. It was as if an entire people had been condemned to live in Plato's cave, with their backs to the fire of life, and deriving their only knowledge of what went on outside from the flickering shadows thrown on the wall before their eyes by the men and women who passed to and fro behind them. When after six years they emerged, dazzled, from the cave into the light of day, it was to a new and vastly different world. (1971, p. 551)

Clair Wills furthers this idea by describing Ireland's experience during the war as a battle between light and dark, particularly for people who travelled from blacked-out England to the supposed 'light' of Dublin; an illumination which only really concealed information, a 'silence' that Sean O'Faolain named 'this total darkness of the mind' (quoted in Wills, 2007, p. 81).



remembered that blood was thicker than water and rushed forward to grasp the hand of the martyrs of Hitlerism. (Hoult, 2005, p. 120)<sup>205</sup>



'The Light is Let In': D. L. Ghilchick cartoon, taken from *Time and Tide*, 28 April 1945. *Time and Tide* ©

Secondly, I argue that Claire Temple's loss of memory, and ultimately the loss of her sense of identity, symbolises the more general fall of London as a progressive, intellectual and cultural centre. There is a strong contrast between the person Miss Temple used to be and the one she is becoming, in parallel to the changes the city of London is experiencing. Modernity and the desire for newer, more experimental artistic creation or simply freer and looser social interactions are washed away by an imposed present of tension, rules and reinforced conservative morals.

The most significant aspect of the book that reflects this idea is Claire's growing inability to write. Miss Temple was in the past respected for creating 'madcap heroines so full of defiances' in stories that were 'enjoyable', and admired for 'taking part in the Suffragette movement and wearing a 'rosette' (p. 107). However, in the 1940s, Miss Temple cannot go

---

<sup>205</sup> This lengthy quote is worth mentioning as it counteracts some of the main character's many clichéd comments on her Jewish friend, which can very well be considered anti-Semitic: 'So Oriental, isn't she?' [...] 'Of course her and her friends are Lesbians' (Hoult, 2005, p. 141).

any further than ‘thinking of good titles’ (p. 99). It is both her failing memory and the constant frowning of those who used to be her closest friends that prevent her from writing. Edith Barlow explains to Claire that the topics she focuses on in her prose are ‘uneasy’ and outdated as ‘we have certainly moved into an age in which there are no taboos worth mentioning’ (p. 107). She also adds that ‘the pioneers of the Suffragettes are now outmoded. Indeed, more, they are comic figures to a generation which believes they spent their time slapping policemen and scratching them... in so far as they have ever heard of them’ (ibid.).

Miss Temple goes from resembling the ‘Red Queen’<sup>206</sup> in her ‘over-crowded scene’ (p. 107) to an old lady who feels she is ‘grabbing garbage out of dust-bins’ (p. 109). Not able to remember the day’s date, the names of her servants or the colour of her hair, what made her the Red Queen is quickly disappearing as she cannot remember if the photographs that line her walls are of ‘celebrities’ or acquaintances that are long dead or still alive (p. 19). Her political views or reflections on the condition of women are replaced by paranoia and anxiety in the same way that London is now solely and essentially defined by the war:

But talking about it all the time the way some people do, one common woman that comes and see me does, is very tiresome. It interrupts conversation, don’t you think?

There always have been wars, and always will be, and to let oneself be obsessed is to make oneself a person of one idea. (p. 7)

The rapid reversal of social morals, from a popular rebellious and transgressive scene to a very conceited patriotic and resilient public discourse in the 1940s, is particularly noticeable in *There Were No Windows* through the reoccurring theme of sex. Whilst Miss Temple was the symbol of a buoyant, lively society, she is now to her entourage an image of decadence and evil, constantly needing to be reprimanded for her immoral comments. As Sonya Rose

---

<sup>206</sup> Her friend Edith calls her the ‘Red Queen’, because Claire has ‘run so fast in her life that she managed to make other people feel giddy’ (p. 106). The sad paradox is that: ‘like the Red Queen with all her running she had always stayed in the same place [...]. But her friends had not stayed in the same place: they had moved on, and they had moved away’ (ibid.).

writes, at the beginning of the war there was ‘widespread public apprehension about the declining morals of girls and young women in British cities and towns’ (1998, p. 1147). Mark Wiggam highlights that the war ‘brought with it not only a freedom in women’s ability to define themselves economically, through taking on a greater role in previously male dominated areas of work, but also in how they could act sexually’ (2011, p. 150). To make the situation even more of a problem, ‘the blackout provided opportunities for women and men to pursue casual romances’, though ‘it was women and girls who were deemed to be the greatest potential problem’ (ibid.).

Yet, Claire Temple is determined to resist this repression, be it consciously or not. Just as she turns on her torch at the wrong time in the wrong places and leaves the curtains open as if to fight against the oppressive darkness (Hoult, 2005, p. 242, p. 76), Miss Temple does not seem to be aware or give much importance to the increasingly conservative views of her entourage, and sex is one of her favourite conversation topics. Though she was never married, Claire Temple had several lovers and constantly refers to them. One of her main habits is to ask other women about their intimate life—‘I hope you have enjoyed your hours of dalliance [...] the embraces of love that you have exchanged [...] surrender the final citadel’ (p. 88), ‘Have you ever had a lover? [...] I shouldn’t think you’ve ever been passionate?’ (p. 208)—<sup>207</sup> most probably because she longs for the excitement and desire that she lacks in her ageing days.

At one point in the novel, the servant Kathleen is told by another member of staff about a couple who were caught red-handed as they were ‘committ[ing] the act of love’ (p. 43). This conversation takes place as Miss Temple is sleeping but, as soon as the two women mention the actual love-making, Claire conveniently wakes up:

---

<sup>207</sup> Here, it is interesting to note that there is a certain disparity between Claire Temple’s frankness and her incredibly old-fashioned language, the language of ‘romance’: ‘dalliance’, ‘final citadel’, etc. This reinforces the idea of a paradoxical, almost binary personality, an aspect of Violet Hunt (on whom Claire’s character is based) that was already very noticeable in her diaries, as stated earlier on in this section.

‘Well, my friend, she was for taking a short cut back up an alley-way, sort of, that isn’t used much. I wouldn’t go it by myself at night. Well, going on ahead, do you see, and not having a torch, see, she walked smash into a pile of sandbags. “Let’s have the torch, duck,” she calls to me. And I switch on, and I see figures. I can’t make out who. But she sees. Oh, yes, she sees.’

‘What?’

‘Her butcher, and my butcher, too, and the butcher, for that matter, of most of us around our way. And she sees who’s with him, too.’ [...] ‘They were...right there, trusting to the dark of course, not to be seen.’

‘But how extraordinary! Do you mean that they were actually holding the court of love in the public street?’

Mrs. White experienced horror. The old lady had awakened! (pp. 41-42)

Whilst both servants disapprove of the ‘awful things’ that involve ‘women [who] just can’t seem to resist anything in trousers’ and therefore ‘misconduct themselves’ (pp. 42-43), Miss Temple is particularly interested in the details of the event, asking about the exact position of the couple on the sandbags they were using to lie on. After Claire is ‘awakened’ from her sleep (a word which could also refer to a sexual awakening), she panics at the idea of the conversation ending and wonders: ‘Was there anything she could do to postpone these destructive activities that hindered what had really turned out to be a most interesting conversation?’ (p. 44). Miss Temple is scolded for ‘thinking such badness’. Her cook Kathleen believes ‘the badness of her mind continues to this very day, as you can see for yourself, when she’s about eighty years of age’, ‘she wants to talk about men, that’s all’ (p. 51).

Miss Temple, who is now in ‘reduced circumstances’ as she puts it (p. 86), does not really trouble herself with answering these comments, and seems very self-aware of her

frustrated sexual desire. The conversation she has about the couple having sex in the streets and the one she has later about her cook sleeping with her fiancé in Claire's own house both trigger an intense sense of dreariness in her life as well as a pleasant sense of sexual arousal. Claire describes her present life as a desolate beach, and quotes Matthew Arnold's 1851 poem 'Dover Beach': 'Retreating, to the edge of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear and naked shingles of the world' (p. 87). Yet these conversations also remind her of moments that could also be described by the previous stanza of the same poem, which refers to the long-lost 'grating roar of pebbles which the waves draw back and fling at their return, up the high strand, [...] with tremulous cadence' (quoted in Walker, 2007, p. 8). After both conversation she goes to sleep content, as if she had just for one moment found this 'tremor' again:

She found herself yawning, and was surprised. She really was sleepy. It must be because they had had some guest to dinner... she'd forgotten her name, but there had been someone. And there had been a good story about sandbags. Trying to remember the full details, she fell into a light half-slumber. (Hoult, 2005, p. 49)

When no one is watching her, in her few moments of complete lucidity, Miss Temple dances. In an attempt to go back to the past, to a different city, she moves her body and sways her hips that help her re-experience the sexual satisfaction she once enjoyed in a distant London:

And just to prove it, holding up the skirt of her thin black dress, she started to dance, humming to herself the refrain of *The Merry Widow* waltz...on and on she went, skirting the foot of her bed, swaying her hips ever so slightly, inclining her head now and again, imagining that she was holding a fan, imagining that a man's arm clasped her tiny waist, that the band was seductive, that the floor was excellent, that her partner was beginning to be just a little in love with her, and was murmuring something about the fineness of her eyes. She paused for breath, and then glided and

swayed once more, dancing on and on to the music that had played in other years. (p. 27)

Miss Temple's longing for the past also leads her to start (over)drinking. She regularly has 'a glass of whisky' in order to 'make her tingle with the consciousness of all there was in the storehouses of her memory', 'to escape for an hour' from 'the unhappiness of her present lot' (p. 252). One of the most intriguing scenes in the novel is the one where Francis Maitland, along with his son James and his American friend Lance Burroughs, allow themselves to be convinced by Claire to take her to the pub. All four of them go, and Claire gets drunk. The passage is tragic as Miss Temple, in dire need of company—'I do think it's so pleasant to see everybody sitting together and drinking. Why don't I come here more often?' (p. 170)—ends up being insulted and mocked by the people in the public house—people realise the 'old lady [.is] a toff' and believe she 'thinks she owns the blasted place [...] who does she thinks she is?' (pp. 170-171). Claire feels uneasy, becomes very distressed and suffers what appears to be an anxiety attack in the taxi on the way home, and starts 'screaming, scream after scream' (p. 174) as she forgets where she is and momentarily forgets who the people she is with are.

Claire's body in *There Were No Windows* 'absorbs the war', to reuse Kathrin Wunderlich's concept, who describes how war during the Blitz becomes a 'physical symptom' (2018). There is an insistence in the novel on the change in the physical appearance as well as bodily functions of Miss Temple. Wunderlich analysed the novels *Caught* by Henry Green and *No Directions* by James Hanley to show the emergence of 'creaturely life as a result of the war' in World War II British fiction.<sup>208</sup> Hunched-over figures, animal-like behaviours and the paralysing of essential faculties like that of vision or smell illustrate the idea of the body as the receptacle of war (ibid.).

---

<sup>208</sup> It is interesting that Wunderlich would choose Hanley's novel for the study of the representation of the physical consequences of the bombings in British fiction, as Mark Rawlinson takes the same text in *British Writing of the Second World War* to argue that British writers generally avoided to hint at the physical damage caused by the war. See introduction to this chapter.

*There Were No Windows* reflects on this same idea of the war ‘being absorbed by the body’, and is all the more daring as it focuses on an ageing woman. Tellingly, the only academic article that has taken Hoult’s text as a focus centres on ‘fiction as a gerontological resource’ (King, 2009). King writes that Hoult to a certain extent contributes to filling the ‘gap left by mainstream feminism’s relative silence about gendered ageing’ (2009, p. 295). The critic links the novel to Simone de Beauvoir’s theory of the female ‘Other’, in the sense ‘she derived from existentialist philosophy’ in which ‘man defines himself in relation to woman’ (p. 298): ‘She is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He [Man] is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other’ (de Beauvoir, 1988, p. 16).

King sees Claire Temple as the Other, as an old woman who unwillingly embodies what her entourage essentially despises and negates. She highlights how Claire’s servants and friends constantly judge her and reminds the reader of how different she is to the rest of them since:

with regard to old age, the distinction between self and Other is always provisional and deferred, making the need to assert the precarious distance between one’s youthful-self and aged-Other increasingly important. (King, 2009, p. 298)

I want to extend King’s analysis by highlighting that, not only does the novel offer a useful and rare depiction of female dementia (particularly underlining how ‘female madness’ was associated with ‘deviant female sexuality’ (p. 299), Claire’s ‘othering’ because of her failing body also functions as a symbol of the failure of the supposed wartime solidarity and fraternity.

Miss Temple’s physical appearance surprises her every time she sees herself in the mirror, but most importantly, it pleases other people around her, who find their ‘fears of ageing’ and ultimately dying, dramatised ‘onto older women more than they are onto older men’ (Markson and Taylor, 2000, p. 137). Claire’s friend Edith Barlow is satisfied when

seeing her previously attractive friend reduced to ‘a drooling, not too clean, semi-deranged old woman’ (Hoult, 2005, p. 300). Miss Jones, her companion, is almost fascinated by the old lady who she calls ‘mental’ (p. 318) and a ‘maniac’. In time of war, having an enemy, an object to focus one’s hatred on acts as a catharsis, especially on the home front where the enemy is invisible. Miss Temple, as the ‘most abject other’, becomes this enemy. Her other old friend Francis Maitland is also terrified when Claire dares to liken herself to him, leading him to be conscious of ‘some mental jar’, a strong ‘depression’ (p. 180):

‘You mean that I’m a tiresome egotist, only concerned with myself. That I haven’t done what the Christians tell us we should do, die to ourselves. But you haven’t either, have you? I know you are much younger than I am; but you are dependent on other people, at least for conversation, aren’t you? [...]’

[...] Had she struck home? Surely, surely there was a greater difference between them than the fortuitous circumstance that his brain still functioned equably, that the visible world still palpably existed, that events marshalled themselves in their order of time and season under his observing and not unappreciative eyes. (pp. 157-158)

Claire’s decline is even more terrifying because it is so sudden. The rapid loss of control is a metaphor for the abrupt start of the bombings after months of ‘Strange War’. As Jeannette King highlights, ‘while often remembering, paradoxically, that she is losing her memory, [Claire] retains enough insight to recognise she is becoming a repetitive bore, increasingly likely to be left alone and lonely’ (2009, p. 305). Miss Temple is repelled by her own physical appearance—noticing with ‘shock’ that ‘her hair [is] quite white’, she receives ‘a disagreeable impression’ and it ‘disturb[s]’ her (p. 10)— and she is aware people abhor her personality—her ‘oldest friend’ ‘despise[s]’ her (p. 148), and Claire knows ‘it is such bad manners to be so *triste*’ (p. 157).



In short, *There Were No Windows* is a novel that is particularly interesting because of its focus on the body as a metaphorical receptacle of the war. It dares to touch on taboo topics such as the ageing woman's body as a mirror for the fallen city of London. This narrative stands outside the paradigms of the resilient discourse of the 'People's War' and is an excellent example of a work by a woman writer who challenges the social and political propaganda of her time. Claire Temple's dementia mirrors the more general 'decay' of London, trapped in conservative, absurd and perhaps illegitimate wartime regulations. As she herself wonders at one point:

'O London, where have you gone?' (p. 221)

But I was thinking that now [Henry James] could only smell decay; the stone has rolled away and let in the evil odours of the dank marsh on which London is built. The past is being wafted by the present. (pp. 243-244)

C) *Sunset Over Soho*, Gladys Mitchell (1943)

Gladys Mitchell (21 April 1901 – 27 July 1983) was an English author famous for her series of 66 detective novels featuring the heroine Mrs. Bradley. Although she was very popular during her lifetime, she has been largely neglected since her death, and *The Independent* lists her as 'Forgotten author No 10' in a series of features destined to shed light on valuable but ignored writers (Fowler, 2008).

Mitchell was born in Cowley, Oxford and was educated at the Rothschild School, Brentford, and the Green School, Isleworth Middlesex, before attending Goldsmiths College and University College London. She then trained as a teacher of History and English and worked in various different schools until the end of her life. She was a very prolific writer and

wrote over 80 books and short stories,<sup>209</sup> as well as being an active member the Crime Writers' Association,<sup>210</sup> PEN<sup>211</sup> and the Society of Authors.

Gladys Mitchell wrote her first novel in 1923 but it was rejected, as were the following three. She then turned to detective stories, and Victor Gollancz agreed to publish *Speedy Death* in 1929, which, despite the fact that it 'had every fault under the sun' (quoted in Pike, 1976, para. 5), became the first of the long Mrs. Bradley series. The adventures of detective Beatrice Adela Lestrangle Bradley and her assistant Laura Menzies were met with huge success and Mitchell was acclaimed by both readers and fellow writers (she was famously described by Philip Larkin as the 'Great Gladys' (1982, p. 273)). The writer's works became part of what is known as the Golden Age of crime fiction, 'usually taken as the period between the two world wars' though 'major texts in "Golden Age" style were also produced after 1940' (Knight, 2003, p. 77). However, after her death in 1983, interest for Mitchell's work slowly declined. Radio adaptations were made (by Elizabeth Proud) of *Speedy Death* (October 6, 1990) and *The Mystery of a Butcher's Shop* (December 11 and 18, 1991), both with Mary Wimbush as Mrs. Bradley, and broadcast on BBC Radio 4. A BBC television series, *The Mrs. Bradley Mysteries* (starring Diana Rigg), was also produced in 1999. Yet, unfortunately, by the mid-1990s, only one of her novels was still available in regular print: a Virago Press paperback edition of *The Rising of the Moon* (1945).

---

<sup>209</sup> Some of which were published under the pseudonyms of Stephen Hockaby (for a series of historical novels) and Malcolm Torrie.

<sup>210</sup> The Crime Writers' Association (CWA) is a writers' association in the United Kingdom founded by John Creasey in 1953. Membership is open to any author who has had or plan to have a crime novel produced by a publisher.

<sup>211</sup> PEN International is a worldwide association of writers, founded in London in 1921 to promote friendship and intellectual co-operation among writers everywhere. The first PEN Club was founded by Catherine Amy Dawson Scott, with John Galsworthy as its first President. Its first members included Joseph Conrad, Elizabeth Craig, George Bernard Shaw, and H.G. Wells. PEN originally stood for "Poets, Essayists, Novelists", but now stands for "Poets, Playwrights, Editors, Essayists, Novelists", and includes writers of any form of literature, such as journalists and historians. The association's charter stipulates: 'In all circumstances, and particularly in time of war, works of art, the patrimony of humanity at large, should be left untouched by national or political passion' ('The Pen Charter', 2018).

In the last twenty years, there has been some attempt to resuscitate Mitchell's work. In 2005, Crippen and Landru published a collection of hitherto unseen short stories, *Sleuth's Alchemy*, and Minnow Press reedited her 1940 novel *Brazen Tongue*. Rue Morgue Press also now has in print *Death at the Opera* (1934) and *When Last I Died* (1941), along with another seven texts by Mitchell. More recently, Random House has published nine titles in paperback and eBooks under their Vintage imprint, and Greyladies hold a few titles from the Mrs. Bradley series.

Although Mitchell came to be known in the inter-war period as 'one of the "Big Three" female mystery novelists, judged the equal of Dorothy L. Sayers and Agatha Christie', Christopher Fowler suggests 'that is not quite accurate—she is more like a mad combination of both' (2008, para. 1). Indeed, Mitchell's detective fiction is characterised by particularly complex plots, relatively inaccessible prose and rather confusing endings, which most probably explains why contemporary readers find it difficult to engage with her works. Fowler writes:

Ultimately, Christie remained safer and more controlled, while the complexity of Mitchell's uber-eccentric mysteries got the better of her. She tested the constraints of the murder genre by pushing them to breaking point, and by surprising too much she often disappointed – therein lies the clue to her canonical absence. But a flawed gem can still sparkle. (para. 4)

Nowadays, readers find Mrs. Bradley's stories difficult to digest, judging them 'challenging', 'disorientating' and quite a 'demanding' read (Neil, 2016, para. 7). Mitchell seems to almost be parodying and mocking the conventions of the detective genre, pushing its borders to extreme confusion which readers have a hard time following (Anon. Reviewer, 2017b).<sup>212</sup> As

---

<sup>212</sup> A tongue-in-cheek review of Mitchell's books by Noah W. J. Stewart gives a good idea of how her books are received today:

Really, I must apologize. I was completely determined to read my way through Gladys Mitchell's enormous backlist of detective fiction (60-plus volumes). I had visions of a long

Anthony Boucher puts it: ‘There are no moderate attitudes on the work of Gladys Mitchell; either you love her (as I do) or you plain can’t read her. [...] Dame Beatrice Adela Lestrangle Bradley [is] possibly the most fascinating and maddening female sleuth ever created’ (1960, np.). Questioning the relatively conservative rules (or rather ‘coherent set of practices which were shared’ by writers (Knight, 2003, p. 77)) of Golden Age crime fiction,<sup>213</sup> which stipulate that the mystery in detective novels should only be resolved thanks to rational, logical problem-solving,<sup>214</sup> Mitchell’s plots included references to Freudian psychology, witchcraft (notably in *The Devil at Saxon Wall* (1935) and *The Worst Viper* (1943)) and the supernatural (naiads and Nessie, ghosts and Greek gods).

---

series of posts in which I would discern Mitchell’s central themes, report back on her preoccupations, and present a picture of Mrs. Bradley (her series detective).  
I just can’t do it.

I have the electronic equivalent of a teetering To Be Read pile filled with her works, greater and lesser. I keep dipping into one and then another, hoping to find something that sets off a spark of interest. And you know, I’m sure it’s my failure as a human being, but I just can’t manage it. I don’t like her writing style, I don’t like her characters. Most of her story hooks seem contrived and pedestrian; the mystery-oriented sections of her plots mostly don’t bear up under scrutiny. Half the books have something to do with boats and boating, and I am like Hercule Poirot, preferring to remain safely on shore. The stories are occasionally incoherent and I wake up a few minutes later, thinking, ‘Just who the hell is she talking to at this point?’ [...] I must have dipped into about 30 of them and put them all aside thinking, ‘Oh, lordy, maybe there’s a better one somewhere in the pile’. I haven’t found one.

[...] There’s something about Gladys Mitchell, or me, and the two of us are immiscible. I have decided to do you all the favour of not beating the topic to death in a vain attempt to keep my promise — it was mostly made to justify my acquisition of so many e-books at one fell swoop. (2017, para. 1-3)

<sup>213</sup> See ‘Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories’ (1928) by S. S. Van Dine (Willard Huntington Wright), the creator of Philo Vance.

<sup>214</sup> See the two following rules:

8. The problem of the crime must be solved by strictly naturalistic means. Such methods for learning the truth as slate-writing, ouija-boards, mind-reading, spiritualistic séances, crystal-gazing, and the like, are taboo. A reader has a chance when matching his wits with a rationalistic detective, but if he must compete with the world of spirits and go chasing about the fourth dimension of metaphysics, he is defeated *ab initio*. (Van Dine, 1928, p. 190)
14. The method of murder, and the means of detecting it, must be rational and scientific. That is to say, pseudo-science and purely imaginative and speculative devices are not to be tolerated in the *roman policier*. For instance, the murder of a victim by a newly found element--a super-radium, let us say--is not a legitimate problem. Nor may a rare and unknown drug, which has its existence only in the author's imagination, be administered. A detective-story writer must limit himself, toxicologically speaking, to the pharmacopoeia. Once an author soars into the realm of fantasy, in the Jules Verne manner, he is outside the bounds of detective fiction, cavorting in the uncharted reaches of adventure. (p. 191)

Considering both its unusual form (constant flashbacks, flashforwards, switches in narrators, etc.) and unconventional plot choices, it is not easy to link Mitchell's work to what critics saw as one of the defining features of inter-war years detective fiction, the fact that there were essentially 'novels of escape'. Dorothy L. Sayers herself, in introductory essay to the memorable anthology entitled *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery, and Horror* (1928) entitled 'The Omnibus of Crime', states:

For, make no mistake about it, the detective-story is part of the literature of escape, and not of expression. We read tales of domestic unhappiness because that is the kind of thing which happens to us; but when these things gall too close to the sore, we fly to mystery and adventure because they do not, as a rule, happen to us. (1928, p. 109)

Conversely, English crime writer P. D. James explains that, when reading a detective novel, readers strive to escape to a utopian society as we:

[f]eel no real pity for the victim, no empathy for the murderer, no sympathy for the falsely accused, and for whomever the bell tolls, it does not toll for us. Whatever our secret terrors or the problems of our everyday life, we are not the body on the library floor, and when Poirot, Miss Marple or Lord Peter point an accusing finger, we can return a confident 'not guilty'. [...] We enter a world of recognised morality, where evil is sanitised and we can settle down in a familiar English world where all problems will be solved and peace and normality restored in that imaginary postlapsarian Eden. (2013, para. 11)

Indeed, during the Second World War in Britain, as Gwen Robyns writes, the raid libraries aimed to provide 'easy reading and harmless puzzles' as an 'antidote against the blackout and shelter depression' (1978, p. 117). Mass-Observation reports confirm this, as it quotes a man who says he reads in wartime 'to pass the time. That's the reason [he] like[s] a good mystery', and a woman explains: 'Well, I used to read for all sorts of reasons—interest, following up

certain lines of study, and so on. But now I'm so overworked I read hardly anything but thrillers, to get me to sleep at night' (MOA, 1944). Another one adds: 'I like the detective or thriller type as, by its close-woven plot (if it is a good tale) it demands a certain amount of attention and provides as complete a break possible from the work and worries of the day' (pp. 90-91).

Yet, whilst this might perhaps be true for some readers of detective fiction, Gladys Mitchell refuses to see her own work as 'novels of escape'. In an essay entitled 'Why Do People Read Detective Stories?' she asserts:

There are those among us who claim that the detective story is a form of escapist literature. Lovers of the genre will deny this, and they are right to do so, for the detective story addict is not content to sit back and enjoy what is called 'a cosy read'. For full enjoyment of the story, the reader needs to use his brains. A problem has been set before him, and the true addict obtains pleasure from doing his best to solve it. (1977, p. 12)

In that sense, Mitchell seems to agree with Raymond Chandler who considers Sayers' views on detective fiction too reductive. Sayers argues that the detective story 'does not, and by hypothesis never can, attain the loftiest level of literary achievement' (1928, p. 102), because of its 'entertaining' purpose. Chandler replies that:

Everything written with vitality expresses that vitality: there are no dull subjects, only dull minds. All men who read escape from something else into what lies behind the printed page; the quality of the dream may be argued, but its release has become a functional necessity. All men must escape at times from the deadly rhythm of their private thoughts. [...] I hold no particular brief for the detective story as the ideal escape. I merely say that all reading for pleasure is escape, whether it be Greek, mathematics, astronomy, Benedetto Croce, or *The Diary of the Forgotten Man*. To say

otherwise is to be an intellectual snob, and a juvenile at the art of living. (1950, pp. 101-102)

Both Chandler's and Mitchell's own view on detective fiction are particularly interesting in the sense that genre fiction, more specifically Second World War detective novels, has generally been assumed by scholarship to correlate 'this desire to escape imaginatively from wartime violence with a desire to soothe or ignore the ideological conflicts of the People's War' (Miller, 2009, p. 117). Yet, Mitchell's work is anything but escapist, primarily since she breaches another one of the fundamental (albeit flexible) rules of Golden Age detective fiction which states that, in the crime story, 'the wider politics of the context are ignored'<sup>215</sup> (Knight, 2003, p. 78) and there should be 'no literary dallying with side-issues, [...] no atmospheric preoccupations'" (Van Dine, 1928, p. 192).

Indeed, one of the main characteristics of Mitchell's work, and what allows me to take her work as an example for the general purposes of this thesis, is precisely that the social and political contexts are essential to the plot and are inherent to the storyline. Unlike other Golden Age conservative, 'cosy', 'country house murder mystery novels' (Horsley, 2010, p. 31), Mitchell's 'England is not class-ridden and changeless' and she 'always sets her books in places of contemporary interest, [...] her environments have changed with the times' (Jessica Mann, quoted in Sarjeant, 1985, para. 3). Her political and social views are an aspect of her work that has been completely ignored, as it has been the case for most detective novels, although it presents ideas that reinforce the wider recent historical reassessment of the Blitz.

In French studies, more and more critics are focusing on French detective fiction of the Second World War, attempting to debunk the myth according to which genre fiction is solely a conservative mirror of society. Claire Gorrara's *French Crime Fiction and the Second World War: Past Crimes, Present Memories* (2012) along with Margaret-Anne Hutton's

---

<sup>215</sup> Julian Symons observes Agatha Christie's novels are a good example of this idea. He notes that 1926 for her characters was not the year of the General Strike and trade unions did not exist (1985, p. 96).

*French Crime Fiction, 1945–2005: Investigating World War II* (2013) both reconsider genre detective and spy fiction of the 1940s (but also contemporary fiction) and link them to the recent historical reassessment of the period, within Henry Rousso’s theoretical framework of the ‘*mythe du résistancialisme*’<sup>216</sup>. In her review of Gorrara’s work, Alistair Rolls writes:

Claire Gorrara’s [...] traces the development of French crime fiction’s reflections on the Second World War—with particular emphasis on (the myths of) resistance and collaboration, and on the repression and extermination of the Jewish population in France—over the decades since the Liberation. Gorrara reveals how this genre more than any other has reflected a broader gamut of memories and representations of the war and its legacy than those articulated by the dominant, state-sanctioned national narrative; furthermore, it has served to subvert received ideas, exposing the complexity of remembering and the relative nature of truth, and, ultimately, promoting the articulation of new national allegories. [...] [Her work] allows the analysis of crime texts to be redeployed as a vehicle for historical studies. Gorrara structures her study around Henry Rousso’s four-phase model of the evolution of French wartime memories, elaborated in his *Syndrome de Vichy* (Paris: Seuil, 1987) [...]. (2013, p. 181)

In the field of British literature, much less work has considered Second World War detective fiction as potential ‘resistance’ literature, ‘resistance’ here understood in the way Elizabeth Bowen uses it,<sup>217</sup> a literature that does not necessarily and solely comply with the social conventions and expectations of its time. For example, whilst she wrote that Agatha Christie’s texts could be linked to post-World War I trauma in her chapter on ‘Sacrificial Bodies: The Corporal Anxieties of Agatha Christie’ (2001), Gill Plain’s chapter ‘Killing’ in *Literature of the 1940s: War, Postwar and ‘Peace’* explains that ‘Christie and Allingham responded to [the

---

<sup>216</sup> See Introduction, section A) 3.

<sup>217</sup> See Introductions, section B) 2.



Second World] war by toughening up their detectives within a context of generic reassurance' (2013, p. 141).

Victoria Stewart is one of the few critics who tries to nuance the idea that World War II is not only a 'reassuring form of writing' (2006, p. 59), focusing specifically on wartime detective fiction in *Narratives of Memory*, basing her argument on Howard Haycraft's link between detective fiction and democracy:

[Haycraft suggests] that it is precisely the existence in democracies, of 'the credo that no man shall be convicted of crime in the absence of reasonable proof', as well as strict rules of evidence, that provides the underpinning of the detective genre. Detective fiction therefore depends on and reinforces those regulatory systems that are absent under dictatorship. The corollary of this is an increase in the popularity of detective fiction within democracies, at times of 'doubt and distress', Haycraft believes in the power of these fictions to serve as a reminder of the civilised values that may appear to be under threat. Implicitly, then, the uncertainties of daily life in wartime can be subsumed by the temporary anxieties of the 'whodunit'. (2006, p. 58)

Analysing the treatment of 'memory' in crime novels of the 1940s, Stewart mainly reads texts such as Graham Greene's *The Ministry of Fear* (1943) within the framework of psychological studies.

Kristine Miller, in *British Literature of the Blitz*, also studied British World War II crime and spy fiction, from a more sociopolitical approach, linking the texts to the myth of the People's War. She dedicates a whole chapter to genre fiction, entitled 'No Escape in the Detective and Spy Fiction of Agatha Christie, Margery Allingham and Graham Greene'. Her main argument is that 'wartime detective and spy novels offered readers equally complicated representations of social relations on an embattled home front', in comparison to Elizabeth Bowen, Rosamond Lehmann and Henry Green, who 'all wrote literary fiction for an educated

audience' (2009, p. 116). Miller states that 'these popular detective and spy novels experiment with generic conventions in order to market to a more diverse book-buying public the ideological conflicts central to the People's War itself', even though 'this argument initially seems counter-intuitive, since many readers and most scholars have described genre fiction as an imaginative escape from rather than a critical engagement with the chaos of war' (ibid.).

Whilst Kristine Miller focuses on novels by Christie, Allingham and Greene in order to highlight how they 'call into question the ideological fictions about changing class and gender roles that helped civilians to make sense of the People's War' and that their writing is 'thus socially and politically ambivalent, rather than unquestionably right-wing' (pp. 120-121), I want to further this idea to other aspects of genre fiction, more specifically on the treatment of the human body, in terms of sex and death, in Mitchell's crime novel *Sunset Over Soho*.

The novel *Sunset Over Soho* was first published in 1943. It is worth quickly attempting to summarise the plot of the novel before commenting on the text, in order for the reader to have a clearer idea of the rather confusing storyline. According to Nick Fuller, *Sunset Over Soho* shows 'Mitchell at her most sui generis' (2005, para. 6). The story is located in London during the Blitz, and narrates Mrs. Bradley and Inspector *Pirberry's* attempt to elucidate how and why a coffin containing a dead body was placed in the basement of the Maidenhead Close Rest Centre<sup>218</sup> where they work. Mrs. Bradley is convinced the body is that of an old, rich man whose murder involved her friend David Harben, a writer who lives on a boat on the Thames. Trying to understand why the body ended up in the Rest Centre, Mrs. Bradley tells Pirberry the story of her first encounter with David, many years earlier. The text therefore jumps between flashbacks and flash forwards, recounting an adventure involving a nymph-like young woman, a group of nuns, midnight intruders, aggressive

---

<sup>218</sup> During the Blitz, rest centres were established in most cities to offer a temporary solution to people whose homes had been destroyed.

Spanish sailors and an oracle parrot; David Harben's epic takes him to France, the Canary Islands and the beaches of Dunkirk.

The first aspect of the novel that I consider particularly relevant, in light of my thesis' aim to reconsider women's literature in relation to Calder's framework of the 'Myth', are the constant allusions to sex and nakedness. One of Van Dine's twenty rules for a good detective story is that 'there must be no love interest' since 'the business in hand is to bring a criminal to the bar of justice, not to bring a lovelorn couple to the hymeneal altar' (1928, p. 189). Mitchell however, in *Sunset Over Soho*, describes two sex scenes, has characters regularly go skinny-dipping in the Thames, and details the erotic fantasies of David Harben who imagines a nun's naked body underneath her religious robe. As Stewart states, 'Mitchell [...] seems to have been more forthright about sexuality than most of her contemporaries', as 'the pure puzzle mystery is not known for sexual realism and she moved the sub-genre forward bravely' (2017, para. 6).

The sex scenes in *Sunset Over Soho* are particularly awkward, and Stewart writes: '[The novel] contains a paragraph that attempts to communicate that two characters are having sex which is one of the most unintentionally hilarious things I have ever seen in print; like someone describing how to participate in an activity that they'd never actually experienced but only been told about' (para. 5). Indeed, Mitchell herself never married and stated once: 'I have only academic knowledge of romance and sex'<sup>219</sup> (quoted in Pike, 1976, para. 42).

Aside from the fact the hyperbolic descriptions of orgasms which make stars 'shiver' and 'swim' (Mitchell, 1988, p. 46) are indeed not particularly plausible, I propose a reading of *Sunset Over Soho* according to which sex in the text becomes an act of resistance, of assertion

---

<sup>219</sup> Some critics argue that Mitchell was a lesbian and interpret several passages of her works as references to same-sex desire. See Brittain Bright's chapter 'The Unshockable Mrs. Bradley' in *Murder in the Closet: Essays in Queer Clues in Crime Fiction Before Stonewall*, edited by Curtis Evans (2016).

of individuality in the context of an overpowering, propagandist public discourse of self-sacrifice. During the Blitz, particularly in bomb shelters, sex emerged as relatively common behaviour between strangers. As people shared blankets with strangers, huddling together with men and women they had never spoken to, the Blitz led to scenes of ‘defamiliarised and uncanny homeliness’ (Wood, 2003, p. 19), which extended ‘to the pursuit of erotic experience—to sex’ (Utell, 2009, para. 3). A good illustration of this is British artist Henry Moore’s 1941 ‘Man and Woman Talking in Dark Corner’, which shows two shadowy figures, one of them holding out their hand to the person standing between their legs:



Henry Moore, ‘Man and Woman Talking in Dark Corner’ (1941)  
The Henry Moore Foundation ©

Julian Andrews explains that Moore used Mass-Observation reports of people having sex in the Underground to create this piece (2002, p. 44). Many studies have reflected on the changes in sexual behaviour on the home front during the Blitz, most of them attributing the desire for erotic experience to a need for intimacy and privacy in a society where moral obligations are strict, and individual freedom is fragile and vulnerable. Janine Utell, drawing on Richard Mohr's idea that sex is a 'world-excluding' behaviour (1988, p. 100), explains that 'the space created in the sexual act, the space surrounding bodies engaged in sex is meant to be an inviolable boundary; the space between bodies is itself a world of intimacy into which others are not allowed' (2009, para. 4). She proposes in 'Erotic Life and the Reimagination of Urban Space in Blitz London' that:

the reimagination of urban space through a privileging of private life, especially the erotic, is a necessary act in the literature of the Second World War, and that in the creation of specifically erotic memory, emerging from the connection of intimate bodies in a particular historical moment, many authors sought to reclaim a private space at a time when the individual self is increasingly under the demands of a world at war. (ibid.)

Utell writes that civilians, and particularly Londoners, 'resisted' propaganda's 'construct of community' 'in seeking to set aside a private space, a private life' (2009, para. 8). Individuals 'in the face of extreme demands from the public sphere might very well seek to assert the primacy of the private being and the right of the private being to define his or her own behavior and desires, outside dominant codes; codes of sacrifice, duty, and loyalty to institutions' (ibid.). This is particularly relevant in the context of the Blitz as British wartime society established practices which invaded the private reserve of an individual and subdued the self (Reiman, 1984, p. 311).

Utell focuses on Louis MacNeice's poetic autobiography *Autumn Journal* (1939) and proposes 'that MacNeice uses the exploration of his sexual experience — his private life — to construct a vision of the city in order to resist the public upheaval which surrounded him in 1938, the year of the poem's publication' (2009, para. 15). I offer a similar reading of *Sunset Over Soho*, in which I believe sex scenes create spaces to negotiate the relationship and borders between public and private life, attempting to seek refuge from the constructed sense of community and patriotism imposed by the 'Myth'.

In the novel, Londoner David Harben has sex with Leda, a mysterious woman who knocks on the door of his tub, at night, and whom he invites to his bed without even asking her name. In a small space, on the awkward slant of the floor of the boat, a 'terrified' Leda whose face shows 'the signs of an exhaustion so complete that the spirit could no longer force the body its will', the two young people make love (Mitchell, 1988, p. 39):

Drawing him to her, she took his head between long, thin hands and kissed him. The moonlight washed on the tide to the sickle-shaped margin of land, etched blandly the hulks of the hoppers, the spars of the yacht, the roofs of the old men's houses, the willows, the hollows, the black and silver reeds.

A star blinked reflecting a mood. Somewhere a dog howled. The river slid by without a sound, and, over the land and the water, the night, with its endless gyrations, danced and swam. (p. 40)

This scene takes place during the blackout, when 'the inhabitants were in bed', 'behind curtained windows without one chink to let out a ray of light' (p. 36). In a cramped room that could resemble a shelter, exhausted Leda and Harben, complete strangers (as far the reader knows) make love after exchanging no more than three sentences. The scene is described by an external narrator who first focuses on Leda's hands before 'zooming out' of the bodies to detail the room, the river and then observe the action from a bird's eye view. This highlights

the idea that sex is a very private, intimate act, one of almost ‘resistance’ to the outside society,<sup>220</sup> reinforced by the fact it takes place in the tub, a space separate from the houses on the waterfront.

The scene quoted above is particularly interesting because it presents two voices. The narrator seems to both be associating sex with the idea of freedom and relief from an outside struggle, and at the same time highlighting the idea that sex is a common, almost routine activity. The world is not moved by the lovemaking of the young man and woman, the river slides by, the world continues its ‘endless gyrations’. After they had sex, David simply sighs: ‘Well that’s that’ (p. 46). Sexual relations represent cathartic, almost transcendental experiences through which ‘agony passed like a sword’ and ‘effort broke out in sweat’ (ibid.), yet it is also an instinctive, natural and familiar act. It takes places outside the realm of romance or intellectual attraction. The passage insists on the alleviating power of sex on the one hand, whilst attempting to demystify it, to perhaps challenge and break the tightening conservative values of wartime society.

David Harben aspires to live outside social norms, sleeping on his boat six months a year, away from anybody else. He lives like a recluse, ‘completely absorbed’ in his writing (p. 37). ‘Egotistical’ and ‘self-centred’, he is also ‘kindly disposed as Abou Ben Adem’.<sup>221</sup> The

---

<sup>220</sup> Here, it is interesting to link this passage to Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, in particular to the scene in which Winston Smith has sex with Julia: ‘Their embrace had been a battle, the climax of a victory. It was a blow struck against the Party. It was a political act’ (2003, p. 129).

<sup>221</sup> Mitchell here refers to the poem ‘Abou Ben Adhem’ (1834) by Leigh Hunt, in which Ben Adhem impresses God by saying he loves his fellow men:

Abou Ben Adhem (may his tribe increase!)  
Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,  
And saw, within the moonlight in his room,  
Making it rich, and like a lily in bloom,  
An angel writing in a book of gold:—  
Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold,  
And to the presence in the room he said,  
“What writest thou?”—The vision raised its head,  
And with a look made of all sweet accord,  
Answered, “The names of those who love the Lord.”  
“And is mine one?” said Abou. “Nay, not so,”  
Replied the angel. Abou spoke more low,

novelist lives on a boat that he describes as a woman, a tub he bought as a 'concession to his lust' (p. 36):

She served the double purpose of summer home and all-weather sweetheart to Harben: He did not so much love her as cling to her. She brought him the satisfaction his books never brought, and she comforted him as only his mother, whom he had lost in his boyhood, might have done. She fitted herself to his moods, controlled and modified his habits, accepted his mastery, could be gay, quick, quarrelsome or downright contrary, and combined in herself all those uncertain sometime irritating but always fascinating qualities which a man has the right to expect in the woman he loves. (p. 36)

It seems Harben seeks refuge in desire, lust and erotic experiences. He feels particularly good when naked, which he describes as a 'baffling, beautiful, exquisitely strange experience' (p. 52). Swimming naked in the water, he craves for Leda's touch: 'he tried to imagine that Leda would bend towards him over the gunwale, her damp hair dark with the water, its gold and its green all gone, her witch's mouth smiling her green eyes alight with laughter' (pp. 50-51). David literally swims out his 'anxieties' (p. 51) through the contact of the water on his skin.

The most telling example of Mitchell's original and even dissident treatment of the body primarily as a sexual object is the relationship between David Harben and the young nun, Sister Mary Dominic. Upon meeting the young refugee, the day the war breaks out, Harben tries to convince her she 'should not have chosen celibacy' (p. 64). His urge for sex becomes all the stronger as the threat of bombs and death gets closer. The moment he is told about the difficult situation in Dunkirk, and that 'great doings there is, for the Germans has

---

But cheerly still; and said, "I pray thee, then,  
Write me as one that loves his fellow men."  
The angel wrote, and vanished. The next night  
It came again with a great wakening light,  
And showed the names whom love of God had blest,  
And lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest. (1860, p. 124)



[sic] marched into Belgium and ‘Olland, and got the other foreigners on the run’ (p. 147), Harben imagines the nun getting dressed in the morning:

He could fancy how she would put on her white serge gown and above it her scrapula. The gown would reach almost to the floor of her cell, but would clear it sufficiently to show (although not her white stockings) the buckles of her broad black shoes. The gown had wide sleeves reaching to the wrists, and underneath those sleeves she would have fastened others, detachable and close-fitting, which were made to button neatly on to the short sleeves of her flannel petticoat. [...] above the scapula she would put on the white linen gimp which covered her shoulders and the upper part of her breast, and above it, around her head, she would fasten a stiff white linen binder and surmount it with her long black veil.

Still regarding the peach-down cheek, the delicate mouth and the sweep of black lashes over eyes that were bent on the book, he continued his mental exercises. (pp. 150-151).

The character of the nun, and the lust Harben feels for her incarnates the idea of sex being a space of negotiation between the private and public sphere. The nun suggests order, and her outfit resembles that of a combatant with its ‘soldier’s belt’, and ‘military cape’. ‘Every fold and fall and fastening [of the religious robe] had to be as exact and correct as that of a soldier on parade’, and the sister has a ‘soldierly mind’ (p. 150).<sup>222</sup> Sister Mary Dominic is the self-

---

<sup>222</sup> This passage, specifically the link between the nun’s uniform and that of the soldier’s, is particularly interesting since it to a certain extent allows ‘women to step across the sexual divide [inherited from] the Edwardian society into the male preserve of militarism’ (Summerfield, 1986b, p. 38). In a study of the music-hall stage of the early twentieth century, Penny Summerfield explains how women impersonated men, dressed in military or naval uniform: ‘it was said to be their close observation and careful portrayal of the uniform and mannerisms of servicemen of different ranks and regiments, coupled with the romance and curiously inverted sex appeal with which they imbued the role, which earned the male impersonators their popularity’ (ibid.). She quotes the well-known 1909 ‘All the Nice Girls Love a Sailor’ sung by Hetty King:

All the nice girls love a sailor  
All the nice girls love a tar  
For there's something about a sailor

sacrificing citizen *par excellence*. Yet, on the other hand, she is also an object of desire, of transgression, and it is this duality that attracts Harben. The nun abandons the older sister she was looking after to follow the writer on his adventure to Dunkirk.

In the Dunkirk scene, in which Harben spontaneously decides to sail to France to help soldiers in need, he ‘kisses’ Sister Mary Dominic, ‘holds her against him’ and asks her to ‘lie down on the bunk’, the same bunk he had asked Leda to lie on in the first chapter (p. 158). Meanwhile, the town is ‘lighted by spurts of flame’, under a ‘shower of vicious machine-gun bullets’ (p. 155). The whole scene transpires sensuality, and even the nun’s pride in wearing her ‘soldier’ outfit is transformed into ‘sinful pride’ (p. 150).

The scene on the beach does not concentrate on the wounded bodies or on the obvious risk of being killed, but on the movement of the water. Water is a recurring motif throughout the book, a powerful erotic symbol. The river is where Leda and Harben meet and what then reminds him of her, as he enjoys the contact with the water:

Harben pushed back among the willows, content to watch her. The thin green leaves of the willows touched his hair and moved restlessly over his shoulders. the rough ground pricked his hams and the back of his thighs. Coarse grass thrust between his toes and against his legs, and his heels were sunk in the ooze (p. 45).

The river is also where Harben first meets the nun. Later on, in Dunkirk (an event that ‘smelt of the sea’), the water takes on a similar role, not threatening, but inviting, and paradoxically associated with warm refuge.

All these aspects contribute to giving the event a surreal atmosphere, almost parodying the myth of the little boats. The Dunkirk episode resembles a perfect dream more than a catastrophic defeat, in which everything goes surprisingly well. Harben ‘asked for fuel, and he

---

(Well you know what sailors are!)  
Bright and breezy, free and easy,  
He's the ladies' pride and joy!  
He falls in love with Kate and Jane, then he's off to sea again,  
Ship ahoy! Ship ahoy!

got it', the men are standing 'orderly and quiet' in the water whilst waiting to be rescued, and 'there seem to be no disorder' (pp. 154-155). Amongst the chaos, only 'quiet, civilised, decent voices are heard'. Sister Mary Dominic's first comment when she sees the sea which is apparently particularly still is: 'it is like Christ, walking on the water. [...] After all the tumult, so calm, so good'. The narrator themselves does not seem to believe the scene they are depicting, as there is nothing 'to give a harsh reality to the sea', it is 'halcyon' sea, idyllic but above all mythical (p. 156). They themselves are aware that what they are recounting stands in sharp contrast with the 'horrors of the day' (ibid.). One aspect to mention here is that the whole story is narrated as 'a long, circumstantial dream' (p. 89), and the names of the chapters all allude to something mythical, spiritual, unreal: The River-God's song, Enchantment, Ulysses, This side of Heaven. The fact that 'Dunkirk' is also the title of a chapter implies Mitchell was aware of the construction of a 'mythical' memory of the event, one that had been voluntarily glorified.

As Richard Mohr writes, 'sexual arousal and activity, like the activities of reading a poem or praying alone, are such as to propel away the ordinary world of public places, public function, and public observation' (1988, p. 101). Sex in the novel holds precisely this function of removing oneself from the public discourse, allowing Mitchell not to stop the action for two characters to discuss her political views. Instead, she 'buries' them, like 'she buries her observations on class and class structure, in the background and subtext' (Stewart, 2017, para. 7).

The Dunkirk scene, in terms of its focus on David Harben and the nun, the only two people named in the whole passage, also suggests that the heroic acts are those of individuals, acting individually, and not necessarily as part of a bigger, communal effort. David Harben goes to Dunkirk to be alone with the nun as much as to participate in the evacuation of the

soldiers, and at no point inscribes his act in the historical framework of war against the Germans, of British invincibility against the enemy.

*Sunset Over Soho*, through its treatment of the sexuality of female characters, also allows for a redefinition of femininity in wartime. Dorothy Sayers explains she generally chooses male protagonists because female main characters are inefficient in the way that they tend to walk ‘into physical danger’, ‘hampering the men engaged on the job’ (1928, p. 79). She adds that they are ‘irritatingly intuitive’, and too concerned with marriage, since they are ‘young and too beautiful’ (ibid.). However, Gladys Mitchell depicts female characters like the young Leda, Mrs. Bradley and the nun as intelligent, assertive and powerful.

Although many crime narratives reiterate ‘the association of criminal and sexual deviance’ (Sterry, 2017, p. 11), the writer here defies it. Leda spends more time in the novel swimming naked or having sex than speaking. Leda is a ‘nymph’, a ‘mermaid’ (Mitchell, 1988, p. 79), a ‘witch’, who Harben first feels he should be afraid of, but ends up being his ally in wanting to solve the murder mystery. Leda is proudly and openly sexual and her face is ‘young and fresh, pink as the inside of a sea-shell, and with all the weariness and childish distress washed out of it’ (p. 45).

Leda being often seen swimming and diving in the river also evokes the powerful myth of Leda and the Swan. The sonnet by William Butler Yeats, ‘Leda and the Swan’ (1923), retells a story from Greek mythology in which Leda was raped by the god Zeus, who had assumed the form of a swan. Like most of the pictorial representations of Leda and the Swan, the depiction of Leda in the poem is deeply erotic. François Boucher produced several paintings of the myth, amongst which:



François Boucher, 1742, Stair Sainty Matthiesen Museum © New York



François Boucher (attr.), circa 1740, Private Collection Michel Motron ©.

Megan Hoffman explains in her study that ‘classic British “golden age” crime fiction provides an ideal space in which to explore issues that accompany hanging models of femininity’ (2016, p. 1). On the one hand, ‘the potential for deviance through transgressing social codes [...] is necessary to the plot’ and, on the other, ‘the break in law and order must be mended’ at the end. This ‘formula allows a “safe” textual space for the exploration of anxieties surrounding constructions of femininity’ (ibid.). I would argue here that Mitchell goes beyond this idea of safe space as she does not feel the need for the transgressor to be corrected, punished or even put on trial. In the novel, it is not the sexually deviant<sup>223</sup> who is killed or punished, it is the sexually deviant (the adulterous woman) who is saved from her husband, killed because of how he treated her.

Even more daringly, Mitchell’s sleuth, Mrs. Bradley, is herself an interesting character. A psychoanalyst very fond of Freud, she runs her psychiatric clinic as well as holding a Home Office appointment. Admired by other women for her ‘intellectual independence’ (Diana Rigg quoted in Stasio, 2003, para. 8), her free-spirited sexual attitudes and impressive sense of style (she generally wears flamboyant 1920s flapper costumes); Mrs. Bradley, thrice married, never chastises or reprimands others for whatever their sexual behaviour may be. As she says in her lecture at Hadleigh Heights: ‘Society is changing. So, girls, before you settle for the little life, remember, the world is now your oyster’ (‘Death at the Opera’, Booker, 2000). William A. S. Sarjeant, great admirer of Gladys Mitchell, writes the following about Mrs. Bradley:

She is entirely self-assured in her judgments, treating adulterous relationships with sympathy, liberal in her opinions of such thing as "filthy" postcards and erotic literature, and arguing for birth control—all these even in books published before 1935 (which was decidedly adventurous of her creator!). She is capable of over-riding

---

<sup>223</sup> I understand ‘deviant’ here as nonconformist, as behaving sexually in a way that would disrupt the established conventions, particularly in terms of adulterous sex and sex in the public space, both of which increased during the Blitz.

conventional legalities when she considers them absurd, allowing murderers to go free if she feels the crimes to have been excusable. (1985, para. 14)

Female characters such as Leda and Mrs. Bradley met with great success, especially since a ‘crucial element in the development of [the crime novel] was the gender of its audience’: ‘lending libraries which [...] were the basic medium for dissemination of the new clue-puzzle novels had a 75% female audience’ (Knight, 2003, p. 81). Mrs. Bradley was ‘very much a rarity for her time’ (Diana Rigg quoted in Stasio, 2003, para. 8), even more so since, as a detective, she never holds her truth for the only one, and constantly is open to receiving help, or helping others.

Women in the Blitz had to try to reconcile the demands for them to participate in the war effort, taking on traditionally masculine jobs, whilst maintaining a pleasing feminine appearance and behaviour in the eyes of men. Patricia Craig and Mary Cadogan praise Mrs. Bradley by writing she:

doesn't resort to feminine subterfuges, but keeps her wits about her [...] She is not accorded special narrative treatment on account of her sex; her qualities might be transferred to a male detective without loss of credibility. Allowing for the edge of fantasy, she exemplifies a type of professionalism which transcends sexual distinctions.(quoted in Sarjeant, 1985, para. 16)

Perhaps one flaw of Mrs. Bradley’s character is precisely her presence and attitude. Mrs. Bradley is particularly unattractive: a ‘small, ugly, curiously vital old lady, with sharp black eyes, a yellow skin and a grin like that of an anticipatory crocodile’ (Mitchell, 1988, p. 59). Bradley is often described in reptilian terms: ‘a deadly serpent basking in the sun or of an alligator smiling gently while birds removed animal irritants from its armoured frame’; or ‘a hag-like pterodactyl’ (Mitchell quoted in Fuller, undated, para.5). In *Dead Men’s Morris* (1936), she has ‘the maternal anxiety of a boa-constrictor which watches its young attempting

to devour their first donkey' (ibid.). Is her masculine, aggressive appearance a way to explain, justify and counterbalance her independence and assertive personality? Would being beautiful somehow discredit her? Mitchell seems to paradoxically agree with Sayers who states that women cannot make good detectives if they are 'too beautiful'.<sup>224</sup>

The last aspect I would like to focus on in Mitchell's novel is the corpse, the dead body, essential feature of any good crime novel. As Susan Rowland explains, when writing detective fiction in wartime, the 'tensions are acute between the possibility of the crime plot disintegrating into the general chaos of war and its forging a detached closure from it' (2010, p. 126). She adds that 'if a murder begins to resemble a war casualty too closely, the moral distinctions upholding society begin to break down' (ibid.).

In *Sunset Over Soho*, the body is discovered in the wrong place, in the Rest Centre, where victims of the Blitz also lie, closely eliding crime and war. The body in the coffin that is found in the basement is not described, except for one sentence: 'the coffin-like box, opened in the mortuary, disclosed contents only suitable for re-internment' (Mitchell, 1988, p. 18). Unlike the abject face drawn on the 1988 Penguin edition, the narrator does not describe the face of the dead body. Whilst readers are not permitted to feel disgust or horror when witnessing the body, they are however encouraged to empathise with the victim before it is put in a coffin:

The old man's eyes were staring open. Harben closed them. The mouth was open, too, but with that he did not interfere. It was discomfoting to see that toothless, astonished maw [...] It expressed the man's last thought—his surprise and horror at his fall. (p. 42)

---

<sup>224</sup> But then again, as Denise Mina puts it, 'crime is a very hard genre to feminise':

Every time I write a book I despair because I say to myself, 'You've written the same fucking book again!'. If you have a female protagonist she is going to be looking after her mum when she gets older; she is going to be worried about her brother and sister; she will be making a living while bringing up kids. (quoted in Guttridge, 2007, para. 5)



There is a direct link made between the corpse, the victim of an intended crime, and the victims of the bombings. A Polish patient from the Rest Centre sees the coffin and exclaims: 'It is strange [...] to find a coffin outside of our beds. Myself, I regard as an omen. I am alive. I shall die' (p. 20). The unknown identity of the victim, the fact the old man remains unnamed, also links it to war and anonymous war victims.

In the same way war victims were dying under the bombs in Britain, as well as in Germany, for reasons that were not all clear to civilians. We readers do not fully understand who killed the old man, and the motives for the crime are unclear to say the least. The man was killed not because he was rich, not because he was hated and not because he was the object of any jealousy. *Sunset Over Soho* is one of the rare detective novels of which the *dénouement* is incomplete. On the last page, there is still a big piece of the puzzle missing: 'Why did he send you the pennon? When we know that, we know all' (p. 188). Unlike in other crime novels, there is no moral order maintained once the identity of the murderer is (very unconvincingly) found out, no trial, and the reasons for the evil deed remain very vague.

In a way, Gladys Mitchell is particularly modern in the way she leaves her novel open-ended. 65 years later, in 2007, Scottish crime writer Denise Mina explains that 'crime fiction now is big enough not to need tidy resolutions' (quoted in Guttridge, 2007, para. 6):

But an open-ended resolution has to be made to work in another way. The concept of justice goes with achieving a pleasing solution for the reader, one which doesn't just have the bad guy shot but which answers those questions about what is just. There's a deep-rooted belief in a just world—and that makes for good mental health—but all the evidence is that the world isn't just, so people have to shift reality all the time to get a sense of justice. And I think that's what crime fiction explores in a really deep way. (ibid.)

This last idea is relevant to the novel we are considering, in the sense it is written as the bombs are falling over London, in a city where the concepts of justice and fairness can no longer be considered in the traditional sense. I believe this is why *Sunset Over Soho* is particularly violent, with people repeatedly getting stabbed in the street or attacked whilst they are swimming, and characters seem to permanently feel unsafe. The murder mystery is almost a pretext to describe a treacherous and unstable atmosphere, as the plot does not specifically focus on finding out who killed the victim.

The structure and ending of the novel challenge the theory of traditional detective fiction. *Sunset Over Soho* cannot plausibly be deemed a '*texte de désir*', to use Roland Barthes' words. For Barthes, the '*textes de désir*', 'which includes detective stories along with much other popular literature [...] refers to fictions that emphasise the linear nature of narrative and are read primarily for the pleasure of reaching the end' (p. 51). Mitchell's novel definitely does not follow a linear structure, and does not function as a classic detective novel, in the sense the reader is not able to progressively put clues together. It is not either a '*texte de plaisir*', 'which recognises the end of the narrative as important in providing a closure, but locates the enjoyment of the text in the devices [...] that [...] fill the space between beginning and end' (ibid.). Here, there is no closure, there is no pleasure in reaching the *dénouement*. *Sunset Over Soho* is more a '*texte de jouissance*', 'which Barthes associates with the new experimental novel in France, the sense of fulfillment, comfort, and plenitude [...] is replaced by the shock and disequilibrium of a text where anecdote disappears in self-reflexive discourse and the only hero is the disoriented reader' (ibid.).

To conclude, I consider *Sunset Over Soho* to be a fine example of a novel which works outside the Myth's paradigm, particularly through its treatment of the body. It is a challenging

read, and the author's complex writing style<sup>225</sup> and complete lack of humour do not render it very accessible, but it was after all written in the midst of the Blitz, at a time when 'Satan was out of hell, and his legions of furies and devils were loosed on a world grown slack and careless, on people absorbed in little lovin' and hatreds, coarse pleasures and dirty little sins' (Mitchell, 1988, p. 151).

The London the novel describes stands in stark contrast with the front cover of Angus Calder's *The Myth of the Blitz*'s front cover, which features the well-known 1940 photograph by Fred Morley of a Cockney milkman, walking over the rubble. It breaks with the clichés the historian argues were at heart of the propaganda, and by extension the literature of the time: community and solidarity. The capital in *Sunset Over Soho* is disunited rather than united, as it is the theatre of rivalry, tensions between citizens from different countries,<sup>226</sup> and above all violence. The novel is one in which sex and violence are heightened by the Blitz rather than substituted for altruistic concerns.

Recalling Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* as it describes Soho as 'dark and deep' and the Thames as a somber, 'weedy river' (p. 63),<sup>227</sup> Mitchell's novel could be considered as a much darker, politicised alternative to the light, romantic view of wartime sex depicted in Lara Feigel's *The Love-Charm of Bombs* (2013). In her work, Feigel chose to highlight that sex, mainly adulterous sex, happened in a 'London [that was] extraordinarily pleasant these days with all the new spaces, and the rather Mexican effect of ruined churches' (Graham

---

<sup>225</sup> The beginning of the novel is challenging. The following is an example of a paragraph which describes two (unnamed) people who get on well at work:

their characters showed some amazing resemblances as well as sharp differences. But even the differences were not divergent in their nature; they were co-operative, and the resemblances never had the unfortunate effect of producing competition, jealousy or any of the lesser and meaner vices, but merely enhanced and deepened the first impression of solidarity of purpose and essential comradeship of these two people so fortunately in juxtaposition. (Mitchell, 1988, pp. 10-11)

<sup>226</sup> The novel depicts a London filled with refugees from Poland and Germany, and aggressive Spanish sailors who seem to take every opportunity they have to stab passers-by.

<sup>227</sup> Adriana Cavarero explains '*Heart of Darkness* is now recognised as a classic of horrorism by contemporary thought on violence, which it evidently has the merits of narrating in an extreme form that exceeds war, murder and cruelty' (2009, p. 116).

Greene in Feigel, 2013, p. 129). ‘Wartime London was a forcing-ground for love and friendship, for experiments and amusements snatched under pressure’ (Charles Ritchie in *ibid.*, p. 164), and ‘wartime tension and danger exonerated lovers from guilt, seemed to protract their time together into eternal moments’ (Davenport-Hines, 2013, para. 5)—made them, in Bowen’s words, ‘moody, hardy and lyrical’ (Bowen, 1962, p. 98). In Mitchell’s novel, sex is inseparable from violence, and performed by mostly egotistic, unscrupulous characters.

### General Conclusions

There are three main conclusions that can be drawn from the texts analysed in this chapter, all of which shed light on a new angle from which to consider women’s Second World War writing.

The first one, and I believe the most significant one, is that these texts inscribe themselves within a narrative of individual vulnerability and trauma rather than wartime communal stoicism. As Frank Furedi explains, ‘the cultural narrative through which people’s emotional responses to adversity were represented [...] was based on the script of communities displaying fortitude and community resilience’ (2007, p. 236). This concept of ‘cultural narrative’ is a particularly relevant one when considering the period of the Blitz, in which distress and fear were considered ‘unpatriotic’ responses to the threat of the bombings.

Derek Summerfield states that this ‘narrative’ defines:

how much or what kind of adversity a person can face and still be ‘normal’; what is a reasonable risk; when fatalism is appropriate and when a sense of grievance is, what is acceptable behaviour at a time of crisis including how distress should be expressed, how help should be sought, and whether restitution should be made. (2001, p. 437)

The three novels I have focused on here present wartime stories which detail issues caused by taboo, untold war trauma and which revolve around broken, confused minds, reveal the

fragile state of civilians on the home front: Francis Halkin's shell-shock symptoms lead him to murder his wife, Norah Hoult feels trapped behind her blacked-out windows and dies of loneliness, and David Harben cannot differentiate the reality from his nightmares and ends up being the accomplice of a homicide. More importantly, none of these stories offer the reader a positive, hopeful ending. Halkin leaves England once again, as if knowing he will forever be unable to cope with being back home after fighting on the frontline; Claire Temple dies alone, and Mitchell's text abruptly ends on a half-solved enigma. This stands in stark contrast with the Blitz spirit, which was constantly oriented towards the idea of a brighter future, and 'conveyed the belief that whatever the loss, the ability of British people to recover quickly and deal with the repercussions' of any catastrophe 'was and is never in doubt' (Furedi, 2001, p. 240). The wartime narrative these writers choose is one of instability and fragility, as exemplified in the non-chronological structure of the novels, which constantly between past and present, reality and dreams.

The second conclusion I want to underline is the writers' ability to reflect on trauma, particularly on the taboo that revolves around mental health issues in wartime Britain. Unlike what Rawlinson and Calder suggest, Brittain, Hoult and Mitchell all narrate extremely violent and unsettling scenes of psychological distress. Opposing strongly the myth according to which morale remained high even in the face of the most disastrous events during the war, these women writers (amongst whom one was a nurse and another fascinated by Sigmund Freud) are able to detail with great precision the psychological consequences war had on civilians, especially in stiff upper-lip Britain. In *Account Rendered*, Halkin's anxiety is made even worse by the pressure he feels to be a 'brave man'; in *There Were No Windows*, Claire is constantly looked down on by her peers for complaining about her loneliness; and in *Sunset Over Soho*, Mrs. Bradley feels the need to tell others that Harben helped soldiers in Dunkirk, as if to save his reputation from being soiled when he is acting confused and disoriented.

My third conclusion has to be that civilians suffering psychological as well as physical violence on Britain's home front were of real concern to writers of very different genres. The texts looked at here are very diverse, which leads me to argue against Mark Rawlinson's categorical statement according to which Second World War British literature nearly always 'exclude[s] war's human calamities' (2000, p. 83), since it participates in the construction of the mythical national memory in the way it mobilises 'the manpower and morale on which the defence of [the country's] sovereignty depend[s]' (p. 2). On the contrary, they recall how war propaganda not only 'conceal[ed] the chaos and distress caused by the air-raids' but 'threatened [...] humane values' by celebrating the virtue of 'Taking it' (Brittain, 1979, p. 274). It is not that women did not write about violence, but more that they were not listened to, in an extremely silencing socio-political climate.<sup>228</sup>

---

<sup>228</sup> See Chapter II, section A, for more detail on Marguerite Steen, author of *Shelter* (1941), a novel partly censored for passages that contained much description of physical violence:

'Last night', said Jos conventionally, 'I saw a woman's head cut off, as clean as a knife, with a piece of flying windowpane. I saw an H. E. fall in the middle of one of those sandbag enclosures and seven chaps go up in bits. Two of our chaps were buried in falling debris. Saw a row of little houses gutted, and kids running about like living torches with their rags on fire. (Steen, 1942, p. 94)



## Conclusions

### A) General Conclusions

The main purpose of this thesis was to explore how women's fiction of the Second World War engages with the political propaganda of the Blitz period. My analysis of nine texts aimed to highlight whether or not they show an awareness of the constructed 'mythical Blitz values' imposed on the public (and private) sphere and, to a further extent, the will to question, challenge and contradict these values. This research departed from Angus Calder's statement on wartime literature which asserts that although 'the writer, who can (most can't) step outside conventional discourses and paradigms, is in a position to defy the myth's status as an adequate and convincing account of human feeling and behaviour', unfortunately only few 'work outside the myth's paradigm' (1991, pp. 143-144). It also stemmed from a study by Jenny Hartley, who claims in *Millions Like Us* that women's wartime writing in particular is a 'literature of commitment and citizenship' (1997, p. 15), implying that generally women writers did not criticise political ideology during the Blitz.

There were several hypotheses that informed my research before I started the close reading of the corpus. First, and most importantly, that Angus Calder and Jenny Hartley's analyses were probably incomplete, and that women war writers were able and did indeed reflect on the myth of the 'People's War'.<sup>229</sup> Second, that as women became what I would label as 'home front soldiers' in the midst of total war, their work was not solely limited to issues of domesticity and gender inequalities, but also reflected on the more general, social and political aspects of wartime Britain. Third, that middlebrow and more popular novels, texts virtually unknown today and absent from most World War II literature studies, inform

---

<sup>229</sup> An idea that was first formulated by Kristine Miller in her study *British Literature of the Blitz* (2009).



the socio-historical reassessment of the period as they ‘dominated the publishing market’ (Humble, 2001, p. 1).

The three chapters of this dissertation all focused on a different aspect of the ‘Myth of the Blitz’ as defined by Angus Calder: patriotism, class, and the representation of the wounded body. There are several general conclusions that can be drawn from my analysis, which all confirm my original hypotheses.

From the study conducted in the first chapter, I firmly conclude that patriotism was not a collective, unanimous feeling in women’s fiction of World War II. Looking at *Anger in the Sky* (1943) by Susan Ertz, *Miss Ranskill Comes Home* (1946) by Barbara Bower and the short story ‘Mysterious Kôr’ (1942) by Elizabeth Bowen, I have shown that each of these writers demonstrates very ambivalent feelings towards the patriotic propaganda promoting the need to protect and defend the British nation. Through very different genres (the rural novel, the dystopian novel and the short story), these three writers all question the British people’s unity in the fight for their country’s victory. Susan Ertz highlights her country’s inefficient diplomatic policies and discusses the legitimacy of American non-intervention. Barbara Bower focuses on the ineffectiveness and absurdity of repressive wartime regulations, and depicts characters whose patriotism is largely based on egotism and potentially damaging effects of nationalism. Elizabeth Bowen centres her short story on the paradox which lies at the heart of the British Empire’s war aims, that is to say the idea of defending British freedom and democracy while the country itself represses national calls for independence in its colonies. What these texts reveal are strong individual differences in British citizens in terms of feelings of national allegiance, as opposed to the image of a united people behind the British flag. Each of these texts also marks a strong opposition between the people and Churchill’s government—‘they’, ‘them’ (Bowen, 1983, p. 730)—that constructs the largely

unjustified 'belief in British invincibility' (Ertz, 1943, p. 100) which leads to preposterous, 'beastly' and paranoid patriotism (Todd, 2005, pp. 156, 135).

I conclude from my second chapter that the issue of social class lies at heart of women's fiction of World War II. Focusing on the novels *Shelter* (1941) by Marguerite Steen, *London Pride* (1941) by Phyllis Bottome and *The Heat of the Day* (1948) by Elizabeth Bowen, my analysis has underlined the lack of social unity described by these writers during the Blitz. All three works understand the People's War as an expression entailing a 'coercive realignment of ideas and national identity' (Ward, 2008, p. 107), ignoring the insurmountable reality of class inequalities that make up British society, differences which were only reinforced by the war. Class-consciousness is portrayed as insuperable in the novels of both upper-middle class writers such as Elizabeth Bowen, whose novel centres on a richer woman's disdain and contempt for a young woman she considers fickle, grubby, and inelegant; and less privileged authors like Bottome and Steen, who highlight the lack of government measures to help the poorer classes in the areas most hit by the bombings. This clearly contradicts Churchill's 'all in it together' image of the home front (quoted in Addison, 2002, p. 236).

My third chapter leads me to suggest that violence is not necessarily minimised or rendered absent from war narratives by authors only concerned with maintaining 'the manpower and morale on which the defence of [the country's] sovereignty depend[s]' (Rawlinson, 2000, p. 2). Despite Mark Rawlinson's argument that, in an attempt to 'prevent civil insurrection amongst a population psychologically unhinged by the enemy's air force', the wound's invisibility is a feature of artistic productions of the time, along with the 'focus on buildings, not bodies' (p. 71), and Hartley's statement that women writers focused on the 'less tangible harm' caused by the war (2001, p. 161), I have highlighted that women did not shy away from depicting the psychological and physical effects of war violence. In the three

novels *Account Rendered* (1945) by Vera Brittain, *There Were No Windows* (1944) by Norah Hoult and *Sunset Over Soho* (1943) by Gladys Mitchell, characters commit murder because of uncontrollable shell-shock symptoms, feel trapped behind blacked-out windows and die of loneliness, or cannot differentiate reality from nightmares and end up being the accomplice of a homicide. The wartime narrative these writers choose is one of instability and fragility, as exemplified in the non-chronological structure of the novels, which constantly oscillate between past and present, reality and dreams.

In light of the above, the most significant conclusion to be drawn from my study of these nine different works is that Calder and Hartley's analyses are incomplete and, I would argue, too reductive. It is unwise to generalise wartime fiction and consider that all of it participated in what Rawlinson assumes to be 'the national mythology of a just People's War' (quoted in Miller, 2008, p. 11). There is a wide range of material available with which to broaden these analyses and observe that many writers did work 'outside the myth's paradigm' (Calder, 1991, p. 144). I say 'many' here, even though I have only focused on eight different writers, as it is evident from my analysis that these reflections on political and social issues of the Blitz period were widespread. The corpus I studied is based on works by women from different social and geographical backgrounds who wrote very different types of texts, yet they all overtly contest the 'myth'. The questioning of the myth is therefore not limited to genre.

This brings me to the most obvious implication of my critical assessment of Second World War British women's fiction, which is that women break the myth at its very inception. All the texts I have considered revolve around women. The characters are mostly women, who interact with other women. The home front during the Blitz consisted of a society in which women had a central role in and had first-hand contact with the war. They therefore embodied the myth and deconstructed it. Women writers of the Blitz period may best

elucidate George Orwell's main thesis in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). Indeed, arguably, the most famous novel of the Second World War<sup>230</sup> is the text that most clearly confirms the idea that the 'People's War' was a 'myth',<sup>231</sup> suggesting that extreme rules and regulations lead to thought control and lobotomy, which constitute the base of the people of Oceania's 'primitive patriotism' (Orwell, 2003, p. 74). Isaac Deutscher reports that Orwell was 'convinced that Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt consciously plotted to divide the world' (quoted in McCrum, 2009, np.), and Peter Davison notes that Orwell's American publisher claimed that the title derived from reversing the date 1948 (ibid.). The women's works explored in this thesis touch on the same contradictions as Orwell's novel.

Also as a result of my analysis, I contend that middlebrow and more popular novels, particularly genre fiction such as detective novels, are excellent sources to use in the context

---

<sup>230</sup> The idea for *Nineteen Eighty-Four* came to Orwell in the Spanish civil war, and began to take shape during 1943-1944, in London, where he lived with his wife Eileen who was working for the Censorship Department of the Ministry of Information.

<sup>231</sup> There are direct references to the Blitz in the novel, as frequent bombings raid appear in the novel, and one passage in particular depicts Smith recalling him and his dad descending into a Tube station to seek shelter:

[o]ne of his early memories was of an air raid which appeared to take everyone by surprise. [...] He did not remember the raid itself, but he did remember his father's hand clutching his own as they hurried down, down, down into some place deep in the earth, round and round a spiral staircase which rang under his feet and which finally so wearied his legs that he began whimpering and they had to stop and rest. [...] Finally they had emerged into a noisy, crowded place which he had realized to be a Tube station. [...] There were people sitting all over the stone-flagged floor, and other people, packed tightly together, were sitting on metal bunks, one above the other. Winston and his mother and father found themselves a place on the floor, and near them an old man and an old woman were sitting side by side on a bunk. (Orwell, 2003, pp. 33-34)

Another strongly resembles one of the V2 rockets attacks during the Blitz on London:

Suddenly the whole street was in commotion. There were yells of warning from all sides. People were shooting into the doorways like rabbits. A young woman leapt out of a doorway a little ahead of Winston, grabbed up a tiny child playing in a puddle, whipped her apron round it, and leapt back again, all in one movement. At the same instant a man in a concertina-like black suit, who had emerged from a side alley, ran towards Winston, pointing excitedly to the sky.

'Steamer!' he yelled. [...] 'Steamer' was a nickname which, for some reason, the proles applied to rocket bombs. Winston promptly flung himself on his face. [...] They seemed to possess some kind of instinct which told them several seconds in advance when a rocket was coming, although the rockets supposedly travelled faster than sound. Winston clasped his forearms above his head. There was a roar that seemed to make the pavement heave; a shower of light objects pattered on to his back. When he stood up he found that he was covered with fragments of glass from the nearest window. (p. 86)

of the socio-historical reassessment of the Myth of the Blitz, and therefore cannot be neglected, as has largely been the case up to the present. I have looked at novels designed to be read by the general public rather than for middle classes or an educated readership, and observed how they strongly question conventions, as opposed commonly held assumptions, since most of these works are completely neglected by studies in the field of Second World War Literature.

Moreover, I have shown how middlebrow and popular wartime literature not only provides extremely significant material in terms of the social and historical context of the Blitz, but also demonstrates particularly interesting form and technique. Marguerite Steen experiments with different narrative voices in *Shelter* as she alternates between third-person narration and journalistic reports, *Miss Ranskill Comes Home* by Barbara Bower uses the technique of estrangement to reflect on wartime society from an outsider's point of view, and Gladys Mitchell's *Sunset Over Soho* follows a distorted, confusing chronology to depict the instability and volatility of wartime society.

I would emphasise that my principal conclusion is that there exists in British women's fiction of the Second World War an alternative narrative to that of the 'People's War'—to the 'Myth' described by Angus Calder, Jenny Hartley or Mark Rawlinson—and that it is precisely a narrative of vulnerability. The Blitz culture offered a particular account of people's behaviour, and established a specific narrative that defined:

how much or what kind of adversity a person can face and still be 'normal'; what is a reasonable risk; when fatalism is appropriate and when a sense of grievance is, what is acceptable behaviour at a time of crisis including how distress should be expressed, how help should be sought, and whether restitution should be made. (Summerfield, 2001, p. 437)

In the specific case of the Blitz, this narrative was based on ‘displaying fortitude and community resilience’ (Furedi, 2007, p. 236). What is more, as research indicates, the fear and intensity with which a traumatic situation is experienced is not directly proportional to the objective character of a specific threat (Carr, 1932), rather, ‘responses to specific circumstances are mediated through cultural norms that inform people about what is expected of them when confronted with a threat and how they should respond and feel’ (Furedi, 2007, p. 237). The specific People’s War ‘cultural script’<sup>232</sup> transmitted rules about feelings and also ideas about what those feelings meant (ibid).

Yet, since the 1980s, the British ‘cultural script’ has changed in the way it confronts adversities, as ‘the focus is increasingly on the emotional pain of the individual’ (Furedi, 2007, p. 41). As Kenneth J. Gergen noted, therapeutic culture provides a script through which emotional deficits ‘make their way into the cultural vernacular’, and become available for ‘the construction of everyday reality’ (1990, p. 362). Vulnerability ‘has emerged as one of the dominant frames through which social problems are communicated to the public’ (Furedi, 2007, p. 242). The shift from the narrative of the Blitz to the narrative of vulnerability has had important implications for the ways current and past disasters are interpreted.

More specifically, this has led to the reassessment of the cultural script of different historical periods. My analysis of these novels has precisely helped to show that women writers of the Second World War shaped an alternative ‘script’ to that of the ‘People’s War’ and transcend the ‘narrative of resilience’ of wartime propaganda. Unlike what Calder suggests, the alternative to the ‘Myth of the Blitz’ he described in his study—one of panic, distrust in the government and fractured society—is very much present in wartime fiction, stepping outside of what Hartley defines as the framework of ‘commitment and citizenship’ (1997, p. 15). The corpus of texts I have looked at depicts vulnerable, fragile, broken,

---

<sup>232</sup> As defined by Cliff Goddard and Anna Wierzbicka, the term cultural scripts refers to ‘a powerful new technique for articulating cultural norms, values, and practices in terms which are clear, precise, and accessible to cultural insiders and to cultural outsiders alike’ (2005, p. 153).

confused and scared characters. This is not to say that there are necessarily pessimistic or fatalistic, but simply that they offer an alternative to the myth.

## B) Implications

The implications of the conclusions I have set out here point to three main questions, namely, the need to extend the socio-historical reassessment of the ‘Myth of the Blitz’ to the literary field; the need to further and extend research on women’s wartime writing, particularly more popular novels and genre fiction; and the fundamental need to highlight ambivalence and ambiguity as essential aspects of Second World War writing.

The main implication of my critical assessment of the chosen corpus is that fiction of the Second World War should be considered and concentrated on in much greater detail within the current socio-historical reassessment of the period. Angus Calder<sup>233</sup> bases his thesis that the Blitz values of community and stoicism were largely a ‘myth’ on the analysis of previously kept-quiet historical facts or carefully minimised data, and dismisses the literature of the time as simply supporting propaganda objectives. His main line of argument according to which the ‘People’s War’ was essentially a political construction is on the contrary reinforced by a large part of Blitz fiction. The historical and social studies that have looked at the Blitz over the last two decades could greatly benefit from closely examining the literature of the time, which would allow to draw even more comprehensive conclusions of the period.

The conclusions of this thesis also necessarily entail that women’s war writing merits more focus and critical attention accorded to it in the field of Second World War literature. The redefinition of the wartime literature canon, which should not limit the presence of women writers to Virginia Woolf and Elizabeth Bowen, can be much extended. Hartley and Lassner’s studies highlight the need for women’s texts to be included in anthologies of

---

<sup>233</sup> And Sonya Rose in *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Britain, 1939–1945* (2003).

Second World War literature in the same way as works by Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene or Henry Green, as they offer just as valuable and relevant commentaries on wartime society. I have also contributed to attracting critical attention to virtually unknown women's texts and firmly assert the need to extend research in this area.

This work also highlights the strict categorisation of wartime literature and very clearly indicates the need to recognise the ambivalence that lies at the heart of wartime texts. In the same way *Chimamanda* Ngozi Adichie warns against 'the danger of a single story' (2009), critics should refrain from labelling women's writing of the Second World War as either texts of 'commitment and citizenship', based on submissive womanhood, or as an ensemble of 'pacifist, rebellious' texts in constant opposition with public discourse. I have highlighted the two contrasting narratives of resilience and vulnerability in the understanding of historical periods, yet I insist on the importance of being wary of building 'a counter-myth' to that of the 'People's War'.<sup>234</sup> Whilst 'commitment and citizenship' do not entirely define women's writings of the 1940s, nor does 'vulnerability'<sup>235</sup>. This thesis emphasises the diversity of thought and the lack of common response to political ideology in British women's fiction of the Second World War.

### C) Further Research

Some points I have raised in this thesis could be fruitfully developed further. I consider here three main suggestions for aspects of this topic that could be explored in more depth.

First, there is scope for further detailed study of British women's popular fiction of the Second World War within the reappraisal of the literature of the period. There is a wide range of little-known authors, such as Lettice Cooper or Mollie Panter-Downes, whose works also represent valuable contributions for the general understanding of British wartime society in

---

<sup>234</sup> See Philip Ziegler, as quoted on p. 26 of this thesis.

<sup>235</sup> Interestingly enough, François Ewald suggests that in recent times vulnerability has acquired the status of a 'sacred term' (2002, p. 294).



relation to the ‘Myth of the Blitz’. Very few critics have undertaken this kind of work, yet there is one researcher in particular, Scott Thompson, who has created an extremely comprehensive anthology of ‘off the beaten page: lesser-known British, Irish, & American women writers 1910-1960’ (Furrowed Middlebrow 2018). His website ‘Furrowed Middlebrow’, specifically the ‘The War List: The Thick of It’ section, lists and provides extensive information about middlebrow women writers of World War II. It would be rewarding to take this list as a point of departure to answer the questions that have been asked at the beginning of this study in even more depth.

Second, another research area would be to explore men’s literature in relation to the ‘Myth of the Blitz’. I have focused specifically on women’s fiction in an attempt to qualify Jenny Hartley’s statement on women’s literature, but there also exists the necessity to reassess men’s Second World War texts. The close reading of male fiction of the Blitz may possibly reveal an alternative conclusion to that of Robert Calder’s in *Beware the British Serpent: The Role of Writers in British Propaganda in the United States 1939–1945* (2004). Calder insists on the ‘propaganda value’ of writers of the Second World War, whose ‘pen were clearly commissioned by the Ministry of Information’ (p. xi). Again, this study might be incomplete, and could be ignoring a whole other part of wartime men’s fiction.

Third, it would also be of interest to explore the link between the socio-historical reassessment of wartime periods and other literatures. In this thesis, I have referred several times to another ‘myth’ of the Second World War, the ‘*mythe du résistancialisme*’ in France.<sup>236</sup> Yan Hamel’s *La bataille des mémoires: la Seconde Guerre mondiale et le roman français* (2006) reflects on the ‘battle of memories’ present in the works of Julien Gracq, Marguerite Duras, Romain Gary and Louis-Ferdinand Céline amongst others; and Claire Gorrara’s study *French Crime Fiction and the Second World War: Past Crimes, Present*

---

<sup>236</sup> See page 20 of this thesis.

*Memories* (2012) is one of the first works to explore French genre fiction of the 1940s in relation to the '*mythe du résistantialisme*', analysing her chosen texts in a similar approach to the one used in this thesis. These two works, as this thesis as a whole, contribute to refuting the idea that wartime writers are necessarily products of wartime propaganda, and subsequently they actively participate in the redefinition of wartime literature as a plural, diverse corpus.



## Works Cited

- Addison, P. (1975). *The Road to 1945, British Politics and the Second World War*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Addison, P. (2002). National Identity and the Battle of Britain. In B. Korte and R. Schneider (Eds.) *War and the Cultural Construction of Identities in Britain* (pp. 225-240). Rodopi.
- Adichie, C. N. (2009). The Danger of a Single Story [Video file]. Retrieved from [https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story).
- Adler, A. (1927). Individual psychology. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 22 (2), pp. 116-122.
- Alberge, D. (2013, July 27). How Francis Bacon Turned to Sculpture Master Henry Moore for Help. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/jul/27/moore-bacon-sculpture-lessons>.
- Allbeson, T. (2015). Visualizing Wartime Destruction and Postwar Reconstruction: Herbert Mason's Photograph of St. Paul's Reevaluated. *The Journal of Modern History* 87 (3), pp. 532-578.
- Allingham, M. (1941). *The Oaken Heart*. London: Michael Joseph.
- Altman, I. (1975). *The Environment and Social Behaviour: Privacy, Personal Space, Territory*. Crowding. Monterey.
- Anderson, B. (2006). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Andrews, J. (2002). *London's War: The Shelter Drawings of Henry Moore*. Burlington, Vermont: Lund Humphries.

- Anon. (undated). Vera Mary Brittain [Blog post]. Retrieved from <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/vera-mary-brittain>.
- Anon. Reviewer (2017a, February 20). Analysing Forms of Love as The Bombs Fall All Around: *Shelter* by Marguerite Steen. [Blog post] Retrieved from <https://leavesandpages.com/2017/02/20/analyzing-forms-of-love-as-the-bombs-fall-all-around-shelter-by-marguerite-steen/>.
- Anon. Reviewer (2017b, October 22). Dress Down Sunday: *Sunset Over Soho* by Gladys Mitchell. [Blog post] Retrieved from <http://clothesinbooks.blogspot.com/2017/10/dress-down-sunday-sunset-over-soho-by.html>.
- Arendt, H. (1968). *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. San Diego: Harcourt.
- Aubane Historical Society (2008). Elizabeth Bowen: A 'Debate'. In *The Irish Examiner*. Retrieved from <http://aubanehistoricalsociety.org/irishexaminerbowendebate.pdf>.
- Baldick, C. (1992). *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Baldwin, S. (1932, November 11). Mr. Baldwin on Aerial Warfare – A Fear for the Future. *The Times*.
- Barker, R. (1982). *Conscience, Government, and War: Conscientious Objection in Great Britain, 1939-45*. London: Routledge.
- Barthes, R. (1973). *Mythologies*. London: Granada.
- Basso, H. (1947, March 15). A Review of *Mary Hallam*. *The New Yorker*.
- Batteson, V. J. (1939). 'Black-out': Problems in Correspondence. *The British Medical Journal* 2, p. 831.
- BBC Written Archives Centre. (1941, January 5). Message from the Ministry of Information to the Programme Controllers. R34/702/4. Propaganda Programme Arrangements.

- BBC Written Archives Centre. (1941, March 4). Message from the Britain's War Propaganda Bureau to Sir Richard Maconachie, Head of the Talks Department. R34/702/4 Propaganda Programmes Arrangements.
- Beaune, Colette. (1987). La notion de nation en France au Moyen Age. *Communications* 45, pp. 101-116.
- Beer, P. (1996). For a Lark. Review of the book *Hearts Undefeated: Women's Writing of the Second World War*. *London Review of Books* 18 (6), pp. 14-15.
- the Bellman [pseud. O'Faolain] (1942). Meet Elizabeth Bowen—Interview by Sean O'Faolain. *The Bell*.
- Berg, M. L. (1980). The Novels of Susan Ertz: Aspects of Affirmation. *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 21 (3), pp. 5-27.
- Billig, M. (1995). *Banal Nationalism*. London: Sage Publications.
- Birch, D. (Ed.) (2009). *Oxford Companion to English Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bishop A. and Bennett Y. A. (Eds.) (1989). *Wartime Chronicle: Diary, 1935-45*. London: Gollancz.
- Bishop, G. (1942, February 28). *Shelter*, Jane Nicholson, Review. *The Herald*.
- Blacker, C.P. (1946). *Neurosis and Mental Health Services*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Blair, T. (2005, July 11). Tony Blair's Statement to MPs. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2005/jul/11/uksecurityterrorism>.
- Bloom, H. (2009). *Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness*. New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism.
- Bolt, C. (2004). *Sisterhood Questioned: Race, Class and Internationalism in the American and British Women's Movements c. 1880s-1970s*. London: Routledge.

- Booker, M. K. (1994). *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature: Fiction as Social Criticism*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.
- Booker, S. and Mitchell G. (Writers), and Hawes, J. (Director). (2000, January 16). Death at the Opera. [*The Mrs Bradley Mysteries*]. BBC America (Producer).
- Booth, A. (1996). *Postcards from the Trenches Negotiating the Space Between Modernism and the First World War*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bottome, P. (1939, August 19). Malcolm Muggeridge on 'The Fate of Homo Sapiens'. *Time and Tide*, pp. 1116-1117, British Library.
- Bottome, P. (1943). *London Pride*. London: Purnell and Sons.
- Bottome, P. (1945). Letter to Max Beerbohm. Beerbohm Papers. Merton College, Oxford.
- Bottome, P. (1960). Letter to Mr Potts. Bottome Papers. Add 78866, British Library.
- Bottome, P. (1961). Letter to Mrs Frank. Bottome Papers. Add 78866, British Library.
- Bottome, P. (1962). *The Goal*. New York: Vanguard Press.
- Bottome, P. (1995). *Not in Our Stars*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Bottome, P. (1998). *Old Wine*. Evanston. Northwestern University Press.
- Bouchard, M. (2013). La Grande Guerre patriotique: narrations sociales et monuments de guerre. *Anthropologica* 55 (1), pp. 113–126.
- Boucher, A. (1960, December 11). *Book Review of Say it with Flowers* by Gladys Mitchell. New York Times.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bourke, J. (2011). Women on the Home Front in World War One. *BBC Website*. Retrieved from [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain\\_wwone/women\\_employment\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain_wwone/women_employment_01.shtml).

- Bowen, E. (1940a). The Big House. In H. Lee (Ed.) (1986). *Mulberry Tree: Writings of Elizabeth Bowen* (pp. 25-30). London: Virago.
- Bowen, E. (1940b) Letter to Virginia Woolf. In H. Lee (Ed.) (1986). *Mulberry Tree: Writings of Elizabeth Bowen* (pp. 214-216). London: Virago.
- Bowen, E. (1942). Review of Maurice Richardson's *London Burning*. In A. Hepburn (Ed.) (2017) *The Weight of a World of Feeling* (pp. 139-141). Northwestern: Northwestern University Press.
- Bowen, E. (1944a). English Novelists. In *Impressions of English Literature*. London: Collins.
- Bowen, E. (1944b). Review of J. L. Hodson's *Home Front*. In A. Hepburn (Ed.) (2017) *The Weight of a World of Feeling* (pp. 168-170). Northwestern: Northwestern University Press.
- Bowen, E. (1945). Preface to the American Edition of *The Demon Lover*. In H. Lee (Ed.) (1986). *The Mulberry Tree: Writings of Elizabeth Bowen* (pp. 94-99). London: Virago.
- Bowen, E. (1945, March ?). Letter to Charles Ritchie. In V. Glendinning (Ed.) (2008). *Love's Civil War* (pp. 43-44). London: Simon and Schuster.
- Bowen, E. (1945, July 29). Letter to Charles Ritchie. In V. Glendinning (Ed.) (2008). *Love's Civil War* (pp. 52-55). London: Simon and Schuster.
- Bowen, E. (1945, September 24). Letter to William Plomer. In H. Lee (Ed.) (1986). *The Mulberry Tree* (pp. 206-207). London: Virago.
- Bowen, E. (1947). She. In H. Lee (Ed.) (1986). *Mulberry Tree: Writings of Elizabeth Bowen* (pp. 246-250). London: Virago.
- Bowen, E. (1950). Britain in Autumn. In A. Hepburn (Ed.) (2008). *People, Places, Things: Essays by Elizabeth Bowen* (pp. 48-55). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Bowen, E. (1950, January 5). Letter to Charles Ritchie. In V. Glendinning (Ed.) (2008). *Love's Civil War* (pp. 148-155). London: Simon and Schuster.



- Bowen, E. (1962). *The Heat of the Day*. London: Penguin.
- Bowen, E. (1962a). *Seven Winters: Memories of a Dublin Childhood and Afterthoughts, Pieces on Writing*. New York: Knopf.
- Bowen, E. (1969a). All People Great and Small. In A. Hepburn (Ed.) (2017) *The Weight of a World of Feeling* (pp. 373-377). Northwestern: Northwestern University Press.
- Bowen, E. (1969b). Review of Angus Calder's *The People's War*. In A. Hepburn (Ed.) (2017). *The Weight of a World of Feeling* (pp. 373-377). Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Bowen, E. (1983). 'Mysterious Kôr'. In *The Collected Stories of Elizabeth Bowen* (pp. 728-740). London: Penguin.
- Bowen, E. (1999). *Collected Stories*. London: Vintage.
- Branson, N. (1985). *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain 1927-1941*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Breton, A. (1969). *Entretiens*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Brey, G. (1977). La destrucción de Guernica. *Tiempo de Historia* 29, pp. 5-12.
- Briggs, J. (2005). Afterword. In Hoults, N. (2005). *There Were No Windows* (pp. 329-341). London: Persephone.
- Brittain, V. (1939). What Can We Do in Wartime?. In A. Bishop and Y. A. Bennett (Eds.) (1989). *Wartime Chronicle: Diary, 1935-45* (pp. 18-21). London: Gollancz.
- Brittain, V. (1939, November 18). Diary Entry. In A. Bishop and Y. A. Bennett (Eds.) (1989). *Wartime Chronicle: Diary, 1935-45* (p. 35). London: Gollancz.
- Brittain, V. (1940, October 5). Diary Entry. In A. Bishop and Y. A. Bennett (Eds.) (1989). *Wartime Chronicle: Diary, 1935-45* (p. 59). London: Gollancz.
- Brittain, V. (1942, October 4). Diary Entry. In A. Bishop and Y. A. Bennett (Eds.) (1989). *Wartime Chronicle: Diary, 1935-45* (p. 181). London: Gollancz.

- Brittain, V. (1942, October 8). Diary Entry. In A. Bishop and Y. A. Bennett (Eds.) (1989). *Wartime Chronicle: Diary, 1935-45* (p. 182). London: Gollancz.
- Brittain, V. (1943, April 5). Diary Entry. In A. Bishop and Y. A. Bennett (Eds.) (1989). *Wartime Chronicle: Diary, 1935-45* (pp. 224-225). London: Gollancz.
- Brittain, V. (1943, April 6). Diary Entry. In A. Bishop and Y. A. Bennett (Eds.) (1989). *Wartime Chronicle: Diary, 1935-45* (p. 225). London: Gollancz.
- Brittain, V. (1943, April 8). Diary Entry. In A. Bishop and Y. A. Bennett (Eds.) (1989). *Wartime Chronicle: Diary, 1935-45* (p. 225). London: Gollancz.
- Brittain, V. (1943, April 12). Diary Entry. In A. Bishop and Y. A. Bennett (Eds.) (1989). *Wartime Chronicle: Diary, 1935-45* (pp. 226-227). London: Gollancz.
- Brittain, V. (1945). *Account Rendered*. London: Macmillan.
- Brittain, V. (1945b) Reflections on Being a Prominent Name on the Gestapo's List. In A. Bishop and Y. A. Bennett (Eds.) (1989). *Wartime Chronicle: Diary, 1935-45* (pp. 271-272). London: Gollancz.
- Brittain, V. (1945, August 24). Diary Entry. In A. Bishop and Y. A. Bennett (Eds.) (1989). *Wartime Chronicle: Diary, 1935-45* (p. 268). London: Gollancz.
- Brittain, V. (1947). *On Becoming a Writer*. London: Hutchinson.
- Brittain, V. (1979). *Testament of Experience*. New York: Seaview.
- Brittain, V. (1978). *Testament of Youth*. London: Virago.
- Brittain, V. (2005). *England's Hour*. London: Continuum.
- Britton, S. (2010). 'Come and See the Empire by the All Red Route!': Anti-Imperialism and Exhibitions in Interwar Britain. *Hist Workshop J 69* (1), pp. 68-89.
- Brock, P. and Socknat, T. P. (Eds.) (1999). *Challenge to Mars: Pacifism from 1918 to 1945*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

- Broder, D. (2016, December 2). 'Progressive' British Patriotism: A Tradition Without History. *Surreal Ale*. Retrieved from <https://surrealale.wordpress.com/2016/12/02/progressive-british-patriotism-a-tradition-without-history/>.
- Brown, C. G. (2006). *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain*. London: Pearson.
- Bryant Jordan, H. (1992). *How Will the Heart Endure: Elizabeth Bowen and the Landscape of War*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Burney, I. (2012). War on fear: Solly Zuckerman and civilian nerve in the Second World War. *History of the Human Sciences*, 25 (5), pp. 49–72.
- Calder, A. (1969). *The People's War*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Calder, A. (1991). *The Myth of the Blitz*. London: Pimlico.
- Calder, A. (1995). Britain's Good War? *History Today*, pp. 55-61.
- Calder A. and Sheridan, D. (1984). *Speak for Yourself: A Mass-Observation Anthology, 1937-49*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Calder, R. (2004). *Beware the British Serpent: The Role of Writers in British Propaganda in the United States, 1939-1945*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Calder-Marshall, C., Connolly, C., Dobree, B., Harrisson, T., Koestler, A., Lewis, A., Orwell, G. and Spender, S. (1941). Why Not War Writers? *Horizon 4*, pp. 236-239.
- Cannadine, D. (1981). War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain. In J. Whaley (Ed.), *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death* (pp. 187-242). London: Europa Publications LTD.
- Carpenter, H. (1988). *A Serious Character: The Life of Ezra Pound*. Boston Houghton Mifflin.
- Carr, L. (1932). Disaster and the Sequence-Pattern Concept of Social Change. *American Journal of Sociology* 38 (2), pp. 207–18.

- Carroll, J. (2011). *Jerusalem, Jerusalem: How the Ancient City Ignited Our Modern World*. New York: Harcourt.
- Cavarero, A. (2009). Appendix. The Horror! The Horror! Rereading Conrad. *Horrorism, Naming Contemporary Violence* (pp. 116-124). New York: Columbia University Press.
- 'Censorship of Books' (1939, December 23). *Publisher's Circular*.
- Chamberlain, N. (1938). Speech 'Peace for Our Time' in 10 Downing Street. Retrieved from <http://www.britannia.com/history/docs/peacetime.html>.
- Chancellor, A. (2009, September 3). It's Time to Explode the Myth that All Children Evacuated from the Blitz Were Well Treated. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2009/sep/03/alexander-chancellor-wartime-evacuees>.
- Chandler, R. (1950). The Simple Art of Murder. In J. Daley (Ed.) (2012). *Great Writers on the Art of Fiction: From Mark Twain to Joyce Carol Oates* (pp. 91-107). Courier Corporation.
- Charman, T. (2018). What Life Was Like in Britain During The Second World War. Imperial War Museums Website. Retrieved from <http://www.iwm.org.uk/history/what-life-was-like-in-britain-during-the-second-world-war>.
- Chassaigne, P. (2011). L'Angleterre, ennemie héréditaire ? *Revue historique des armées* 264, pp. 3-10.
- Chessman, H. S. (1983). Women and Language in the Fiction of Elizabeth Bowen. *Twentieth Century Literature: A Scholarly Critical Journal* 29 (1), pp. 69-82.
- Chibnall, S. (1995). Pulp Versus Penguins: Paperbacks Go to War. In D. Thoms and P. Kirkham, P. (Eds.) *War Culture: Social Change and Changing Experience in World War Two Britain* (pp. 131-149). Lawrence and Wishart, London

- Chrisafis, A. (2017, April 23). Emmanuel Macron Vows to Be 'President For All Of France' After First Round Win. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/23/emmanuel-macron-hailed-by-supporters-as-next-french-president>.
- Christensen, L. (2001). *Elizabeth Bowen: The Later Fiction*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press.
- Churchill, W. (1940a, June 4). 'We Shall Fight On the Beaches' The International Churchill Society. Retrieved from <https://www.winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/1940-the-finest-hour/we-shall-fight-on-the-beaches>.
- Churchill, W. (1940b, June 14). Their Finest Hour. Retrieved from <https://winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/1940-the-finest-hour/their-finest-hour/>.
- Churchill, W. (1940c, August 20). 'The Few' The Churchill Centre and Museum. Retrieved from <http://www.churchill-society-london.org.uk/thefew.html>.
- Churchill, W. (1941a, April 27). A Difficult Time. 'Westward, Look, the Land is Bright'. Retrieved from <http://www.churchill-society-london.org.uk/LngHrdWr.html>.
- Churchill, W. (1941b, December 26). Address to Joint Session of US Congress, 1941. Retrieved from <https://www.nationalchurchillmuseum.org/churchill-address-to-congress.html>.
- Coates, J. (1987). The Rewards and the Problems of Rootedness in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day*. *Renascence* 39, pp. 484-501.
- Collins, M. (2008). Ireland, Culture and Religion: 'The New Writers and Censorship'. In *The Pursuit of Sovereignty and the Impact of Partition, 1912–1949*. Cork Multitext Project. Retrieved from

[https://web.archive.org/web/20060827093102/http://multitext.ucc.ie:80/d/Ireland\\_culture\\_religion\\_1912-49](https://web.archive.org/web/20060827093102/http://multitext.ucc.ie:80/d/Ireland_culture_religion_1912-49).

Connelly, M. (2004). *We Can Take It! Britain and the Memory of the Second World War*. London: Routledge.

Conrad, J. (2006). *Heart of Darkness*. P. B. Armstrong (Ed.). London: Norton.

Cooper, M. (1981). *The German Air Force, 1933-1945: An Anatomy of Failure*. London: Jane's.

Corcoran, N. (2004) *The Enforced Return*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Corum, J. (1997). *The Luftwaffe: Creating the Operational Air War, 1918–1940*. Lawrence: Kansas University Press.

Cox, J. (2012). Blake's Jerusalem. *The Socialist Review*. Retrieved from <http://socialistreview.org.uk/372/blakes-jerusalem>.

Crang, J. A. (2008). 'Come Into the Army, Maud': Women, Military Conscription, and the Markham Inquiry. *Defence Studies* 8 (3), pp. 381-395.

Culleton, C. A. (2000). *Working-Class Culture, Women, and Britain, 1914-1921*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

*Daily Mail* (1940, December 31). War's Greatest Picture: St. Paul's Stands Unharm'd in the Midst of the Burning City. Cover page.

*Daily Mirror* (1939, September 2). *Daily Mirror's Coverage of the Evacuation*. Retrieved from [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain\\_wwtwo/evacuees\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain_wwtwo/evacuees_01.shtml).

Dalrymple, W. (2015, July 25). Britain Didn't Fight the Second World War — the British Empire Did. *The Spectator*. Retrieved from <http://www.spectator.co.uk/2015/07/britain-didnt-fight-the-second-world-war-the-british-empire-did/>.

- D'Alton, I. (2017, January 16). 'Devoted Ladies': the Lives of Elizabeth Bowen and Molly Keane. *The Irish Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/devoted-ladies-the-lives-of-elizabeth-bowen-and-molly-keane-1.2936236>.
- Davenport-Hines, R. (1996). *Auden*. London: Minerva.
- Davenport-Hines, R. (2013, January 14). The Love-Charm of Bombs by Lara Feigel: Review. *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from [https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/non\\_fictionreviews/9795290/The-Love-charm-of-Bombs-by-Lara-Feigel-review.html](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/non_fictionreviews/9795290/The-Love-charm-of-Bombs-by-Lara-Feigel-review.html).
- De Beauvoir, S. (1988). *The Second Sex*. London: Pan.
- De Beck, A. (1916). *Women of the Empire in Wartime*. London: Dominion of Canada News.
- De la Croix, H. and Tansey, R. G. (1970). *Art Through the Ages*. Atlanta: Harcourt.
- Diderot, D. (1964). *Œuvres philosophiques*. Paris: Paul Vernière.
- Disraeli, B. (1845). *Sybil: Or the Two Nations*. Leipzig: Tauchnitz.
- Doenecke, J. D. (2003). The British Empire: A Dubious Cause. In *Storm on the Horizon: The Challenge to American Intervention, 1939-1941* (pp. 203-211). Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Dosse, F. (1991). *L'histoire ou le temps réfléchi*. Paris: Hatier.
- Downes, B. (2008). *Targeting Civilians in War*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Drew, E. (1943, December 11). Through the Thick of It. *The Saturday Review*.
- Drieu la Rochelle, P. (1934). *La comédie de Charleroi*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Eagleton, T. (2011, July 1). *Visions of England* by Roy Strong - Review. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/jul/01/visions-of-england-roy-strong-review>.

- Ellman, M. (2003). Elizabeth Bowen: The Shadowy Fifth. In R. Mengham and N. H. Reeves (Eds.) *The Fictions of the 1940s: Stories of Survival* (pp. 1-25). New York: Palgrave.
- Elms, R. (2005, July 9). Robert Elms: There Was No Panic, No Hysteria. This Is a Hard-Nosed, Battle-Scarred City. And We Londoners Are Hard to Scare. *The Independent*. Retrieved from <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/robert-elms-there-was-no-panic-no-hysteria-this-is-a-hard-nosed-battle-scarred-city-and-we-londoners-5346457.html>.
- Ertz, S. (1943). *Anger in the Sky*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Ewald, F. (2002). The Return of Descartes' Malicious Demon: An Outline of a Philosophy of Precaution. In T. Baker and J. Simon (Eds.) *Embracing Risk: The Changing Culture of Insurance and Responsibility* (pp. 273–301). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Feigel, L. (2013). *The Love-Charm of Bombs*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Field, G. (1990). Perspectives on the Working-Class Family in Wartime Britain, 1939-1945. *International Labor and Working-Class History* (38), pp. 3-28.
- Field, G. (2002). Nights Underground in Darkest London: The Blitz, 1940-1941. *International Labour and Working-class History* 62, pp. 11–49.
- Fielding, S., Thompson, P. and Tiratsoo, N. (1995). *'England Arise!' The Labour Party and Popular Politics in 1940s Britain*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Fisher, H. A. L. (1924). *The Common Weal*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Foley, M. E. (2012). *How Did Those Feet In Ancient Time Become A Patriotic Song?: "Jerusalem"*. Retrieved from <https://mefoley.wordpress.com/2012/10/26/jerusalem1/>.
- Foot, M. R. D. (1995). Blackout. In I. C. B. Dear (Ed.) *The Oxford Companion to World War II* (pp. 134-35). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Forbes-Robertson, D. (1941, November 30). Review of *London Pride*. *Books*.



- Fowler, C. (2008). Forgotten Authors No 10: Gladys Mitchell. *The Independent*. Retrieved from <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/forgotten-authors-no-10-gladys-mitchell-963946.html>.
- Fuller, N. (2005, December 19). Review of *Sunset Over Soho* by Gladys Mitchell [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://gadetection.pbworks.com/w/page/7931596/Sunset%20Over%20Soho>.
- Fuller, N. (undated). Dame Beatrice Adela Lestrangle Bradley: An Introduction by Nicholas Fuller. Retrieved from <https://www.gladysmitchell.com/mrs-bradley-an-introduction>.
- Furedi, F. (2007). From the Narrative of the Blitz to the Rhetoric of Vulnerability. *Cultural Sociology* 1 (2), pp. 235-254.
- Furrowed Middlebrow (undated). Retrieved from <http://furrowedmiddlebrow.blogspot.com/>.
- Fussell, P. (1975). *The Great War and Modern Memory*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Fussell, P. (1990). *Wartime: Understanding and Behaviour in the Second World War*. New York: Oxford University Press
- Fredette, R. H. (1976). *The Sky on Fire: The First Battle of Britain 1917–1918*. New York: Harvest.
- Garbett, C. (1945). *Reading in War-Time*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Garton Ash, T. (1998, October 22). Orwell in 1998. *The New York Review of Books*. Retrieved from <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1998/10/22/orwell-in-1998/>.
- Gergen, K. J. (1990). Therapeutic Professions and the Diffusion of Deficit. *The Journal of Mind and Behaviour* 11 (3–4), pp. 353–368.
- Gemie, S., Humbert, L. and Reid, L. (2012). *Outcast Europe: Refugees and Relief Workers in an Era of Total War 1936-48*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Gibbons, S. (1941). *The Rich House*. London: Longmans, Green and Co.

- Gilbert, S. M. (1983). Soldier's Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War. *Signs Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 8 (3), pp. 422-450.
- Gingrich, N. (2005). "Every Man Who Dies, Dies for You and Me. See You Be Worthy": The Image of the Hero as Rhetorical Motivation in Unofficial War Propaganda, 1914-1918'. *War, Literature and the Arts: An International Journal of the Humanities*, pp. 108-117.
- Gleeson, S. (2015a, September 10). A Long Gaze Back at Norah Hoult on her 117th Birthday. Retrieved from <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/a-long-gaze-back-at-norah-hoult-on-her-117th-birthday-1.2347171>.
- Gleeson, S. (2015b, November 28). Norah Hoult: Brilliant, Censored and Forgotten. *The Irish Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/norah-hoult-brilliant-censored-and-forgotten-1.2446113>.
- Glendinning, V. (1977). *Elizabeth Bowen: Portrait of a Writer*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- Glover E. (1940). *The Psychology of Fear and Courage*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Glover E. (1942). Notes on the Psychological Effects of War Conditions on the Civilian Population. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 23, pp. 17–37.
- Glover, M. (1990). *Invasion Scare 1940*. London: Pen and Sword.
- Goddard, C. and Wierzbicka, A. (2005). Cultural Scripts: What Are They and What Are They Good For? *Intercultural Pragmatics* 1 (2), pp. 153-166.
- Goodall, F. (2009, November 1). Life During the Blackout. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2009/nov/01/blackout-britain-wartime>.
- Graves, R. (1949). *The Common Asphodel*. London: Hamish Hamilton.
- Greenhalgh, J. (2017). The Threshold of the State: Civil Defence, the Blackout and the Home in Second World War Britain. *Twentieth Century British History* 28 (2), pp. 186–208.

- Gregory, A. (1994). *The Silence of Memory. Armistice Day 1919-1946*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Griffiths, R. (1980). *Fellow Travellers of the Right*. London: Constable.
- Guttridge, P. (2007, July 29). Murder She Wrote - and Plenty of It: Denise Mina on Her Career. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/jul/29/crimebooks.features>.
- Haggard, R. (1877). The Transvaal. *Macmillan's Magazine* 36, pp. 71–79.
- Haggard, R. (1926) *Days of My Life, vol. I*. London: Longmans.
- Haggard, R. (1991). *She*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hamilton, A. (2005, July 11). Today We Follow the Example of the War Generation. *The Times*.
- Hanley, J. (1943). *No Directions*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Hansard HC Deb vol 339 cc40-162. (1938, October 3) Prime Minister's Statement. Retrieved from <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1938/oct/03/prime-ministers-statement>.
- Hansard HL Deb vol 361 c1361. (1940, June 13). Military Service (British Citizens Abroad). Retrieved from <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1940/jun/13/military-service-british-citizens-abroad>.
- Harby, J. (2015, November 13). The Coventry Blitz: 'Hysteria, Terror and Neurosis'. *BBC Website*. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-coventry-warwickshire-34746691>.
- Hariman, R. and Lucaites, J. L. (2007). *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Harrison, T. (1941). War Books. *Horizon* 4 (24), pp. 416-37.
- Hartley, J. (1997). *Millions Like Us*. London: Virago.

- Hastings, M. (1985). Their Wehrmacht Was Better Than Our Army. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1985/05/05/their-wehrmacht-was-better-than-our-army/0b2cfe73-68f4-4bc3-a62d-7626f6382dbd/?utm\\_term=.c0124e817e69](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1985/05/05/their-wehrmacht-was-better-than-our-army/0b2cfe73-68f4-4bc3-a62d-7626f6382dbd/?utm_term=.c0124e817e69).
- Hepburn, A. (2008). Introduction. In A. Hepburn (Ed.). *People, Places, Things: Essays by Elizabeth Bowen* (pp. 1-23). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Hepburn A. (2008). *People, Places, Things: Essays by Elizabeth Bowen*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Hewison, R. (1988). *Under Siege: Literary Life in London 1939-45*. London: Methuen.
- Hirsch, P. (1988). *The Constant Liberal: The Life and Work of Phyllis Bottome*. London: Quartet Books Limited.
- Hodgson, M. (1990, October 21). A Female Rake. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/10/21/books/a-female-rake.html>.
- Hoffman, M. (2016). *Gender and Representation in British 'Golden Age' Crime Fiction*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Holman, B. (2011). The Air Panic of 1935: British Press Opinion between Disarmament and Rearmament. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 46 (2), pp. 288-307.
- Holman, V. (2008). *Print for Victory: Book Publishing in England 1939–1945*. London: The British Library.
- Holtby, W. (1934). *Women and a Changing Civilisation*. London John Lane.
- Hoogland, R. (1994). *Elizabeth Bowen: A Reputation in Writing*. New York: New York University Press.
- Horsley, L. (2010). From Sherlock Holmes to the Present. In C. J. Rzepka and L. Horsley (Eds.) *A Companion to Crime Fiction* (pp. 28-42). Chichester: John Wiley and Sons.

- Horton, H. (2015, December 7). The Seven Social Classes of 21st century Britain - Where Do You Fit In? *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/12037247/the-seven-social-classes-of-21st-century-britain-where-do-you-fit-in.html>.
- Hough, R. A. and Denis, R. (2005). *The Battle of Britain: The Greatest Air Battle of World War II*. New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company.
- Hoult, N. (2005). *There Were No Windows*. London: Persephone.
- Howe, N. (2016, November 7). Personal Communication.
- Howe, S. (1949). *Novels of Empire*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Humble, N. (2001). *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hunt, L. (1860). *The Poetical Works of Leigh Hunt*. London: Routledge.
- Hynes, S. (1992). *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture*. New York: Collier-Macmillan.
- Isherwood, C. (2011). *Diaries*. London: Vintage.
- Jacob, N. (1941). *Me In Wartime*. London: Hutchinson.
- Jalland, P. (2014). Bereavement and Mourning. In D. Ute, P. Gatrell, O. Janz, H. Jones, J. Keene, A. Kramer and B. Nasson (Eds.) *International Encyclopedia of the First World War* - online. Berlin: Freie Universität. Retrieved from [https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/bereavement\\_and\\_mourning\\_great\\_britain](https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/bereavement_and_mourning_great_britain).
- James, P. D. (2013, December 2014). Who Killed the Golden Age of Crime? *The Spectator*. Retrieved from <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2013/12/a-nice-gentle-murder/>.
- Jameson, F. (1990). Modernism and Imperialism. In S. Deane (Ed.), *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature* (pp. 43-66). Minneapolis. University of Minnesota.
- Joad, C. E. M. (undated). *An Old Countryside for New People*. London: J. M. Dent.

- Johnson, L. (1989). The Teenage Girl; The Social Definition of Growing Up for Young Australian women 1950 to 1965. *History of Education Review* 18 (1), pp. 1-12.
- Johnston, B. (2002, October-December). Three Roads Less Travelled: The Pacifism of Huxley, Isherwood, and Auden. *Peace Magazine*.
- Jones, E. (2012a). Shell Shocked. *Monitor on Psychology* 43 (6), p. 18.
- Jones, E. (2012b). 'The Gut War': Functional Somatic Disorders in the UK During the Second World War. *History of The Human Sciences* 25 (5), pp. 30-48.
- Jones, E., Woolven, R., Durdoié, B. and Wessely, S. (2004). Civilian Morale During the Second World War: Responses to Air Raids Re-examined. *Social History of Medicine* 17 (3), pp. 463-479.
- Jones, T. (1938, March 20). Letter to Abraham Flexner. In (1954). *A Diary with Letters*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Judd, A. (2005, November 19). A Selection of the Best and Worst Books of the Year, Chosen by Some of Our Regular Contributors. *The Spectator*. Retrieved from <http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/19th-november-2005/27/a-selection-of-the-best-and-worst-books-of-the-yea>.
- Kakutani, M. (1983, August 14). Novelists are News Again. *The New York Times Book Review*.
- Kelly, M. (2013). Writing the Colonial Past in Postcolonial Ireland: an Anglo-Irish Response. *Historical Geography* 41, pp. 137-155.
- Kennedy, B. P. (1990). *Dreams and Responsibilities: The State and the Arts in Independent Ireland*. Dublin. The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon.
- Kennedy, P. M. (1987). *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000*. New York: Random House.

- Khan, Y. (2015). *The Raj at War: A People's History of India's Second World War*. London: Random House.
- King, J. (2009). Fiction as a Gerontological Resource: Norah Hoult's *There Were No Windows*. *Ageing and Society*, 29 (2), pp. 295-308.
- Knight, S. (2003). The Golden Age. In M. Priestman (Ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction* (pp. 77-94). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kristeva, J. (1982). *Powers of Horror*. New York: Columbia.
- Kumar, K. (2003). *The Making of English National Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kunitz, S. J. (1955). *Twentieth Century Authors: First Supplement*. New York: H. W. Wilson.
- Laborie, P. (2006). *Les mots de 39-45*. Toulouse: Presses Université du Mirail.
- Lafitte, F. (1988). *The Internment of Aliens*. London: Libris.
- Lake, M. (1995). Femininities. In Damousi, J. and Lake, M. (Eds.). *Gender and War: Australians at War in the Twentieth Century*. (pp. 60-79). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lake, M. (2004). Female Desires. In G. Martel (ed.) *The World War Two Reader* (pp. 359-381). New York: Routledge.
- Lang, A. (1923). *The Poetical Works of Andrew Lang*. London: Longmans, Green and Co.
- Langdon-Davies, J. (2007). *Behind the Spanish Barricades: Reports from the Spanish Civil War*. London: Reportage Press.
- Lant, A. C. (2014). *Blackout: Reinventing Women for Wartime British Cinema*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Larkin, P. (1982). The Great Gladys. In *Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces 1955-1982*. London: Faber and Faber.

- Larkin, P. (2015). Never Such Innocence Again. In Rácz, I. D. *Philip Larkin's Poetics: Theory and Practice of an English Post-war Poet*. Leiden: Brill Rodopi.
- Larousse (2017). Dictionnaire Larousse en ligne. Retrieved from <http://larousse.fr>.
- Lassner, P. (1990). *Elizabeth Bowen. Women Writers*. London: Macmillan.
- Lassner, P. (1998). *British Women of World War II*. London: Macmillan.
- Leavis, Q. D. (1978). *Fiction and the Reading Public*. London: Chatto and Windus.
- Lee, H. (1986). Preface. In Lee, H (Ed.) *Mulberry Tree: Writings of Elizabeth Bowen* (pp. 1-7). London: Virago.
- Lewis, A. (1943). Mental Health in War-Time. *Public Health* 57, pp. 27–30.
- Liddell Hart, B. H. (1934). *A History of the World War 1914–1918*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Light, A. (1991). *Forever England: Femininity, Literature, and Conservatism Between the Wars*. New York: Routledge.
- Luftwaffe Regulation 16 (1935). In Corum, J. and Muller, J. (1998). *The Luftwaffe's Way of War: German Air Force Doctrine 1911–1945*. Baltimore: Nautical and Aviation Publishing.
- Lynch, F. M. B. and Guirao, F. (2015). Introduction: Reading Contemporary European History: A Milwardian Perspective. In Lynch, F. M. B. and Guirao, F. (Eds.) *Alan S. Milward and Contemporary European History: Collected Academic Reviews* (pp. 1-35). London: Routledge.
- Lyons, F. S. L. (1971). *Ireland Since the Famine*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- Macaulay, R. (1941, May 18). *Luxborough Towers Have Fallen*, Letter to Victor Gollancz. In Gollancz, V. (1968). *Reminiscence of Affection* (p. 78). London: Victor Gollancz.
- MacKay, M. (2009). Introduction. In M. MacKay (Ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of World War II* (pp. 1-10). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



- MacKenzie, J. M. (1984). *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Macmillan, H. (1966). *Winds of Change, 1914-1939*. London: Macmillan.
- MacNeice, L. (1941). The Morning After the Blitz. In A. Heuser (Ed.) (1990). *Selected Prose of Louis MacNeice*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- MacNeice, L. (1979). *Collected Poems*. London: Faber.
- Magot, C. (2008). Trouble dans la guerre: *The Heat of the Day* d'Elizabeth Bowen, un roman d'espionnage au féminin. *Revue LISA/LISA e-journal*, 5 (4), pp. 153-173.
- Maltby, K. (2016, January 2016). There's Nothing Patriotic About William's Blake Jerusalem. *The Spectator*. Retrieved from <http://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2016/01/theres-nothing-patriotic-about-william-blakes-jerusalem/>.
- Mannin, E. (1944, October 8). Do Women Writers Lack Distinction? *London Calling*.
- Markson, E. and Taylor, C. (2000). The Mirror has Two Faces. *Ageing and Society* 20 (2), pp. 137-160.
- Marwick, A. (1980). *Class, Image and Reality in Britain, France and the U.S.A. Since 1930*. London: Collins.
- Marwick, A. (Ed.) (1988). *Total War and Social Change*. London: Macmillan.
- Matthews, J. J. (1984). *Good and Mad Women*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.
- May, T. (2016, October 5). Theresa May's conference speech in full. *Financial Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.ft.com/content/ffb25e84-8af2-11e6-8aa5-f79f5696c731>.
- McCormack, W. J. (1991). Irish Gothic and After (1820-1945). In S. Deane (Ed.) *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, Vol II* (pp. 831-854). Derry: Field Day publications.
- McCormack, W. J. (1993). *Dissolute Characters: Irish Literary History Through Balzac, Sheridan Le Fanu, Yeats, and Bowen*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

- McCrum, R. (2009, May 10). The Masterpiece that Killed George Orwell. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/may/10/1984-george-orwell>.
- McCrum, R. (2015, January 12). The 100 Best Novels: No 69 – The Heat of the Day by Elizabeth Bowen (1948). *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jan/12/100-best-novels-elizabeth-bowen-heat-of-the-day-blitz>.
- McKinstry, L. (2006, September 12). The Death of British Humour. *The Daily Mail*. Retrieved from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-404792/The-death-British-humour.html>.
- McLoughlin, K. (2001). *Authoring War: the Literary Representation of War from the Iliad to Iraq*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McSmith, A. (2007, September 18). Patience, Good Humour and a Touch of The Blitz Spirit. *The Independent*. Retrieved from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/patience-good-humour-and-a-touch-of-the-blitz-spirit-402676.html>.
- Medoff, J. (1984). “There Is No Elsewhere”: Elizabeth Bowen’s Perception of War. *Modern Fiction Studies* 30 (1), pp. 73-81.
- Mellor, D. (Ed.) (1987). *A Paradise Lost: The Neo-Romantic Imagination in Britain 1939-1955*. London: Lund Humphries Ltd., in Association with the Barbican Art Gallery
- Mellor, D. (1987). The Body and the Land. In *A Paradise Lost: The Neo-Romantic Imagination in Britain 1935-55* (p. 22). London: Lund Humphries Ltd., in Association with the Barbican Art Gallery.
- Mendras, H. (1994). *La Seconde Révolution française (1965-1984)*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Miller, K. A. (2009). *British Literature of the Blitz: Fighting the People's War*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Milward, A. S. (1965). *The German Economy at War*. London: Athlone Press.
- Mitchell, E. (1966). Themes in Elizabeth Bowen's Short Stories. *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 8 (3), pp. 41-54.
- Mitchell, G. (1977). Why Do People Read Detective Stories? In D. Winn (Ed.) *Murder Ink* (pp. 12-15). Workman Publishing Company.
- Mitchell, G. (1988). *Sunset Over Soho*. London: Penguin.
- MO (Mass-Observation) (1940). In Harrison, T. and Madge, C. (Eds.) *War Begins at Home*. London: Chatto and Windus.
- MOA (Mass-Observation Archive) (1939, September 4). Diary 5390.
- MOA (Mass-Observation Archive) (1941). Topic Collection 32, 3/E. Letter to Tom Harrison, Preston.
- MOA (Mass-Observation Archive) (1944). Directive Respondent 1553. FR 2018, Books and the Public: Major Report on Reading Habits for the National Book Council.
- Mohr, R. (1988). *Gays/Justice: A Study of Ethics, Society, and Law*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Monckton, W. (1940, March 10). Walter Monckton Papers. Box 2 Folio 125. Balliol College Oxford.
- Mooney, S. (2007). Unstable Compounds: Bowen's Beckettian Affinities. *Modern Fiction Studies* 53 (2), pp. 238-256.
- Moore, C. (2010, June 23). A Tireless Campaigner. *The Spectator*. Retrieved from <http://www.spectator.co.uk/2010/06/a-tireless-campaigner/>.
- Moorhouse, R. (2010). *Berlin at War: Life and Death in Hitler's Capital, 1939-45*. New York: Basic Books.
- Morley, S. (2005). *Noël Coward*. London: Haus Publishing.

- Mustich, J. (2008, April 7). Nicholson Baker: Human Smoke, A Conversation with James Mustich, Editor-in-Chief, Barnes & Noble Review. Retrieved from <https://www.barnesandnoble.com/review/nicholson-baker-human-smoke>.
- Nathan, E. (1947). *Letter to Phyllis Bottome*. Bottome Papers. Add 78866, British Library.
- Neale, R. S. (1981). *Class in English History, 1680-1850*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Neil (2016, November 23). *Sunset Over Soho* by Gladys Mitchell (1943) [Blog post]. Retrieved from <https://reading19001950.wordpress.com/2016/11/23/sunset-over-soho-by-gladys-mitchell-1943/>.
- Newsinger, J. (1999). *Orwell's Politics*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Nichols, B. (1941, March 21). Is Your Child Your Own or the State's? *Sunday Chronicle*.
- Nietzsche, F. (2010). *The Use and Abuse of History for Life*. New York: Cosimo Classics.
- Noakes, L. (1997). Making Histories: Experiencing the Blitz in London's Museums in the 1990s. In M. Evans and K. Lunn (Eds.) *War and Memory in the Twentieth Century*, (pp. 89-104). Oxford, New York: Berg.
- Nora, P. (1989). Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire. *Representations* 26, pp. 7-24.
- Nora, P. (1993). *Les Lieux de mémoire, Les France, tome III: De l'archive à l'emblème*. Paris: Gallimard.
- O'Brien, T. H. (1955). *Civil Defence*. London: HMSO.
- O'Faolain, S. (1936). The Dangers of Censorship. *Ireland To-Day* 1 (6), pp. 57-63.
- Olick, J. K. and Robbins, J. (1998). *Social Memory Studies: From "Collective Memory" to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices*. *Annual Review of Sociology* 24, pp. 105-140.
- Orwell, G. (1941). *England Your England*. Retrieved from [http://orwell.ru/library/essays/lion/english/e\\_eye](http://orwell.ru/library/essays/lion/english/e_eye).

- Orwell, G. (1945a). Anti-Semitism in Britain. Retrieved from [http://www.orwell.ru/library/articles/antisemitism/english/e\\_antib](http://www.orwell.ru/library/articles/antisemitism/english/e_antib).
- Orwell, G. (1945b). Notes on Nationalism. Retrieved from [http://orwell.ru/library/essays/nationalism/english/e\\_nat](http://orwell.ru/library/essays/nationalism/english/e_nat).
- Orwell, G. (1970). The English People. In S. Orwell and I. Angus (Eds.) *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, vol. iii. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Orwell, G. (1978). *The Road to Wigan Pier*. London: Harmondsworth.
- Orwell, G. (2003). *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. New York: Plume.
- ‘Our Reviewers Write’ (2006). *The Persephone Quaterly* 30, p. 7.
- Overton, G. M. (1967). *The Women Who Make Our Novels*. Freeport: Books for Libraries Press.
- Overy, R. J. (1978). “From Uralbomber to Amerikabomber”: The Luftwaffe and Strategic Bombing. *Journal of Strategic Studies* 1 (2), pp. 154-178.
- Overy, R. J. (2009, September 6). Civilians on the Frontline. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/sep/06/blitz-second-world-war>.
- Overy, R. J. (2011). Introduction. In C. Baldoli, A. Knapp, and R. J. Overy (Eds.) *Bombing, States and Peoples in Western Europe, 1940–1945*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Owen, W. (1919). Draft Preface for a Collection of War Poems to be Published in 1919. In J. Stallworthy (Ed.) (1983). *The Complete Poems and Fragments of Wilfred Owen*, ii. London: Chatto and Windus.
- Owen, W. (1994). *The Poems of Wilfred Owen*. London: Wordsworth.
- Oxford English Dictionary* (3rd ed.). (2010). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Paris, M. (1992). *Winged Warfare: The Literature and Theory of Aerial Warfare in Britain 1859-1917*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

- Parker, S. G. (2006). *Faith on the Home Front: Aspects of Church Life and Popular Religion in Birmingham, 1939-1945*. Bern: Peter Lang AG.
- Parsons, L. (2014, June 21). Making Sense of Human Suffering: *Francis Bacon and Henry Moore - Terror and Beauty*. World Socialist Website. Retrieved from <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2014/06/21/baco-j21.html>.
- Pascal, B. (1993). *Pensées*. L. Brunschwig (ed.) Paris: Garnier.
- Patterson, I. (2007). *Guernica and Total War*. London: Profile Books.
- Pearson, J. (1966). *The Life of Ian Fleming*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Penny, W. K. (2011). A Tragic Harp: Ritual, Irony and Myth in The War Poetry of Wilfred Owen. *Language and Literature* 20 (2), pp. 151-167.
- Persephone Website (2015). Persephone Book No 59: There Were No Windows by Norah Hoult [Blog post]. Retrieved from <https://www.persephonebooks.co.uk/content/persephoneforum/persephone-book-no-59-there-were-no-windows-by-norah-hoult/>.
- Peters, A. D. (1939, September 5). *Letter to War Authors*. William Ready Division of Archives, McMaster University, Vera Brittain Papers.
- Peterson, A. (2004). Shell-Shock in Somerville: Vera Brittain's Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. In A. K. Smith (Ed.) *Gender and Warfare in the Twentieth Century: Textual Representations* (pp. 33-52). Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Peterson, A. (2006). *Self-Portraits: Subjectivity in the Works of Vera Brittain*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Phillips, W. A. (1938, September 20). Letter to *The Times*. *The Times*.
- Piette, A. (1995). *Imagination at War, British Fiction and Poetry 1939-1945*. London: Macmillan.

- Pike, B. A. (1976). In Praise of Gladys Mitchell—Interview with the Writer. *Armchair Detective* 9 (4). Retrieved from <https://www.gladysmitchell.com/biography-gladys-mitchell>.
- Piper, M. (1941, March 29). Review of Helen Ashton's *Tadpole Hall*. *New Statesman and Nation*.
- Plain, G. (2013). *Literature of the 1940s: War, Postwar and 'Peace'*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Pogorelskin, A. (2010). Phyllis Bottome's *The Mortal Storm*: Film and Controversy. *The Space Between* 6 (1), pp. 39–58.
- Poirier, F. (1995). La Guerre des Cockneys. In *Londres 1939-1945*. Paris: Autrement.
- Pollard, W. (2003). Afterword. In Todd, B. E. (2003). *Miss Ranskill Comes Home – with a New Afterword by Pollard. W.* (pp. 318-330). London: Persephone.
- Polmar, N. and Allen, T. B. (2012). *World War II: The Encyclopaedia of the War Years, 1941-1945*. New York: Dover.
- Pound, E. and Spann, M. (1964). *Confucius to Cummings: An Anthology of Poetry*. New York: New Directions.
- Prest, D. (2011). Evacuees in World War Two - the True Story. *BBC Website*. Retrieved from [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain\\_wwtwo/evacuees\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain_wwtwo/evacuees_01.shtml).
- Priestley, J. B. (1940). *Postscripts*. London: Heinemann.
- Priestley, J. B. (1941). *Out of the People*. London: Heinemann.
- PRO (Public Record Office), AIR 9/69 (1922, May 29). Folio 13, Extract from Papers in which the CAS Stressed the Priority of the Air Menace Over all other Defence Problems.
- PRO (Public Record Office), HO199/444 (1940, October 7). Weekly Morale Report.
- Pudney, J. (1943). Missing. In *Beyond This Disregard: Poems*. London: John Lane.

- Quester, G. H. (1966). *Deterrence Before Hiroshima: The Airpower Background of Modern Strategy*. New York: Wiley.
- Rau, P. (2005). The Common Frontier: Fictions of Alterity in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* and Graham Greene's *The Ministry of Fear*. *Literature & History*, 14 (1), pp. 31-55.
- Rau, P. (2010). Introduction: Between Absence and Ubiquity — on the Meanings of the Body-at-War. In *Conflict, Nationhood and Corporeality in Modern Literature* (pp. 1-25). London: Macmillan.
- Rawlinson, M. (2000). *British Writing of the Second World War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rawlinson, M. (2011). Review of Patrick Deer. Culture in Camouflage: War, Empire, and Modern British Culture. *The Review of English Studies* 62 (253), pp. 158-160.
- Reiman, J. (1984). Privacy, Intimacy, and Personhood. In F. Schoeman (ed.) *Philosophical Dimensions of Privacy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Renan, E. (1892). What is a Nation?, text of a conference delivered at the Sorbonne on March 11th, 1882, (translated by Ethan Rundell). In *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* Paris: Presses-Pocket. Retrieved from [http://ucparis.fr/files/9313/6549/9943/What\\_is\\_a\\_Nation.pdf](http://ucparis.fr/files/9313/6549/9943/What_is_a_Nation.pdf).
- 'R. G. G.' and Hargreaves, G. R. (1940). The Differential Diagnosis of the Psychoneuroses of War. In E. Miller (Ed.) *The Neuroses in War* (pp. 85-104). London: Macmillan.
- Rhowbotham, K. (2013). Agrarianism: the country and the city. Retrieved from <https://o50328b.wordpress.com/2013/09/19/agrarianism-the-country-and-the-city/>
- Richards, D. (1974). *Royal Air Force 1939–1945: Volume I - The Fight At Odds*. London: HMSO.
- Richards, J. (2011). The Blitz: Sorting the Myth from the Reality. *BBC Website*. Retrieved from [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain\\_wwtwo/blitz\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain_wwtwo/blitz_01.shtml).



- Ritchie, C. (1941, February 10). Diary Entry. In V. Glendinning (Ed.) (2008). *Love's Civil War* (p. 22). London: Simon and Schuster.
- Ritchie, C. (1941, September 2). Diary Entry. In V. Glendinning (Ed.) (2008). *Love's Civil War* (pp. 22-23). London: Simon and Schuster.
- Robertson, K. G. (1982). *Public Secrets: A Study in the Development of Government Secrecy*. London: Macmillan.
- Robyns, G. (1978). *The Mystery of Agatha Christie*. New York: Doubleday.
- Rolls, A. (2013). *French Crime Fiction and the Second World War: Past Crimes, Present Memories* by Claire Gorrara (review). *French Studies: A Quarterly Review* 67 (2), p. 281.
- Rose, S. O. (1998). Sex, Citizenship, and the Nation in World War II Britain. *The American Historical Review*, 103 (4), pp. 1147-1176.
- Rose, S. O. (2003). *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Britain, 1939–1945*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ross, A. (1950). *The Forties: A Period Piece*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- Rouso, H. (1987). *Le syndrome de Vichy: 1944-198...* Paris: Seuil.
- Rouso, H. (1998). *La hantise du passé*. Paris: Textuel.
- Rouso, H. (2013). *La Seconde Guerre Mondiale expliquée à ma fille*. Paris: Seuil.
- Rowland, S. (2010). The 'Classical Model' of the Golden Age. In C. J. Rzepka and L. Horsley (Eds.) *A Companion to Crime Fiction* (pp. 117-127). Chichester: John Wiley and Sons.
- Royce, M. and Todd, B. (1925). *The Very Good Walkers*. London: Methuen.
- Rubinstein, W. D. (2003). *Twentieth-Century Britain: A Political History*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rumens, C. (2014 January, 20). Poem of the Week: The Charge of the Light Brigade by Alfred Tennyson. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2014/jan/20/poem-of-the-week-charge-light-brigade-tennyson>.

Ryan, E. and Conlon, A. (1989). *Gentle Invaders. Australian Women at Work*. Ringwood: Penguin.

Sarjeant, A. S. (1985). Gladys Mitchell: The Last of the 'Golden Age' Writers. *The Armchair Detective* 18 (4). Retrieved from <https://www.gladysmitchell.com/the-last-of-the-golden-age-writers>.

Sassoon, S. (1917). Survivors. In Spear, H. D. (1979). *Remembering, We Forget: A Background Study to the Poetry of the First World War*. London: Davis-Poynter.

Savage, M. (2015). *Social Class in the 21st Century*. London: Pelican.

Saville, J. (2002). François Lafitte, Analyst Who Highlighted the 1940 Refugee Scandal. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2002/dec/05/guardianobituaries1>.

Sayers, D. L. (1928). The Omnibus of Crime. In H. Haycraft (Ed.) (1946). *The Art of the Mystery Story* (pp. 71-109). New York: Simon and Schuster.

Saywell, S. (1985). *Women in War*. New York: Viking.

Seib, P. (2006). *Broadcasts from the Blitz: How Edward R. Murrow Helped Lead America Into War*. Washington: Potomac Books.

Seybert, G. and Stauder, T. (2011). Misères de l'héroïsme. La Première Guerre mondiale dans la conscience intellectuelle, littéraire et artistique des cultures européennes. Retrieved from <https://www.fabula.org/actualites/la-premiere-guerre-mondiale-dans-la-conscience-intellectuelle-litteraire-et-artistique-des-cultures-45742.php>.

Shell Shock. (1922). *The British Medical Journal*, 2 (3216), pp. 322-323.

Sherry, N. (1973). *Conrad: The Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

- Sherry, V. (2005). Introduction. In V. Sherry (Ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War* (pp. 1-12). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shklovsky, V. (1998). Art as Technique. In J. Rivkin and M. Ryan (Eds.) *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (pp. 15-21). Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Simmers, G. (2016, September 26). Vera Brittain, Novelist [Blog post]. Retrieved from <https://greatwarfiction.wordpress.com/2016/09/26/vera-brittain-novelist/>.
- Sinclair, A. (1993). *Francis Bacon: His Life and Violent Times*. New York: Crown.
- Skidelsky, T. (1983). *John Maynard Keynes, I: Hopes Betrayed, 1883-1920*. London: Macmillan.
- Smith, A. D. (2003). *Chosen Peoples*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Smith, S. (2000). 'Literally, For This': Metonymies of National Identity in Edward Thomas, Yeats, and Auden. In A. Davis and L. M. Jenkins (Eds.) *Locations of Literary Modernism: Region and Nation in British and American Modernist Poetry* (pp. 113-134). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Somerville, J. (1981). Patriotism and War. *Ethics*, 91 (4), pp. 568-578.
- Stalin, J. (1943). *On the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union: Speeches, Orders of the Day, and Answers to Foreign Press Correspondents*. London: Hutchinson.
- Stapleton, J. (2005). Citizenship Versus Patriotism in Twentieth-Century England. *The Historical Journal* 45 (1), pp. 151-178.
- Stasio, M. (2003, July 6). Cover Story, It's Elementary, My Dear Mr. Moody. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/06/tv/cover-story-it-s-elementary-my-dear-mr-moody.html>.
- Stauffer, A. M. (2006). Introduction. In Haggard, R. *She* (pp. 9–29). Toronto: Broadview.
- Steen, M. (1942). *Shelter*. New York: The Sun Dial Press.
- Steen, M. (1966). *Looking Glass*. London: Longmans.

- Steen, M. (1968). *Pier Glass*. London: Longmans.
- Stern, G. B. (1944). *Trumpet Voluntary*. New York: Macmillan.
- Sterry, E. (2017). *The Single Woman, Modernity, and Literary Culture: Women's Fiction from the 1920s to the 1940s*. London: Springer.
- Stewart, N. J. W. (2017, October 1). Binge-Reading Gladys Mitchell: Game Over [Blog post]. Retrieved from <https://noah-stewart.com/2017/10/01/binge-reading-gladys-mitchell-game-over/>.
- Stewart, V. (2006). Damaged Minds, Crime and Detection. *Narratives of Memory, British Writing of the 1940s* (pp. 58-93). London: Macmillan.
- Streatfeild, N. (1941). Diary Entry for March 28, 1941. In A. Bull (Ed.) (1984). *Noel Streatfeild*. London: Collins.
- Summerfield, D. (2001). The Invention of Post-Traumatic Disorder and the Social Usefulness of a Psychiatric Category. *British Medical Journal* 322 (7278), pp. 95–8.
- Summerfield, P. (1986a). Patriotism and Empire: Music Hall Entertainment 1870–1914. In J. MacKenzie (Ed.) *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (pp. 17-48). Manchester: University of Manchester Press.
- Summerfield, P. (1986b). The Levelling of Class. In H. L. Smith (Ed.) *War and Social Change* (pp. 179-207). Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Summers, A. (1975). *Damned Whores and God's Police*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.
- Süss, D. (2014). *Death from the Skies: How the British and Germans Survived Bombing in World War II*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Symons, J. (1985). *Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel: A History*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

- Taillandier, F. (2018). *Edmond Rostand, l'homme qui voulait bien faire*. Paris: Éditions de l'Observatoire.
- Talbot de Malahide (1963). *Letter to Ernan Forbe Dennis*. Bottome Papers. Add 78866, British Library.
- Taylor, A. J. P. (2004). *English History, 1914-1945*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Teissier du Cros, J. (1992). *Divided Loyalties: A Scotswoman in Occupied France*. Edinburgh: Canongate.
- Thatcher, M. (1982, July 3). Speech to Conservative Rally at Cheltenham Racecourse. Retrieved from <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/speeches/displaydocument.asp?docid=104989>.
- The Bible* (1998). Authorized King James Version. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 'The Pen Charter' (2018). Retrieved from <https://pen-international.org/who-we-are/the-pen-charter>.
- The Rotarian* (1941, November). 59 (5).
- The Times* (1945). Review of *Account Rendered* by Vera Brittain.
- Tilley, J., Exley, S. and Heath, A. (2004). Dimensions of British Identity, in Park, A., Curtice, J., Thomson, K., Bromley, C. and Phillips, M. (Eds.). *British Social Attitudes: the 21st Report* (pp. 147-168). London: Sage.
- Titmuss, R. M. (1950). *Problems of Social Policy*. London: Green and Co.
- Titmuss, R. (2001). *Welfare and Wellbeing: Richard Titmuss' Contribution to Social Policy*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Todd, B. E. (2003). *Miss Ranskill Comes Home – With a New Afterword by Pollard. W.* London: Persephone.
- Todorov, T. (1995). *Les abus de la mémoire*. Paris: Arléa.
- Tolstoy, L. (1991). *War and Peace*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Tosh, J. (1991). Domesticity and Manliness in the Victorian Middle-Class: the Family of Edward White Benson. In M. Roper and J. Tosh (Eds.) *Manful Assertions Masculinities in Britain since 1800* (pp. 44-73). London: Routledge.
- Townsend, C. (2016, October 17). Orwell on Patriotism. *The King's Review*. Retrieved from <http://kingsreview.co.uk/orwell-on-patriotism/>.
- Tylee, C. (1990). *The Great War and Women's' Consciousness – Images of Militarism and Womanhood in Women's Writings, 1914-64*. Iowa, IA: University of Iowa Press.
- Utell, J. (2009). Erotic Life and the Reimagination of Urban Space in Blitz London. *Literary London: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Representation of London* 7 (2). Retrieved from <http://www.literarylondon.org/london-journal/september2009/utell.html>.
- Valéry, P. (1919). La crise de l'esprit. In *Europes de l'antiquité au XXe siècle* (pp. 405-414). Paris: Éditions Robert Laffont.
- Vallée, C. (2006). La propagande cachée sur les ondes de la BBC pendant la Seconde Guerre Mondiale : vers une héroïsation nationale. *LISA/LISA e-journal* 4 (3), pp. 109-128.
- Vallée, C. (2012). L'histoire vous regarde: l'heure de gloire du petit peuple d'Angleterre dans les *Postscripts* de J. B. Priestley. *Cercles* 24, pp. 46-72.
- Van Dine, S. S. (1928). Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories. In H. Haycraft (Ed.) (1946). *The Art of the Mystery Story* (pp. 189-193). New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Walker, J. (1822). *A Critical Pronouncing Dictionary and Expositor of the English Language*. London: J. Richardson and Company.
- Walker, R. (2007). *Labyrinths of Deceit: Culture, Modernity and Identity in the Nineteenth Century*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- Wall, M. (1971). Michael Smith Asks Mervyn Wall Some Questions About the Thirties. *The Lace Curtain* 4, pp. 77-86.
- Ward, P. (2008). *Britishness Since 1870*. London: Psychology Press.

- Washington, G. (1796). Farewell Address 1796. *The Avalon Project*. Retrieved from [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/washing.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/washing.asp).
- Wasson, S. (2010). *Urban Gothic of the Second World War: Dark London*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Webb, C. (1940, December 31). St. Paul's Defied Flames. *Daily Herald*.
- Weigold, A. (2008). *Churchill, Roosevelt and India: Propaganda During World War II*. London: Routledge.
- Wells. H. G. (1924). *The Works of H. G. Wells*. London: T. Fisher Unwin.
- Wells, H. G. (2005). *The War of the Worlds*. London: Penguin.
- What Is an English Man? (1942, July 17). Home Service, in Radio Talks Scripts Film T 615, at the BBC Written Archives Centre, Caversham Park, Reading.
- Wicks, B. (2013). *No Time to Wave Goodbye*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Wiggam. M. P. (2011). *The Blackout in Britain and Germany during the Second World War*. University of Exeter. Retrieved from <https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/bitstream/handle/10036/3246/WiggamM.pdf?sequence=2>.
- Wilkinson, C. (2015). A Necessary Evil? Propaganda, Censorship, and Class in Britain's Ministry of Information, 1939-1941. *Liberated Arts: a journal for undergraduate research* 1 (1), pp. 1-15.
- Williams, K. (1996). *British Writers and the Media, 1930–45*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Williams, R. (1975). *The Country and the City*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wills, C. (2007). *That Neutral Island: A Cultural History of Ireland during the Second World War*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Wiltshire, C. (2000, December 8). Letters: Tune Into Jerusalem's Fighting History. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from

<https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2000/dec/08/guardianletters1>.

Winter, J. (2014). Shell Shock and the Emotional History of the First World War, a Lecture by Professor Jay Winter. Held at the British Academy on July 9, 2014. Retrieved from

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=exw0iKVjvOY>.

Wintringham, T. (1944). *New Ways of War*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Women's Group on Public Welfare (1943). *Our Towns: A close-Up*. London: Oxford University Press.

Wood, J. (2003). A Household Name: Henry Moore's Studio-Homes and Their Bearings, 1926-1946. In J. Beckett and F. Russell (Eds.) *Henry Moore: Critical Essays* (pp. 17-42). Aldershot: Macmillan.

Woodward, G. (2015). *Culture, Northern Ireland, and the Second World War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Woolf, V. (1924). Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown. In S. Gupta and D. Johnson (Eds.) (2005). *A Twentieth-Century Literature Reader: Texts and Debates* (pp. 112-118). London: Routledge.

Woolf, V. (1939) Diary Entry for September 6, 1939. In A. O. Bell (Ed.) (1984). *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol. V (1936-1941). London: The Hogarth Press.

Woolf, V. (1942). Middlebrow. In *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays*. Retrieved from <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks12/1203811h.html#ch-23>.

Woolf, V. (1986). *Three Guineas*. New York: Harcourt.

Woolf, V. (2005). *Mrs. Dalloway*. New York: Harcourt.

Wright, P. (2009). *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.



- Wünderlich, K. (2018). Conference paper: Absorbing the War from the Air: the Body in British and German World War II Fiction. Interdisciplinary conference *The Human Body and World War II*, University of Oxford.
- Wurtz, J. (2010). Elizabeth Bowen, Modernism and the Spectre of Anglo-Ireland. *Estudios Irlandeses* 5, pp. 119-128.
- Yesil, B. (2004). 'Who Said This Is a Man's War?': Propaganda, Advertising Discourse and the Representation of War Worker Women During the Second World War. *Media History* 10 (2), pp. 103-117.
- Young, P. (2014). *A Matter of Pride*. NatCen Social Research. Retrieved from [www.natcen.ac.uk/blog/a-matter-of-pride](http://www.natcen.ac.uk/blog/a-matter-of-pride).
- Ziegler, P. (2015). *London at War 1939-1945*. London: Pimlico.
- Zweig, S. (1964). *The World of Yesterday: An Autobiography*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.