

Writing the Radio War: British Literature and the Politics of Broadcasting, 1939-1945

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A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

The social and political transformations of the Second World War in Britain required a massive coordination of public opinion and effort. “Writing the Radio War: British Literature and the Politics of Broadcasting, 1939-1945” examines the mobilization of British writers through their involvement in radio broadcasting. Drawing on theories of mass communication from the 1930s to the present day, this dissertation argues that the power of radio as a medium of propaganda and national identity-formation lay in its ability to generate an aura of intimacy that encouraged listener identification with the national community. Capitalizing on this intimacy, writers imagined listening publics that were at odds with official projects of national unity. Confronted with the Anglophone fascism of pro-Nazi broadcaster William Joyce, Nancy Mitford and Rebecca West used their writings to neutralize the threat of autochthonous extremism by depicting Joyce as a laughable ideological non-national subject. Even among patriotic Britons, political fractures appeared, as when J.B. Priestley used his radio “Postscripts” to frame debates about postwar British society along socialist lines. In the mixed documentary-dramatic genre of the radio “feature,” Louis MacNeice modelled collective gain through collaborative effort in *The Stones Cry Out*, *Alexander Nevsky*, and *Christopher Columbus*. On the Overseas Service, George Orwell and E.M. Forster attempted subtle compromises to keep Indian listeners loyal to the Empire, while Jamaican poet Una Marson repurposed the BBC’s networks in order to imagine alternative communities. Marson turned the program *Calling the West Indies* into an incubator for a vibrant Caribbean literary scene. Collectively, these writers used the wireless to guide British listeners through the social and political changes brought

on by the war: having entered the conflict as an imperial nation riven by class and ideology, Britain emerged ready to embark on the massive social experiment of the multicultural postwar welfare state with a renewed sense of possibility and promise.

Résumé

Les transformations sociales et politiques de la deuxième guerre mondiale en Grande-Bretagne ont nécessité une mobilisation énorme d'opinion et d'effort publique. "Writing the radio war: British literature and the politics of broadcasting, 1939-1945" examine la participation des écrivains britanniques dans cette mobilisation au niveau de leur engagement dans la radiodiffusion. Cette thèse utilise diverses théories de communication datant des années 1930 jusqu'au présent pour démontrer la puissance de la radio comme moyen de propagande et de gestion d'identité nationale en raison de sa capacité d'engendrer une semblance d'intimité entre les auditeurs et leur communauté nationale. Les écrivains de cette période ont pris avantage de cette intimité pour imaginer des publiques qui contredisaient les projets officiels d'unification nationale. Face au fascisme anglophone de William Joyce, un propagandiste pronazi, Nancy Mitford et Rebecca West se sont servies de leurs écrits pour rendre neutre la menace d'une extrémisme autochtone en décrivant Joyce comme une aberration idéologique, risible et étranger. Les divisions politiques sont apparues même parmi les Britanniques patriotiques; avec son programme "Postscripts" sur la BBC, J.B. Priestley a poursuivi un avenir socialiste pour la Grande Bretagne, ce qui contrevenait les intentions du gouvernement pendant la guerre. Avec ses productions documentaires et dramatiques, incluant *The Stones Cry Out*, *Alexander Nevsky*, et *Christopher Columbus*, Louis MacNeice a modelé un processus de travail collectif au bénéfice du collectif. Dans le Overseas Service du BBC, George Orwell et E.M. Forster tentaient des compromis subtils pour assurer la fidélité des auditeurs indiens à l'Empire Britannique. La poète jamaïcaine Una Marson a profité des réseaux impériaux pour imaginer des

communautés autres que celui de l'Empire en transformant le programme *Calling the West Indies* en incubateur pour une scène littéraire caraïbe dynamique. Ensemble, ces écrivains ont profité de la radiodiffusion pour piloter le public britannique à travers les changements sociopolitiques de la guerre. Ayant rentré dans la guerre une nation impériale fendu par l'idéologie et par les classes sociales, la Grande Bretagne est ressortie avec un esprit de possibilité et se trouvait prêt à embarquer sur la grande expérimentation de l'état social démocratique de caractère multiculturelle.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support, guidance, and affection of a great many people. My family has been the centre of my emotional and intellectual life since before I can remember; to my parents, I extend my deepest love and gratitude for the many conversations, ideas, laughs, and thoughtful silences we have enjoyed and will continue to enjoy. In addition to being the best of siblings, my brothers Luke and Jesse are my closest friends and a constant source of inspiration and encouragement. Even though we stand exactly the same height, I find myself looking up to both of them on a daily basis. To Tabitha and Ali, and to Lennox, Tavish, Gideon, Johanna, and new arrivals as yet unnamed, I offer thanks for the happiness they have brought to my brothers and me by joining our family.

Had I imagined what role a thesis supervisor would play in this project, I could not have come up with an abler guide than Allan Hepburn. He has believed in this project from its inception, and more importantly, has given me every opportunity to fulfill the potential he saw in me. Allan has done what I hope to do for my own students in the future: he gave me the necessary intellectual tools and told me to go out and build this house myself. He bolstered this mentorship with every speedy email, word of good counsel, and feat of crisis mitigation. For each of these acts of support, large and small, I am grateful. Other academic mentors deserve mention. Ned Schantz and Jonathan Sterne have provided invaluable intellectual support during the crafting of this thesis. Debra Rae Cohen of the University of South Carolina has given me both scholarly feedback and professional encouragement. At McGill, Monica Popescu has shepherded me towards a greater sophistication in my thinking about imperialism, nationalism, and

anti-colonialism. Derek Nystrom has shaped my pedagogy and my thinking about the politics of academia, along with being a most friendly office-neighbour. Many other faculty members at McGill have contributed to my understanding of this project and the broader field of English literature.

I have benefitted from a great deal of institutional assistance in completing this project. This dissertation was written with the support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, through a CGS Bombardier Doctoral Fellowship and a Michael Smith Foreign Travel Supplement. Together, McGill University and the Department of English provided a Tomlinson Recruitment Fellowship, graduate fellowships, and departmental and faculty-level travel grants. The department also provided me with valuable opportunities for teaching as an instructor and teaching assistant, which have helped me to grow as a scholar and an educator.

Thanks are due to those individuals who have helped with the substantial archival research required for this project. Louise North, Jacquie Kavanagh, and the entire staff of the BBC Written Archives Centre in Caversham, UK, provided invaluable advice in navigating the compendious archives of the BBC. They tolerated my presence for four months while I combed their holdings for the masterpieces, scraps, and loose threads that would make up the primary sources for this dissertation. Stefan Collini of the University of Cambridge enabled that research trip by agreeing to supervise my research while I was in the UK. Alison Cullingford and the Special Collections staff at Bradford University were very adept at providing me with information relating to J.B. Priestley's wartime broadcasts and other output. Acknowledgement is also due to the staff at the National Sound Archive at the British Library, King's College Archives at

Cambridge, the Bodleian Library Special Collections at Oxford, and the Mass Observation Archive at the University of Sussex, who were manifestly professional, courteous, and knowledgeable in their dealings with me. On this side of the Atlantic, the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center provided me with access to materials relating to E.M. Forster, J.B. Priestley, and Louis MacNeice over the course of two trips in October 2009 and April-May of 2012. Richard Workman, Andi Gustavson, Molly Schwartzburg, and many other staff members at the HRC were a pleasure to work with.

Having begun with my family, it seems right that I close by acknowledging my friends in the McGill community, an exceptional group of people who have influenced both my thinking and my way of being in the world. The members of the Centre for Excellence merit first mention: Paula Derdiger, who taught me a great deal about literature, film, and the epicurean virtues; Ben Barootes (honourary member), an able wordsmith and true companion in fair weather and foul; Justin Pfefferle, who never stopped pushing me to think deeper about my topic, or about baseball; and Ariel Buckley, without whose friendship and shared interest in fitness I might never have had the mental equilibrium to conquer the mountain of this dissertation. Robin Feenstra has been a sound friend and mentor, offering great advice on all manner of conundrums. In addition to her help with translations, Sunita Nigam proved an insightful and supportive friend. Casey McCormick has been a great source of encouragement, ideas, and laughter. In a hundred other ways, Joel Deshayé, Naben Ruthnum, Amanda Clarke, Rory Critten, Marc Ducusin, Hilary Havens, Joanne Holland, and Jeff Weingarten were sources of intellectual and personal inspiration. My thanks to all of those individuals without whose contributions I could not have written the dissertation that follows.

Introduction: War on the Wireless

“For this is total war; and total war is war right inside the home itself, emptying the clothes cupboards and the larder, screaming its threats through the radio at the hearth, burning and bombing its way from roof to cellar.” (J.B. Priestley, *Postscripts* 78 [22 September 1940])

At 11:15 on the morning of 3 September 1939, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain declared war against Germany in an announcement carried over the airwaves and through wireless sets into the homes of the nation. Speaking with deliberation, Chamberlain explained that, as Hitler had refused to withdraw German troops from Poland and thereby produce a “peaceful and honourable settlement” of the crisis, Britain was at war. Chamberlain noted that Hitler had followed a broadcast threat with material invasion; though the Führer’s demands to Poland “were announced in the German broadcast on Thursday night, Hitler did not wait to hear comments on them, but ordered his troops to cross the Polish frontier the next morning.” Though performing in an official capacity, Chamberlain lent his speech a note of pathos by describing the war in terms of personal disappointment. “You can imagine what a bitter blow it is to me that all my long struggle to win peace has failed. Yet I cannot believe that there is anything more or anything different I could have done and that would have been more successful” (Chamberlain, “Declaration”). Air raid sirens sounded over London immediately following Chamberlain’s broadcast, as if to fuse the radio-borne catastrophe of a new war with the air-borne catastrophe of imminent bombing. Though they were only a false

alarm triggered by French airplanes, the sirens seemed, as Nancy Mitford remarked, a strange way of relieving the tension caused by his broadcast; “a few citizens, having supposed their last hour was at hand, were slightly annoyed by this curious practical joke” (*Pigeon Pie* 10).

For listeners, this dramatic sequence of events reinforced the annunciatory quality of wartime radio. Broadcasts like Chamberlain’s speech brought the war into British homes and united listeners in a shared posture of national defense. In Evelyn Waugh’s *Put Out More Flags* (1942), Chamberlain’s broadcast marked 3 September 1939 as “the Sunday morning when all doubts were finally resolved and misconceptions corrected” (9). The radio declaration unites the characters around Basil Seal: his sister, Barbara Sothill, feels “personally challenged and threatened” by the broadcast, “as though, already, the mild autumnal sky were dark with circling enemy and their shadows were trespassing on the sunlit lawns” (9). Lady Seal, Basil’s mother, is oddly unmoved; she observes only that Chamberlain “had spoken very creditably that morning” before the “then unfamiliar shriek of the air-raid sirens sang out over London” (18). Angela Lyne, Basil’s mistress, cocoons herself behind the blackout curtains of her flat and saturates herself with wireless bulletins from around the globe (120). Compulsive listening keeps her in a state of hyper-informed fear, alternately compelled and paralysed by dire news. When asked to explain Angela’s descent into hermetic, radio-fuelled intoxication, Basil can only venture that “She doesn’t like the war” (161). The conflict was, for Waugh, inseparable from the medium that at once united and unsettled the characters of his novel.

Waugh’s radio neurotics serve as reminders that, in wartime Britain, to be a citizen was to be an air-minded listener. Aerial bombardment and radio waves were the

twin novelties that stumbled out of the Great War not yet fully developed, only to exert their power more devastatingly in the Second World War. As Paul Saint-Amour has outlined, the interwar period entailed considerable legal wrangling with these two “new agencies of warfare,” most notably at the Hague Commission of December 1922, which took as its central concern “the preservation of the distinction between combatants and non-combatants, especially as affected by aerial bombardment” (qtd. in Saint-Amour, “Air War” 133-34). The new paradigm of total war—in which all national production is geared towards the war effort, and thus virtually any civilian or industrial zone could be considered a legitimate target for bombing—instilled a deep sense of “catastrophic anticipation” in the public (Saint-Amour 138). Waiting to be bombed became as emotionally destructive as being bombed was physically destructive:

Unlike the realized physical violence of a raid, a false alarm provides no catharsis for the sense of endangerment it produces; it mobilizes anxiety without providing it with a kinetic outlet. Thus the very falsity of the alarm emphasizes a condition of hideously prolonged expectation, a state of emergency that is both perennial, having been detached from the arrival of violence in a singular event, and horribly deferred—the advance symptom of a disaster still to come. (Saint-Amour 140)

If, as Saint-Amour argues, the catastrophe of anticipation embodied in the siren bears disastrous psychological effects, what of that other interwar technology of aerial power? As both Hitler’s and Chamberlain’s broadcasts indicate, radio often served as a prophet of disaster. Signs of conflict—news reports of invasions, sirens announcing bombs—followed their broadcast announcement so quickly as to fuse prophecy with its

materialization and forestall a mental separation between the two. Ushered into the war in this way, air-minded British listeners might be excused for equating belligerent broadcasts with belligerence itself.

Radio was a major component of a newly charged sensory world, a world which demanded compensatory responses from its occupants. Shut in shelters or straggling through blacked-out streets, Britons had to open their ears the better to navigate environments transformed by the conflict. “Walking in the darkness of the nights of six years,” writes Elizabeth Bowen in the preface to her wartime story collection *Ivy Gripped the Steps* (1945), “one developed new bare alert senses, with their own savage warnings and notations” (xiii). The whistle of a bomb or the thrum of airplanes overhead might be the only signal of imminent danger; the scrape and tinkle of glass a small announcement that clean-up had begun in the wake of a raid. The soundscape of war was marked by acoustic absence as much as presence: Bowen in *The Heat of the Day* and George Orwell in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* both remark on the lack of church bells in wartime London, which had been ordered silent except in the event of a German raid (Calder, *People’s War* 121).

If changes to the soundscape mostly signified the toll of the war, they could also catalyze determined political responses. Orwell opens his book-length essay *The Lion and the Unicorn* (1941) by stating matter-of-factly, “As I write, highly civilised human beings are flying overhead, trying to kill me” (*CEJL* 2:74). Rather than invoking paralysis, this contemplation of the absurdity of war leads to a profound meditation on English national identity and the possibility of social revolution. Virginia Woolf’s “Thoughts on Peace in an Air-Raid” likens the sound of bombers to “the zoom of a

hornet, which may at any moment sting you to death”; her sense of vulnerability as an unarmed listener subjected to auditory terror compels her to think about peace in the grandest sense, as a rejection of the masculinist aggression that fuels war (Woolf, “Thoughts” 154). If, for Woolf and Orwell, alterations of the auditory environment indexed the cost of the conflict, they also signalled the possibility of deeper and more lasting transformations.

Radio served as a crucial point of confluence for the political and acoustic experiences of the war. The medium occupied a central position in the domestic life of ordinary Britons and in the intellectual life of the country as a whole. Ensconced in the family home, the wireless set meted out the rhythms of life at every scale, from the regular news bulletins and favourite programs that structured everyday listening to the monumental events—the evacuation at Dunkirk, the London blitz, the landings at Normandy—that shaped the conflict on the broadest historical scale. Other forms of communication, most notably the press and cinema, played important roles in the mediation of the war for British citizens; what distinguished radio was the instant reception of information in the private domestic sphere. Radio lived, and was live, in the home. Woolf, in “The Leaning Tower” (1940), identified the curious power of radio to collapse the space between writers and the war across the sea: “Scott never saw the sailors drowning at Trafalgar; Jane Austen never heard the cannon roar at Waterloo. Neither of them heard Napoleon’s voice as we hear Hitler’s voice as we sit home of an afternoon” (“Leaning” 261). Broadcasting opened the British home to information from sources both licit and illicit. While the 9 pm news routinely attracted up to 50% of the British listening public during the war, German propagandist William Joyce (better

known as Lord Haw-Haw) counted 30% of that same public as occasional listeners over the first winter of the war (Briggs 3:48; Doherty 93). Listeners were eager for the information that radio could provide, and they would roam wavelengths to find it.

British listeners tuned in not only to hear news of the conflict, but also to be educated and entertained; and they listened to hear representations of their own lives spoken back to them. Bowen, reflecting on the war some twenty-five years after its conclusion, remarked that during the conflict, “[s]ound made for community of sensation, was emotive. Press and radio combined in keeping the people’s collective image constantly in front of the people’s eyes... It was inspirational; one beheld oneself as one had it in one to be” (“The People’s War” 184). Bowen’s vision of the constitutive relationship between radio and its public captures how the BBC guided listeners’ acoustic involvement in the nation.¹ Geared towards national mobilization, the imagined spaces of British broadcasting were vehicles for thinking through the problem of collective participation in the war effort and the possible configurations of a postwar Britain, with or without its empire. The Second World War brought tectonic shifts to almost every facet of British cultural and political life: civilians became combatants as aerial bombardment literalized the “Home Front”; the British Empire held together for the duration of the war, only to crumble in its aftermath; the social and financial turmoil of the 1930s yielded to the planned economies of total war and, later, the welfare state; stark divisions of left and right found themselves replaced, however tenuously, by wartime coalitions and the post-war consensus. Throughout this process of upheaval, the wartime

¹ On the role of the BBC in mediating public participation in, and perceptions of, the war effort, see Siân Nicholas, *The Echo of War: Home Front Propaganda and the Wartime BBC, 1939-1945*, pp. 1-9 and *passim*; see also David Cardiff and Paddy Scannell, “Radio in World War II” in Andrew Crisell (ed.), *Radio* 2:170-204.

BBC played a double role: it both channelled official policies and information and reflected the concerns and aspirations of a broad swath of the British public. If the BBC was to serve the interests of its listening public, it had to tread a line between encouraging officially sanctioned views on the events of the war and addressing the frustrations, confusion, and dangers experienced by average Britons.

British writers were keen to participate in this process of articulating the nation. The BBC provided the ideal medium through which writers could apply their literary and intellectual skills to the project of uniting and sustaining Britain and its subject colonies. Writers who broadcast represented a vibrant cross-section of the literary culture of wartime London: George Orwell, E.M. Forster, Louis MacNeice, J.B. Priestley, T.S. Eliot, V.S. Pritchett, Elizabeth Bowen, James Hanley, Stephen Spender, Stevie Smith, Patrick Hamilton, Mulk Raj Anand, William Empson, and Herbert Read, among others. Some, like MacNeice and Hanley, crafted elaborate dramas and features; others took part in conversations about the progress of the conflict, the nature of the enemy, and the role of the arts in wartime. Forster and Priestley contributed spoken essays in the form of “talks.” In taking up the microphone, British writers assumed roles as public intellectuals; through art, analysis, and debate, these writers mediated the conflict for which the members of the radio public were being asked to sacrifice so much.

Being a public intellectual involved rejecting a polarized view of the relationship between the intelligentsia and the masses. Works such as John Carey’s *The Intellectuals and the Masses* hinge on the notion that modernist writers, artists, and thinkers defined themselves in negative and oppositional terms: intellectuals formed a reactionary social group in response to increasing literacy among the general population, and they saw little

or no possibility of useful engagement with the “mass” against which they defined themselves (*Intellectuals* 18). There is much evidence to support charges of snobbishness and elitism among modernist intellectuals, but cleaving too strongly to the notion that intellectuals can be defined by virtue of their disdain for (and separation from) the broader public ignores multiple examples of intellectuals reaching out to the broad community of readers, listeners, and learners. T.S. Eliot’s enthusiastic involvement with London University’s Committee for the Higher Education of Working People in 1916 and E.M. Forster’s lectures at the Working Men’s College in the 1900s and 1910s offer early instances of this outreach (Carey 16; Furbank 1:97, 173-176). In the 1930s, increasing numbers of writers and thinkers would foray into “public culture” through such initiatives as documentary filmmaking and the experimental ethnography of the Mass Observation project, both of which were animated by egalitarian cultural principles.

The BBC allowed intellectuals to build on such initiatives. It vastly expanded the potential audience for literary, artistic, and scientific content in Britain, and in doing so facilitated the transition from the older categories of “scientist,” “artist,” “man of letters,” and “intellectual” to the more emphatically demotic “public intellectual.”² One of the main characteristics of the intellectual as cultural figure, as Stefan Collini argues, is the discursive movement between a body of specialized knowledge and a general audience (48). Intellectuals must acquire sufficient expertise in their field to begin sharing it with a non-specialist audience through media channels of wide distribution and in a manner that maintains public interest (52). Middlemen who traffic in information, they shuttle

² Use of the term “public intellectual” is somewhat anachronistic. Collini notes that the term only became current in Britain towards the end of the twentieth century, and the *OED* lists no examples before 1967 (Collini 471; *OED*). As an analytic category applied retroactively, it can clarify the difference between conventional, print-centric intellectuals (“men of letters”) and more public figures who worked across multiple media.

between the imposing repositories of knowledge (the university, the legal profession, the halls of government, the salon) and multiple arenas of public discussion. This account of the social role of intellectuals depends upon the proliferation of policies of mass education and media of mass communication. In order to be truly “public,” intellectuals must have access to a broadly literate audience eager to consume and engage with ideas.

The term “literate” does not apply strictly to the capacity to read; indeed, one of the primary achievements of radio was to enlarge the scope of the audience hungry for art and ideas beyond alphabetical literacy. Collini justifiably privileges the periodical press as the locus of formation for his concept of the “intellectual” (54). Privileging the written word, however, risks obscuring the qualitative and quantitative differences between print and other media. Non-print media enabled the intellectual to go public in ways that transformed the relationship between leading thinkers and their audience. Cultural hierarchies depend on a structuring relationship not only between “high” and “low” culture, but also between the specialist cultural producer and the non-specialist cultural consumer. Media like radio simultaneously seem to bridge the physical space between producer and consumer and, through a rhetoric of intimate familiarity, manufacture a sense of intellectual or emotional collaboration between speaker and listener (LeMahieu 103-4). Thus, not only do media of mass information bring elite cultural forms to an increasingly vast audience, but they seek to foster affective identification between readers and writers, filmgoers and actors, listeners and broadcasters.

Wartime broadcasters were keenly aware that their transmissions reached a rapidly changing and often demanding public. Though bound by censorship and propaganda directives, British writers did not simply mouth official platitudes. Through

subtle acts of collaboration and compromise, these writers used the wireless to forward their own agendas for Britain at a time of political and cultural upheaval. Radio was a preeminent site for the public discussion of British identity writ large: questions resounded about who could properly claim British citizenship, what ideologies fit the normative mould of British political life, what the fate of British imperial subjects should be, and most of all, how best to steer the nation through the current crisis and into a future brighter than that left in the wake of the First World War. The intimate acoustics of radio, which brought these conversations into the domestic sphere, were crucial in determining the limits of acceptable “Britishness” on the airwaves: from William Joyce’s troublingly Anglophonic brand of fascism to J.B. Priestley’s demotic growl and Una Marson’s Jamaican lilt, it was the *sound* as much as the *idea* of Britishness that dictated ally and enemy, owner and worker, colonizer and colonized. Radio was a resonant chamber in which British writers articulated, on behalf of a series of newly empowered publics, the social and political changes brought on by the war. While far from catalyzing the revolution some writers were hoping for, radio contributed to substantial changes in British society. Having entered the war as an imperial nation riven by class and ideology, Britain left it a nation transformed if not united, prepared to embark on the massive social experiment of the multicultural postwar welfare state with a renewed sense of possibility and promise.

Imagined Communities: Radio and the British Public

More than the hobby of ham operators, as it had been in the 1910s and early 1920s, radio had become by the end of the 1930s a vast and viable system of public

information and entertainment. In Britain, the formation of the private British Broadcasting Company in 1922—which became a public Corporation in 1927—inaugurated a revolution in the production and consumption of entertainment and information. Between 1923 and 1939 the number of registered wireless sets in the United Kingdom rose from approximately 80,000 to over 9 million, out of a total population of 46.5 million (Briggs 2:253). By the mid-1930s, the BBC had increased its signal strength and expanded coverage of the island to reach 98% percent of the British population (Briggs 2:253; LeMahieu 230, 273-4). While the poorest households did not own wireless sets, the presence of receivers in pubs, cafés, workplaces, and the homes of friends and family members meant that, by 1939, almost all citizens had at least some access to radio programming. Under the guidance of director Sir John Reith, the BBC used its monopoly over British airwaves to pursue a policy of cultural enlightenment through a largely “highbrow” selection of programs (Avery 12-31). Although many intellectuals initially dismissed the BBC as culture for the masses, opinions had shifted enough by the end of the 1930s that broadcasting was seen as a legitimate means by which writers could reach a broad public.

The growing popularity of radio had coincided with deepening international crises over the 1930s, as the struggle for ideological control of the airwaves over Europe and its dependencies came to inflect all broadcasts with political valences. Before any shots were fired, the Second World War announced its arrival through the rising din of claim and counter-claim, as propagandistic volleys were launched across the world in the form of news bulletins and cultural programming slanted in the interests of the broadcasting nation. Writing in 1936, German media theorist Rudolf Arnheim evoked the eventuality

of war in this battle for the ether:

Each country strengthened its own transmissions so as to drown the disturbance of foreign stations... whereupon the next country did the same thing and so it came to be a wireless war in which it was no one's fault but everyone's together; voices sounded, as they do wherever there is rivalry and no question of arbitration, not softly and in order, but loudly and on top of one another. What we hear to-day from the loudspeaker is an artistically forceful symbol of war in peace... a chaos concretised in discord and as such directly perceptible to the human ear. (237-8)

Even in the mid-1930s, this radio war extended beyond the borders of Europe, as German and Italian stations reached British colonies with news propaganda in English and local languages (Briggs, *History* 2:389). As its foreign services expanded following the Nazi rise to power in 1933, the German national broadcaster, the *Reichsrundfunkgesellschaft* (RRG), actively began soliciting listener opinion overseas; the *Daily Telegraph* reported in April of 1935 that German Overseas Radio (*Reichssender*) was circulating questionnaires regarding programme preferences and reception in several British colonies and dominions (2:394). In 1935 alone, the *Reichssender* received 28,000 letters from listeners abroad (2:393). In 1935, Italy established a station beaming propaganda to Egypt and British colonies in the Middle East, a turn of events that elicited concern from British officials in Cairo (2:399).

The outbreak of war prompted both heightened listening and heightened output. The BBC entered the war with 4,233 staff and 23 transmitters with a power of 1,620kw broadcasting 50 hrs a day. By the end of the conflict, it had essentially tripled in size,

with 11,417 staff and 138 transmitters with a total power of 5,250kw broadcasting 150 hours a day (Calder, *People's War* 359). War brought important changes to the structure and schedule of the BBC. Beginning in the late 1920s, the corporation had elaborated a Regional Programme to complement the National Programme. With branches in Wales, Manchester, the Midlands, Scotland, and elsewhere, the Regional Programme aimed to achieve a degree of local specificity in programming. With the outbreak of war, the BBC abandoned this structure as part of contingency plans drawn up in the shadow of the Munich Crisis in 1938 (Nicholas, *Echo* 18). In the place of the National/Regional structure arose a single Home Service with a mandate to serve the entire British population with a single program schedule. This consolidated output channelled all BBC programming to just two wavelengths (449.1 metres in the North and 391.1 meters in the South) as opposed to the former diversity of wavelengths used by transmitters scattered around the country (Briggs 3:62).

This adjustment meant that all listeners in a given area (North or South) tuned in to the same place on the dial and heard the same programming. Administrators hoped that by placing all BBC stations on two region-specific wavelengths, disruptions to service caused by air raids would be minimal; if bombs took out one transmitter, listeners would only notice a diminution in signal strength, as the next nearest transmitter continued to broadcast. This diminution often presaged the sounding of air raid sirens as German bombers moved across the landscape, a sequence which could only have deepened the psychological connections between air war and war on the airwaves for British listeners (Briggs 3:297). The consolidation of wavelengths had another justification: as all transmitters would be working on the same wavelength, German bombers could not

orient themselves by locating regionally specific transmitters (Briggs 3:62-3). Though primarily a medium of public outreach, radio was implicated in a vast network of electromagnetic defense that included the related technology of radar; this implication is perhaps best captured by the technique of “meaconing,” in which the British military would retransmit German broadcasts through British antennae in order to frustrate German attempts at navigation by radio signal (Briggs 3:61-2, 72).

Though grounded in military concerns, the contraction of the broadcast spectrum also served to consolidate the power of the BBC as a vehicle for the formation of national identity. Wartime programming was an interpellation of British listeners into the nation: in linking Britons through a shared diet of news and other programs, the BBC could inform and entertain its citizens while maintaining their faith in the certainty and justness of a British victory. Radio is a particularly effective medium for binding a public together. Whether or not it is part of a concerted propaganda campaign, every program effects a synchronization of the listening public; in annihilating distance, radio brings into being a community of listeners whose common bond is the simultaneous experience of sound. Like the newspapers identified in Benedict Anderson’s landmark study of nationalism, *Imagined Communities*, radio creates a common “now” among far-flung communities sharing a language, as listeners consume time-sensitive programming within a particular historical moment. Anderson describes the ritual of reading the daily national newspaper as one in which “each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion” (Anderson 35). Like print media, the new synchronized ceremony of radio creates an awareness of

simultaneous action across space and thereby helps to shape a community defined by language rather than immediate proximity. To tune in is to bring this bounded community into being, and to place individuals within the collective audience.³

The immateriality and instantaneity of broadcasting yield an accelerated medium for the creation of what Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff have called the “we-feeling” necessary to the creation of collective narratives (277). Crucial to the process of community-formation is the concept of “co-presence”: the simultaneity of listening to a live program makes radio a fundamentally social endeavour that hinges on an understanding, however dimly perceived, that listeners are sharing an experience with others. David Hendy describes this as an implicit awareness that “our lives stand in the same temporal relation to other listeners as much as they stand in the same temporal relationship to the programmes we hear” (184). The value of this sense of co-presence to processes of nation-formation is significant; it encourages the perception of a common culture unfolding in a shared historical present regardless of the content of the broadcast. In the British context, where a single semi-governmental agency enjoyed a monopoly over the airwaves, the nation and the listening public were virtually coterminous. The BBC could claim to address “the nation” with greater credibility than could any single American station, or even network, at a given time.⁴

Addressing the British nation as a whole—and not its constituent English, Scottish, Welsh, and Northern Irish elements individually—was especially important for

³ Despite the fact that radio exemplifies his theory of imagined communities as well as or better than newspapers do, Anderson makes only two brief mentions of radio; one of these, a footnote, mentions that radio extends processes of nation-formation to illiterate populations (54).

⁴ Two important exceptions, discussed later, disrupt the seamless join between radio public and nation: interwar for-profit stations like Radio Luxembourg and Radio Normandy, which targeted British audiences with more popular fare than the BBC offered, and German propaganda stations. Nonetheless, the BBC was the only broadcaster whose reach extended across the whole of the British Isles.

the elaboration of a cohesive national identity. With the outbreak of war and the closure of the Regional Programmes, the BBC encouraged speakers to replace the term “England” with “Britain” or, where appropriate, the regional appellation, although Thomas Hajkowski notes that it took some pressure from Scottish listeners to make this policy stick (*National Identity* 155-8). In particular, writers who had dedicated much of their careers to considerations of England and Englishness found it difficult to adjust the focus of their address to Britain. There is therefore much slippage between the two terms in wartime broadcasts and discussions of broadcasting; Orwell, for instance, seems to have cared little about distinctions between the two. Priestley, while he managed to refer to “Britain” for the most part in his Home Service broadcasts, often slipped between the two in his transmissions to America in the series *Britain Speaks*. For most of the writers under consideration here, it is fair to generalize that Britain was seen as a political formation with some admirable traits (and considerable flaws); the truly affective bonds of nationhood stemmed from more local national identifications, be they MacNeice’s roots in Northern Ireland, Marson’s Jamaican upbringing, or the Yorkshire of Priestley’s youth.

As the reaction from Scottish listeners indicates, the listening audience was not merely a passive vessel for the reception of a notion of nationhood dictated from on high. As Walter Benjamin notes, listeners at the very least had the option of switching off, although Benjamin considers that a very poor act of “sabotage” against the power imbalance inherent in broadcasting (“Reflections” 391). Tuning in did not mean unthinking acceptance; listening could be a critical act. British writers quickly found that addressing the nation did not mean addressing a community with uniform political and

artistic sensibilities. Rather, the BBC was the focal point for a British radio public whose discursive networks extended into the pages of *The Listener*, *London Calling*, and *The Radio Times*; into the editorial pages and radio columns of every major daily newspaper; into novels, films, variety shows, dinner-table conversations, and office chatter. This community of radio listeners represents a “public” in the sense elaborated by Michael Warner: an affiliative community composed of strangers and constituted by the circulation of discourse. Warner’s theory, adapted to the wireless, suggests that individuals participate in the radio public by choosing to listen; while factors like citizenship, class, ethnicity, and religion might intersect with and affect listening choices, they do not determine it outright. Membership in the radio public is actualized only by listeners’ willingness to share in the flow of information through, around, and about the medium of radio (Warner 72-4). This is not to say that agencies like the BBC had little control over the field of discourse; they quite obviously did. But they could not control public responses to the discursive field, especially as regards changing questions of national identity in a state of crisis. As radio became the prime channel for the mediation of the war in day-to-day life, Britons engaged in patterns of listening that sutured them to an abstract concept of “Britain” as a national and cultural formation connected to, but not coterminous with, official state apparatus.

As Warner makes clear, publics depend on the circulation of discourse; every public is a “virtual social object” that at once enables and is enabled by a mode of address (55). A public does not properly exist without the discursive utterances that at once presume the existence of a public and bring it into the world. “A public might be real and efficacious,” writes Warner, “but its reality lies in just this reflexivity by which an

addressable object is conjured into being in order to enable the very discourse that gives it existence” (67). Radio broadcasters—like writers, public orators, and other wielders of discourse—can affect the parameters of the public to some extent by modifying the characteristics of their address (14). Winston Churchill effectively named a different kind of public than did J.B. Priestley, even though they largely spoke to the same body of people; the former’s elevated rhetorical style and military-imperial imagery implicitly characterized an alternate ideal listening public than the latter’s everyman demeanour and plainspoken anti-intellectualism. Those who circulate discourse to a public must be able to imagine that that public exists in a form receptive to their particular text or utterance. Public-formation is iterative and cyclical: the conjectural notion of a public affects discourse, and that discourse goes on to constitute its public by circulating among individuals who willingly identify themselves as members of a discursive community, regardless of whether they agree with a particular utterance.

Independent of Warner’s more recent theorization of the public sphere, other scholars have noted the reflexivity inherent in broadcasting. D.L. LeMahieu, in a broader discussion of mass communication in interwar Britain, observes that the mass media work by a process of mutual identification in which producers shape content to their notion of the audience’s expectations, while consumers seek out information and entertainment that best meet their expectations (19). LeMahieu, writing in 1988, echoes even earlier assessments of the feedback loops that can forge a sense of community. Kenneth Cmiel, in a survey of mid-century communications research in the context of the war, argues that by the late 1940s many communications researchers had realized (and read positively) that mass communication was not just about manipulation or

management. Mass communication generated strong affective bonds; it was empowering, because it gave people tools for acting in concert (94-5). As the BBC became more interested in listener feedback, they too realized the power of radio to foster a sense of collectivity. In August 1940, BBC director of Listener Research Robert Silvey drafted a policy document encouraging the development of light-hearted variety programs during the war, “[s]omething which will be common currency in the street and in the air raid shelter, in camps, in billets, or on leave, in the pub and in the senior common room. It is not too much to claim that such programmes are a valuable part of the cement which binds the nation together as a community” (qtd. in Nicholas, *Echo* 64). This turn to promote lighter fare represents a subtle but important shift from pre-war BBC policy; the need to cater to a listening public being asked to give everything to the war effort led to the expansion of popular music and comedy programming. Even in an environment of censorship and propaganda imperatives, the Corporation understood it had to respond in at least modest ways to the demands of listeners. The public spoke, and the radio listened.

Intimacy and the Radio Public

The rapid rise in the consumption and production of radio between 1922 and 1939 led to the consolidation of a number of practices that connect the publicness of broadcasting to the privateness of interpersonal communication. As many critics have pointed out, radio is a medium of paradoxical mass intimacy. Its ability to collectivize a listening audience depends on a fluid movement between public and private spheres; it brings world events into the home, transmits local events to a national audience, and communicates with its audience through that most subjectively freighted of physical

characteristics, the human voice (Loviglio xvi). The generation of intimacy via radio is partly a question of material technology and partly a question of rhetorical effect. As Simon Frith argues, technologies of capturing and transmitting voices permit the mass reproduction of sounds formerly associated with human intimacy and physical proximity: “the whisper, the caress, the murmur” (Frith 187). But the ability of the apparatus to produce an “intimate” sound is only half the story. According to Jacob Smith, the conditions of reception also affected the mode of address, as listening often happened in the private space of the home where individuals or small groups of people gathered close to the speaker (85). This “radically new kind of listening audience” contributed to the development of such radiogenic forms as the “crooner,” whose soft delivery was perfectly suited to the new listening environment (85).

As early radio theorists observed, the presence of the broadcast in the familiar world of the listener creates the expectation of a corresponding familiarity of tone. BBC Talks Director Hilda Matheson comments in her 1933 volume *Broadcasting* that the earliest audience experiments indicated that radio listeners imagined a proximity between voice and ear: “it was useless to address the microphone as if it were a public meeting... The person sitting at the other end expected the speaker to address him personally, simply, almost familiarly, as man to man” (75-6). By the 1930s, radio producers, presenters, and theorists understood that there was an erotics at play in radio broadcasting, a game of mutual desire between speaker and listener. “Anyone who does not possess [an] unaffected personal way of speaking suited to the short distance between the source of sound and the microphone,” writes German media theorist Rudolf Arnheim, “and to the isolated position of the individual listener, will never have his text understood

by the listener” (73-4). The radio voice must address thousands, if not millions, as if they were a single listener; thus, Arnheim claims, “the radio-speaker should proceed softly and as if ‘à deux’” (72).

Radio produces the semblance of intimacy by allowing listeners to scrutinize the voice, a physiological projection that is often interpreted as an index of individual selfhood. “By enabling a whole country or continent to listen to a disembodied voice, wireless concentrates attention on it—flood-lights it, as it were—bringing out every little trick and particularity” (Matheson 61). Intimate knowledge of strangers’ voices seems to elide their strangeness, making them sound more familiar than they actually are because the listener has access to one of their defining characteristics. As Steven Connor notes, the voice, unlike the written word, is physiologically rooted in the individual body, but extends outward into the auditory environment (4). This extension is an event that defines the self while simultaneously exceeding the self:

Nothing else about me defines me so intimately as my voice, precisely because there is no other feature of my self whose nature it is thus to move from me to the world, and to move me into the world. If my voice is mine because it comes from me, it can only be known as mine because it also goes from me. My voice is, literally, my way of taking leave of my senses. What I say goes. (7)

Ned Schantz identifies a double valence to the last two sentences of this passage: the voice moves an individual into the world and away from herself, which leaves her both vulnerable and imperious (148). The speaker gains power over the outside world only by risking a loss of control over the traits that most identify her as an individual. Especially

when her voice is enhanced by technologies of transmission and amplification, the speaker sacrifices knowledge of and control over the conditions of its reception without a compensatory gain in anonymity or impersonality; the transmitted material remains the identifiably personal voice.

This sense of familiarity, as John Durham Peters comments, is less an inevitability of the medium than a consciously deployed ideological effect intended to maximize the persuasive potential of radio: “Of extreme importance for the market and state, the audience of commercial broadcasting was generally designed to experience itself as a honeycomb of simultaneous intimacies. The audience was a macrosocial structure designed to be experienced as intimate” (“Uncanniness” 114). Far from a purely aesthetic consideration, the cultivation of intimacy in radio speech was a massive exercise in trust-building. A rhetoric of intimacy, enabled by the mechanical apparatus of microphone, transmitters, receivers, and speakers, encouraged a perception of speakerly authenticity: a sense that the broadcaster was a real person, speaking directly to the listener (if also to millions of others), communicating her message in honest and open terms. What Peters identifies in commercial broadcasting applies equally to the public system; both are interested in public relations, never more so than in times of crisis. In terms of British wartime broadcasting, each point of closeness, commonality, and familiarity—whether through news or cultural programming—enabled the furtherance of war aims, both at home and abroad. War raised the stakes of intimate address by making the human voice a fulcrum on which public opinion about the conflict pivoted. Without a plausible and approachable voice at the other end of the apparatus, listeners might not submit as willingly to the constraints of wartime life.

The manufacture of intimacy and authenticity is analogous to the fetishization of “fidelity” that Jonathan Sterne identifies in *The Audible Past*, in which “a set of procedures and aesthetics had to be developed to stand in for reality within the system of reproduced sounds” (285). Just as “faithful” sound reproduction depended on the establishment of technical standards and conventions, “sincere” vocal performance depended on its recognition as such according to a complicated system of codes and cues; there was nothing inherently “authentic” about authenticity. Speakers often tailored their speech to a particular public by adopting a particular *register*, an umbrella term which includes syntax, vocabulary, and pronunciation and which tends to be conceptualized spatially (elevated diction, down-to-earth phrasing). A speaker’s *cadence* is a rhythmic quality that can alternately foreground or obscure the deliberate and affected structure of performed speech and can convey leisure or haste. *Timbre* refers to the distinctive “tone” of a given sound or voice, and derives from the relationship of harmonic overtones particular to the sound source; vocal timbre is usually described by adjectives like “reedy,” “nasal,” and “raspy” (Smith, *Vocal* 82). Other terms, like *delivery* and *style*, tend to blend aspects of *register* and *cadence*. In performed speech, all of these qualities intersect and interact with strategies of written rhetoric and literary technique not unique to the spoken word.

While these qualities suggest a range of available speech forms, the predominant microphone persona at the BBC remained one that was coded as approachable and sincere, if not always downright homely. The ability to project authenticity was a crucial factor in evaluating a writer’s potential skill as a broadcaster. They had to be able to perform naturalness, sincerity, and approachability. Radio is most intimate when

seamlessly integrated into the everyday; as Jacob Smith notes, the style is “less formally marked off from everyday speech than [its] more boisterous predecessors” (88). In bringing the public discursive utterance into the home, radio obviated the need to frame that discourse as explicitly public, important, or political (89). This was not true of all speakers. Churchill, for example, succeeded as a broadcaster precisely because his infrequent but high-flown radio addresses punctured the everyday with a sense of the historical importance of the British struggle in the war; a broadcast was for him an occasion for grandiose oratory. But others, like E.M. Forster and J.B. Priestley, gathered a devoted following because their microphone manner exuded everyday familiarity. “What really holds the attention of most decent folk,” Priestley writes in his introduction to the wartime *Postscripts*, “is a genuine sharing of feelings and views on the part of the broadcaster. He must talk as if he is among serious friends, and not as if he has been appointed head of an infants’ school” (vii). To a certain extent, the qualities named by Priestley, Matheson, and others served as foils to strident speakers like Adolf Hitler, and offered an image of reasonableness conducive to the free exchange of ideas. In the context of the war, the intimate mode was an implicitly democratic and liberal humanist mode.

Writers capitalized on their relative skills at generating the intimacy-effect in order to advance their own notions about what British literature, culture, and socio-political life should look like both during the war and afterwards. Intimacy was one of the qualities by which authors responded to radio speakers, and it was one of the qualities on which they depended for furthering their own messages. As a medium, radio enabled certain modes of address and affected the reception of certain aesthetic and political

ideas. It was not, however, a medium with a single predictable effect on the reception and circulation of discourse by the radio public. If radio was a deterministic medium, it was weakly so; it both emerged as an expression of certain socio-cultural needs and, in turn, dictated a particular horizon of possibility for its own uses (LeMahieu 56-9; Smith, *Vocal* 83). Technologies, Sterne argues, represent the “crystallization” of social, cultural, and material practices. “Social forms did not necessarily follow logically from technologies: those connections had to be made. Technologies had to be articulated to institutions and practices to become media” (8, 25). Writerly involvement in radio was one relatively minor nodal connection between the medium of radio and the much larger network of social and political conditions in which it was embedded. Like the acoustic properties of the radio voice itself, writers’ involvement was neither wholly deterministic nor wholly determined.

Collaboration and Compromise: Radio as Hegemonic Medium

The contingent, give-and-take exchanges that characterized the wartime radio public find their mirror in the relations among writers, the BBC, and the British government. The involvement of British writers in Second World War broadcasting captures what Marina MacKay has called the “anti-transcendent, concessionary development” of British literature during the war (13). Like many Britons, these authors approached the conflict with a mix of skepticism and resolve. The interwar years had gradually revealed the contradictions inherent in the official British version of the Great War, which had simultaneously offered exaggerated accounts of German “atrocities” while glossing over the staggering traumas soldiers experienced in the trenches

(Wollaeger 13-26, 222). Though disillusioned by a catastrophic war and its attendant manipulations, by the late 1930s most British intellectuals could no longer deny the threat posed by rapacious fascist governments on the continent. The Italian invasion of Abyssinia, Franco's bloody takeover of Spain, and Hitler's methodical re-armament and occupation of the Rhineland, Austria, and the Sudetenland made pacifist arguments and strategies of appeasement increasingly untenable. Faced with a choice between rehearsing the dubious propaganda of the Great War and refusing to participate in what began to seem like a necessary war with Germany, many writers staked out a middle ground by pairing an anti-fascist commitment with an ironic disdain for the jingoism of imperial Britain. "In 1914, war still seemed a romantic, heroic thing," observed Cecil Day Lewis in an interview for the BBC program *Ariel in Wartime* in March of 1941, "but today the poets are more like sirens before an air-raid—they strike a warning note" (*Ariel* 2). Lewis captures the resigned determination of this stance in "Where Are the War Poets?" (1943), written as a riposte to oft-repeated calls that literary artists should participate more fully in the war of words:

It is the logic of our times,
 No subject for immortal verse—
 That we who lived by honest dreams
 Defend the bad against the worse. (ll. 5-8)

Emerging from the stark polarizations of the interwar period, British writers cast their lot with a politics of consensus whose public manifestations included the cross-party National Government, the appropriation of private property in the name of total war under the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act of 1940, and atmosphere of collective

solidarity represented by the enduring myth of the “People’s War.” The enemy made it easy to define what Britain was struggling against; the more difficult issue was what they were struggling for.

Most intellectuals chose to fight fascism not in order to return to the status quo of pre-war Britain, but rather in the hopes of reshaping the country as they knew it. They chose to collaborate. Collaboration, especially in the context of the Second World War, risks invoking negative imagery of the Vichy government and other puppet regimes set up by the fascist powers. Yet “collaboration” also has the positive sense of working together for a mutually beneficial output. It is a particularly radiocentric term; unlike literary production, assembling a broadcast demands the cooperation of dozens if not hundreds of individuals, from the engineers responsible for maintaining and extending infrastructure to the producers who translate scripts into sounds and the actors who realize the dramatist’s vision. Writers who turned to the BBC collaborated on both artistic and political levels: they shared in the process of creation while adjusting their contributions to fit the propaganda directives of a nation at war.

But if collaboration always demands a measure of compromise, it can also yield substantial gains. Whether politically right or left—and most fell somewhere between liberal humanism and democratic socialism—writers who chose to broadcast traded their independence for a say in the struggle. Collaboration offered a means of overcoming the worst injustices of interwar Britain and its empire en route to victory, especially as the collectivizing tendencies of rationing, nationalization of production, and cross-class solidarity began to show what Britons could achieve together. “To be loyal both to Chamberlain’s England and to the England of tomorrow might seem an impossibility, if

one did not know it to be an everyday phenomenon,” George Orwell wrote in the autumn of 1940. “Only revolution can save England, that has been obvious for years, but now the revolution has started, and it may proceed quite quickly if only we can keep Hitler out” (“My Country Right or Left,” *CEJL* 1:591).

As MacKay has pointed out, it matters little whether the social changes ushered in by the war and the postwar Labour government actually constituted a revolution in the larger historical sense; they were experienced and discussed in revolutionary terms (4). “Either we are fighting to bring a better world into existence,” wrote J.B. Priestley in late 1940, “or we are merely assisting at the destruction of such civilisation as we possess” (*Postscripts* vii). Collaboration via radio enabled the dissemination of ideas that could be simultaneously anti-Nazi and progressive, as British writers took liberal humanism to its logical conclusion by pushing for greater socio-political rights for the disenfranchised at home and abroad. For Orwell, Marson, and Forster, this revolution meant the break-up of the empire; for many others, it meant the continued breakdown of class hierarchies in Britain and the aggressive pursuit of a better standard of living for all citizens. Collaboration with a government with whom they did not agree offered writers the possibility of altering the broader cultural conversation about British society, its role on the world stage, and the cultural and aesthetic values that define it.

But collaboration entailed a complicated relationship to government agencies like the BBC. In his wide-ranging account of the relationship between modernism and war in twentieth-century Britain, Patrick Deer describes British literature in terms of a relationship between official war culture—those texts and cultural forms which are explicitly created or promoted by the state—and other, more “resistant” forms of writing

(4). Official war cultures claim to offer strategic “oversight” of the conflict, a commanding perspective from which disruptive and chaotic elements can be subsumed into a larger, more coherent version of events. Deer places literary production in an ambivalent relation to official war culture: as a nominally autonomous and socially privileged site of expression, literature offered a means of narrating the ironic contradictions between the view from on high and “the view of those living out the tactical realities of the conflict” (10). Yet official culture proved remarkably adaptable during the Second World War: “The deeply conservative Churchillian vision of Englishness and Empire jostled alongside other, more radical perspectives. British war culture was flexible enough to combine apparently contradictory elements with ease” (134). The People’s War succeeded, as a mythology, in part because it could expand to encompass both residual and emergent notions of what it meant to be a part of “the People.”

British war culture was, in other words, hegemonic. In their glosses on Antonio Gramsci’s influential formulation, Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall characterize hegemony as a form of social control that operates less by overt force and more by dynamic processes of interaction that dictate the range of political and social possibilities (Williams, *Marxism* 110-112; Hall, “Culture” 332-3). Hegemony refers to a way of achieving “equilibrium in the class struggle” that, by offering concessions to a diversity of class fractions, avoids disruption of the ruling bloc (Hall, “Culture” 334). Hegemony is above all an elastic form of containment: by providing an outlet for expressions of political and social dissidence, it perpetuates the functioning of that bloc. As Williams frames it, “dominant culture... at once produces and limits its own forms of counter-

culture” (114).⁵ This is not to say that social transformations cannot occur, simply that such transformations are rare, and that hegemonic structures of power tend towards a stability that favours the ruling élite (Williams 114).

While hegemonic forms of containment obtained in British society at large during the war, they are especially relevant to the situation at the BBC. As the voice of the nation at home and abroad, the BBC was tasked with projecting Britain as a tolerant and democratic nation, if only to provide a stark contrast with the totalitarian enemy. At the same time, the British government could ill afford serious disruptions of the status quo. Any major change—from an outright revolution at home, to the breakout of independence movements overseas—risked the fatal weakening of a country that, by June of 1940, was the last obstacle preventing total German domination of Europe. To ensure the right message of national solidarity alongside democratic vitality, the BBC chose its star performers carefully, often with an eye for intellectuals and writers whose views put them slightly at odds with the government. Marson’s cultural nationalism and black Atlantic connections lent her credibility with her West Indian audience; Priestley was a vocal proponent of socialism; Orwell and Forster were chosen to broadcast to India specifically because of their anti-imperial credentials. In a letter to George Woodcock dated 2 December 1942, Orwell was typically straightforward about how the BBC used dissenters:

⁵ LeMahieu has pointed out the potential tautology and classism of such hegemonic arguments: claims that even expressions of dissent are incorporated by the hegemonic state make every exception seem like part of the rule. Only by “oracular” judgements about when an act or utterance is truly “counter-hegemonic” can an assessment of social change be made (LeMahieu 15-6). Moreover, the adjudication of what is or is not in the best interests of the public at large—and of the extent to which the public is complicit in its own domination—depends on a presumed superiority on the part of the scholar (17). These criticisms, while valid, downplay the extent to which the hegemonic view of culture allows for incremental social change. Despite his reservations, LeMahieu acknowledges that the theory of hegemony represents a subtler middle ground between more rigid theories of “strong containment” and more celebratory accounts of the autonomy of the cultural consumer.

As to the ethics of b'casting and in general letting oneself be used by the British governing class. It's of little value to argue [about] it, it is chiefly a question of whether one considers it more important to down the Nazis first or whether one believes doing this is meaningless unless one achieves one's own revolution first. But for heaven's sake don't think I don't see how they are using me. (*CEJL* 2:307)

To varying degrees, all of the writers examined in this dissertation understood and accepted the compromise that Orwell identifies. They recognized that they were lending their names and literary reputations to an organization with which they could not agree wholeheartedly, but which offered the best means of contributing to the war effort and furthering their own agendas to whatever degree possible. This stance was far from the patriotic zeal with which some writers contributed to the First World War; rather, it signified a hard-eyed pragmatism that saw no alternatives but to pursue the fight against fascism.

The same attitude of calculation characterized most writers' relationship to the question of propaganda itself. Louis MacNeice, writing in the Autumn 1938 edition of *New Verse* (a special issue on "Commitments"), took a relatively moderate stance vis-à-vis propaganda, given the partisanship of the decade: "The world no doubt needs propaganda, but propaganda (unless you use the term, as many do, very loosely indeed) is not the poet's job. He is not the loudspeaker of society, but something much more like its still, small voice" ("A Statement," *SLC* 98). For all of MacNeice's admonitions, by the time war had begun many writers were using the term very loosely indeed. Without quite embracing Eric Gill's famous pronouncement that "All art is propaganda," writers had

come to see political and ideological persuasion operating at some level in all forms of cultural production (Gill 530). Orwell summarized the predicament of those writing in the wake of both modernism and the polemical 1930s in his broadcast called “The Frontiers of Art and Propaganda” (1941). Between about 1890 and 1930, he claims, widespread social stability had created an atmosphere conducive to the development of various forms of “intellectual detachment, and also dilettantism” that went under the banner of “art for art’s sake” (*CEJL* 2:151-2). But things changed quickly:

The writers who have come up since 1930 have been living in a world in which not only one’s life but one’s whole scheme of values is constantly menaced. In such circumstances detachment is not possible. You cannot take a purely aesthetic interest in a disease you are dying from; you cannot feel dispassionately about a man who is about to cut your throat. (2:152)

The existential threat posed by global ideological conflict shook the foundations of aesthetic autonomy and laid bare the political content lurking behind all cultural production. Nonetheless, Orwell seems haunted by the ghost of intellectual independence past. The turn to the political “led for the time being into a blind alley, because it caused countless young writers to try to tie their minds to a political discipline which, if they had stuck to it, would have made mental honesty impossible” (2:152). “The Frontiers of Art and Propaganda” does not ultimately propose a way out of the dilemma of choosing between a falsely idealistic world of autonomous art and a rigidly ideological world of political commitment. In naming those two tendencies, however, Orwell’s broadcast succeeds at mapping out the field on which wartime cultural production would play itself out.

During the war, some writers tried to distinguish between overtly manipulative propaganda and the subtle persuasion engendered by honest communication and literary art. In a broadcast to America in September 1940, Priestley outlined the two scales on which propaganda can be said to operate; while he acknowledges his radio talks might be considered propaganda because they advocate for the prosecution of war against Germany, he claims that unlike German propaganda, his broadcasts are not part of a coherent and concerted attempt to sway listeners (*Britain Speaks* 231-2). While somewhat disingenuous—Priestley was being paid handsomely by the Ministry of Information to promote the British cause to America—it remains true that British writers were more free to say what they wished than were their German counterparts, although that is admittedly not saying much. MacNeice, writing shortly before he joined the BBC, took a different tack by arguing that the best propaganda might not be propaganda at all:

It is nonsense to say, as many say nowadays, that all great poetry is propaganda... the fact that a poem in which a belief is implicit may convert some whom direct propaganda does not touch, far from proving that that poem is propaganda, only proves that propaganda *can* be beaten on its own ground by something other than itself, so that we can admit that poetry can incidentally have effects like those of propaganda though its proper function is not propagandist. (MacNeice, *I Crossed the Minch* 201-2)

This attitude inflects MacNeice's work with the BBC Features department. While clearly meant to persuade, his broadcast output succeeds precisely to the extent that it transcends the blunt exhortations of overt propaganda. MacNeice's features, like the best works of

political persuasion, achieve their effects by shaping themselves to a familiar and believable notion of the nation and its values.

Given the slippage and expansiveness of the concept of propaganda during the war, this dissertation applies an appropriately broad definition of the term.⁶ “Propaganda” is used throughout to signify all information deployed with the intent to persuade the recipient of a particular ideology, political position, or set of values. This usage approaches Jacques Ellul’s notion of “integration propaganda,” a diffuse form of persuasion that operates through many of the political and cultural structures of everyday life, and which produces “a progressive adaptation to a certain order of things, a certain concept of human relations, which unconsciously molds individuals and makes them conform to society” (Ellul 64). Ellul’s term, useful as it is in conceptualizing the pervasiveness of persuasion in everyday life, does not quite capture the hybrid quality of wartime propaganda by British writers. As almost all of the writers treated in this dissertation worked for a semi-governmental agency at a time of war, and were overtly committed to the struggle against fascism, their propaganda cannot be treated as diffuse. Their propaganda was focused, if not quite dogmatically prescribed by the Ministry of Information or the War Cabinet. At the same time, their interest in avoiding the most tendentious forms of persuasion led them to create works that balanced war aims with more personal values of intellectual and artistic independence. They were at once inside and outside the propaganda machine; while their complicity meant that the difference between Axis and Allied propaganda was only one of degree, it was equally true that the degrees mattered.

⁶ Mark Wollaeger offers an overview of twentieth-century theories of propaganda, including those of Jacques Ellul and Edward Bernays, in the introduction to *Modernism, Media, and Propaganda*.

This nuanced position reflects the fact that, during the war, writers saw propaganda as a way of orienting listeners in a crowded informational field. Ellul argues that propaganda is not simply a tool used by nefarious governments as much as it is the natural outgrowth of all “technological societies” in which information travels widely and instantaneously. Propaganda offers a means by which individuals can navigate the surfeit of data they encounter on a daily basis; in easing this navigation, propaganda allows individuals to integrate more smoothly into society (*Propaganda* xvii). Rather than being dragooned into political obedience, Ellul argues, individuals participate in their own integration because it offers a palliative to the alienation brought on by the semiotic surplus of a media-saturated existence (118-60 and *passim*). Mark Wollaeger, in *Modernism, Media, and Propaganda*, adapts Ellul’s theory in order to posit propaganda as a transformative agent that takes the “negative affect” of modern alienation and translates it into “socially ‘productive’ forms, such as myths, stereotypes, and xenophobia” (12). Wollaeger’s thesis is that the aesthetic of modernism and the techniques of propaganda play similar transformative roles, rendering informational surfeit assimilable (12-13). While most of the writers who broadcast regularly would not be identified as flag-bearers of modernism, they all operated in its shadow and inherited its historical circumstances, including the imperative to negotiate a crowded matrix of information.

The argument of this dissertation is that Second World War propaganda by British writers went beyond converting alienation into a useful mythology of unitary British national identity. Instead, these writers appropriated propaganda for the purpose of propagating their own cultural communities at smaller scales. Mitford and West sought to

mitigate the historical parallels between fascism and the British establishment; Priestley became a celebrity by proclaiming a socialist revolution; MacNeice sought to repurpose modernism in the service of postwar reconstruction; Orwell collaborated with Indian nationalist writers to promote independence under the radar of the censor; Forster preached the virtues of little England over Great Britain; Una Marson reached out to the West Indies and to black communities around the Atlantic region. While appearing to embrace the goal of integration propaganda—widespread integration by means of persuasion—these writers opened up new and autonomous channels of communication with the radio public that diverged from official culture.

Methodology

This project builds on a recent groundswell of scholarship at the intersection of twentieth-century literature and radio broadcasting. Todd Avery's *Radio Modernism* (2006) examines the broadcasts of T.S. Eliot, H.G. Wells, and several Bloomsbury group writers through an ethical lens. Avery argues that radio served as a bridge between Victorian ideals of public service and more radical forms of literary experimentalism. Michael Coyle has also explored T.S. Eliot's involvement with radio in a number of essays that put the poet's broadcasts into constellation with contemporaneous discourses of mass communication and mass culture. Coyle, along with Debra Rae Cohen and Jane Lewty, co-edited *Broadcasting Modernism* (2009), a collection which brings together analyses of the radio-related work of writers ranging from F.T. Marinetti to Samuel Beckett. Peter Kalliney's *Commonwealth of Letters: British Literary Culture and the Emergence of Postcolonial Aesthetics* (2013) explores the connections between British

literary institutions (including the BBC), modernist ideals of aesthetic autonomy, and the rise of postcolonial literature in Britain. Neil Verma's *Theater of the Mind* (2012) offers complex and historicized readings of "Golden Age" American radio drama, and contributes significantly to the formal lexicon of radio studies. Numerous collections of broadcasts by modern writers have also appeared recently, including *Listening In: Broadcasts, Speeches, and Interviews by Elizabeth Bowen* (ed. Allan Hepburn, 2010), *The BBC Talks of E.M. Forster, 1929-1960* (ed. Mary Lago, Linda K. Hughes, and Elizabeth MacLeod Walls, 2008), and the broadcasts of George Orwell contained in the *Complete Works* (ed. Peter Davison, 1997-8).

The present project seeks to complement this growing body of literature by pairing formal analysis of Second World War broadcasts by modern British writers with close attention to the literary and historical contexts in which those broadcasts emerged. The project draws on archival research conducted at the BBC Written Archives Centre (Caversham, UK), the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre (University of Texas at Austin, USA), the National Sound Archives of the British Library (London, UK), and the Bodleian Library (Oxford, UK). Additional archival research was conducted among the MacNeice and Forster papers at King's College (Cambridge, UK), the J.B. Priestley Collection at Bradford University (Bradford, UK), the Mass Observation and Wartime Social Survey collections at the University of Sussex (Brighton, UK), and the George Orwell Archive at University College (London, UK). Without these collections, the project could not have achieved the scope and depth that it did, even if much material has been left out in the interest of telling a manageable story. Wherever possible, the project refers to published editions of radio talks, features, and plays so as to facilitate further

investigation by readers. Archival versions are referred to only in cases where they are the sole version of a given text, or they offer particular insights into the topic in question.

While much of the argument of this dissertation involves the sound of wartime radio broadcasting—accents, intonations, nation language, and spatial acoustics—few recordings from the period in question survive. Most extant recordings are preserved at the National Sound Archive (NSA) at the British Library. Among those recordings that do survive, many of the best examples are not widely available. No recordings of Louis MacNeice’s radio plays have been distributed commercially, and listening to the versions preserved at the NSA is subject to considerable restriction. The task of reconstructing how these broadcasts were received, already a difficult one, becomes more so as it must be conducted in the absence of a substantial sound archive.

A stable and representative sound archive is, in any event, something of an illusion. Even the evidence provided by recordings of Una Marson’s voice, J.B. Priestley’s “Postscripts,” or Louis MacNeice’s plays cannot fully stand in for the original broadcast as encountered by listeners. There was, for one thing, no single act of audition; radio enables a diversity of listening experiences organized around a single broadcast, and to map a single experience as representative risks foreclosing on that diversity.⁷ Attending to the event of the broadcast means attending to what Rick Altman has called the material heterogeneity of sound, its differential reproduction and reception according to a variety of technological, environmental, and subjective conditions (Altman 15-31). Furthermore, technologies of preservation and repeated listening alter the present-day archival radio experience to the point that it becomes difficult to equate with the stream

⁷ Elena Razlogova’s *The Listener’s Voice: Early Radio and the American Public* is a successful example of the reconstruction of audience attitudes to, and involvement in, radio broadcasting.

of ephemeral broadcasts. In a discussion of “media archaeology,” an emerging field which attempts to foreground the intermediary role of a given medium in shaping what is often considered “content,” Wolfgang Ernst argues that “when we direct our senses to human voices or images of the past replayed from media recordings we are not communicating with the dead; rather, we are dealing with the past as a form of delayed presence, preserved in a technological memory” (250). Like any mnemonic device, recording technologies represent sounds rather than reproduce them; in listening, we encounter not the archived event but the illusion of its presence (Altman 29).

Acknowledging the interventions that machines make in the archival record, this project interprets recordings as useful pieces of evidence rather than quasi-religious relics binding the present-day listener back to a mythical past experience of audition. Attempts to recover an idealized, past, listening experience risk what Dominick LaCapra has called a fetishization of the archive, in which the archive is no longer simply “the repository of traces of the past which may be used in its inferential reconstruction” but becomes “a stand-in for the past that brings the mystified experience of the thing itself” (92). Archival reconstructions must always position themselves as contingent and partial achievements; their conclusions are not so much absolute certainties as productive interpretations.

As Sterne notes, the difficulties inherent in recovering the fleeting experience of listening *as it happened* should not stop scholars from “interrogating the conditions under which that experience became possible in the first place” and reconstructing lost audition as an event enmeshed in larger social and historical contexts (28). This dissertation therefore takes a pragmatic approach to archival research. It incorporates textual traces (both personal and institutional), acoustic traces, and historical data in order to provide an

overview of how these broadcasts were conceived, produced, and interpreted at the time. While the voices of listeners make important contributions to the argument, those contributions are most often highly mediated and diffuse: listeners' opinions and expectations emerge through letters to the editor at *The Listener* and *London Calling*; through periodicals like the *Spectator* and the *Daily Mail*; under the watchful eye of the Mass Observation and Wartime Social Survey projects; and through the reports of the BBC's own Listener Research Department, founded in 1936 and rapidly expanded during the war years. These sources provide important insights into how British listeners interacted with the broadcasts prepared to entertain, inform, and persuade them.

Traces of listener experience are more scarce than traces of broadcast production. The emphasis of the project therefore falls on the documented intentions, methods, and achievements of those producing and scripting the broadcasts. Lack of recordings, furthermore, directs attention to scripts at the expense of the fully realized radio productions listeners would have encountered. This is to some extent born of necessity; writers (and institutions like the BBC) leave a larger and more coherent paper trail than do audiences. But the focus on cultural producers, rather than cultural consumers, also yields a useful interpretive framework in that it places radio production in a longer line of utterances by public figures. Study of the wartime broadcasts of Priestley, Orwell, and others in the context of their pre- and post-war output enables the contemplation of these authors as public intellectuals conscious of their role in the world, and eager to affect discourse about the war and its aftermath. This focus on the intentions of cultural producers—intentions that are themselves often expressed publicly—obviates the need to square broadcasts with specific achievements in terms of elections, policies, and broad

social attitudes. Instead, radio becomes a forum for the articulation of Britain as these writers would have it to be: whether peopled by discerning listeners (MacNeice), creative and broad-minded cultural participants (Priestley), diasporic and anti-imperial progressives (Marson), or anyone else. By focusing on the production end of wartime broadcasting, this dissertation emphasizes the use of radio as a site for cultural interventions by writers, without ignoring the relationships that emerged between cultural producers and their audiences.

Chapter 1: Radio Treason and the Political Uncanny: Rebecca West, Nancy Mitford, and the Spectre of Lord Haw-Haw

It remains one of the remarkable ironies of the Second World War that the last man to be hanged for High Treason in Britain was not even British. During the war, William Joyce—better known as Lord Haw-Haw—was the figurehead for German radio propaganda in Britain. He made hundreds of pro-Nazi broadcasts for the *Reichsrundfunkgesellschaft* (RRG), the German national broadcaster. Despite Joyce's birth in the United States to an Irish father and an English mother who had both been naturalized as American citizens, British prosecutors pursued his conviction with diligence and secured his execution. He was hanged on 6 January 1946, two weeks after fellow radio traitor John Amery, son of MP Leopold Amery. Both deaths testify to the postwar need to purge Britain of the treasonous voices that had permeated its airwaves. Joyce was aware of the ambivalent status of his disembodied broadcasts; in a moment of strange levity, preserved in the William Joyce files at the National Archives at Kew, he told his brother Quentin during a prison visit that Britain should “hang the voice not the throat from whence it came” (qtd. in Martland 86).

Joyce's elusive and un-hangable voice haunted the wartime soundscape with the sound of a familiar enemy. Like most citizens, British writers and intellectuals reacted strongly to the sound of fascism spoken in the tones of a native English speaker; his was, in V.S. Pritchett's words, a “voice like teeth coming slowly towards me, threatening, eating a bite off peace, happiness & freedom” (qtd. in Treglown 121). Rebecca West claims that Joyce's voice “climbed into the ears of frightened people,” at once terrifying

listeners and courting their impulse to betrayal (*Meaning of Treason* 28). Her assessment that “[t]he idea of a traitor first became real to the British of our time when they heard the voice of William Joyce on the radio” (*New Meaning* 3) points not only to the paradigmatic severity of Joyce’s crimes, but also to a political lesson not lost on British writers of the Second World War: from the outset of the conflict, radio technology redefined the power of words by thrusting upon listeners and broadcasters alike an often troubling political responsibility. Treason was airborne; the acts of producing and consuming programming could, depending on the circumstances, constitute cooperation or dissent, collaboration or sabotage.

Joyce’s broadcasts compelled listening for the subtlety of their style and the appeal of their substance. “Haw-Haw’s microphone manner was superb,” wrote American editor and critic Charles Rolo in 1942. “His half-ironic, half-cajoling tone, his pointed sarcasms and unpredictable flashes of drollery, were ideally suited to put across his attacks on the British upper classes” (Rolo 70). If Hitler’s bombastic oratory was radio in High Explosive form, Joyce’s more measured attacks were incendiary bombs; their danger lay in their potential to spark fires of political resistance that could lie undetected until too late. Political extremism was not entirely unknown in Britain, but its transmission over the radio in Joyce’s fluent English was unusual in a media environment characterized by the monopoly of the BBC. Britons responded to this illicit opening of the airwaves by tuning in: a 1940 BBC Listener Research report indicated that over the winter of 1939-1940, as much as 60% of the adult British population listened to German broadcasts at least occasionally.⁸ These high levels of listening prompted official

⁸ The period later known as the Phoney War—September 1939 to May 1940—represented a sustained low ebb for British morale and for British broadcasting. While a host of wartime restrictions had materialized in

concerns that Joyce's calls for a negotiated peace between Britain and Germany, his proclamations of German superiority, and his angry anti-Semitism might be gaining traction with the British populace (BBC Listener Research Report LR/98: "Hamburg Broadcast Propaganda"). The report observed that "compared with people who do not listen to Hamburg, listeners are more conscious of such disunity as exists within the Empire, and more prepared to credit Hitler with positive social achievements" (LR/98). Rather than representing a threat wholly alien to the nation, Joyce's broadcasts disturbed British officials because they appeared to tap into undesirable political tendencies already present, to varying degrees, within the British population itself. Other agencies turned a similarly attentive ear to the phenomenon. Independent of the Listener Research surveys, Mass Observation and the Wartime Social Survey each conducted their own investigations into British listening to foreign broadcasts between the fall of 1939 and the summer of 1940. The proliferation of such surveys indicates the extent of both foreign listening and official concerns about the possible influence of German broadcasts.⁹

Faced with this airborne spectre of treason, British writers intervened in the

the fall of 1939, including the blackout and, for a few weeks, the closure of theatres and cinemas, the conflict itself had largely failed to materialize in such a way as might justify the constraints on wartime life. The BBC, meanwhile, had shifted to its emergency wartime broadcasting schedule on 1 September, two days before war was officially declared (Nicholas, *Echo* 25). The new schedule involved the abandonment of a great deal of familiar programming in favour of regular news bulletins, recorded music played on gramophones, and seemingly endless hours of Sandy MacPherson at the BBC Organ. As Siân Nicholas points out, this rather unstimulating output led British listeners to seek out entertainment and war information elsewhere, namely Germany (*Echo* 40).

⁹ Founded in 1937 by Charles Madge, Tom Harrisson, and Humphrey Jennings, Mass Observation was an experiment in auto-ethnography in which local "observers" recorded their impressions of public opinion, behaviour, and mood based on conversations (both their own and those of others), events around them, even dreams. The group gathered an immense amount of data and periodically published reports in book form. The Wartime Social Survey (WSS), formed in London in 1940 under the National Institute for Economic and Social Research, was a similar initiative. Though initially led by academics, the WSS was taken over by the Ministry of Information (MoI) in the summer of 1941, a development which led to the resignation of 22 out of 24 researchers and staff ("War-time Social Survey Papers" n.p.). The resulting government-run surveying agency, under the direction of MoI chief Duff Cooper, was colloquially known as "Cooper's Snoopers."

debates about national ideological formations unfolding around Joyce. As self-appointed custodians of the English language and its attendant culture, authors sought to undermine the figure of the radio traitor by prescribing the limits of normative British political identity, including how that identity is embodied in the person and voice of political agents and the means by which political deviance might be purged from the body politic. Nancy Mitford's *Pigeon Pie* (1940) and Rebecca West's *The Meaning of Treason* (1947) are symptomatic of differing relationships to the disturbing familiarity of Joyce's treasonous beliefs. Produced during the opening months of the war, Mitford's novel displays a gentle tone of mockery that betrays her proximity to members of the conservative and fascist establishment, while it seeks to render harmless a potentially violent movement by domesticating it—that is, by bringing it into the home. Written in the aftermath of the conflict, West's non-fiction account of Joyce's trial and execution fixes the broadcaster's treason in spatial and national terms—as non-British in origin but British in its aspirations for belonging—through a focus on passports, juridical architecture, and the treasonous body itself.

The two works bear the signs of their respective historical moments and social environments. Mitford's lighthearted novel reflects both the relative innocence of the Phoney War period and the problematic links between British Conservatism, British Fascism, and Nazism; West's indictment of Joyce, on the other hand, figures his crimes through a lens that takes in the full horror of the war and the resultant need to expunge the memory of ideological affinity that Mitford's novel represents. Though different in tone and genre, both works exhibit concerns about the supposed alterity of fascism as an “alien” ideology and about radio as a technology of intrusion, invasion, and malicious

mobility. For Mitford and West, Joyce serves as a figure of the political uncanny; he used the wireless to make public the elements of British political life that official war culture suppressed in order to facilitate the conduct of the war. Mitford's trivialization of the political uncanny as a familiar and laughable quirk of British politics and West's ascription of Joyce's extremism to non-British origins represent opposing strategies for the mitigation of an internal ideological threat. For both writers, the narrative act of fixing the radio traitor in space tempers the unnerving ability of Joyce's broadcasts to defy boundaries of nation, home, and political subjectivity.

Anxious Listening: The Acoustics of Propaganda

Radio treason confronts the listener with the difficulty of locating, in spatial and national terms, an enemy one can only hear and whose ethereal mode of transmission scrambles attempts at identification. To a great extent this is an effect of radio as a medium: radio reception generates a sense of electronic presence for the listener, but signals do not easily reveal their point of origin. Both German and British authorities capitalized on this indeterminacy of origin by operating covert propaganda stations (known as "black" propaganda) purporting to originate within the target country. The Concordia Bureau of the RRG operated stations such as *Worker's Challenge* and *The New British Broadcasting System*, which claimed to broadcast opposition from within Britain when in fact, programs were produced at Zeesen and other German radio facilities. Similarly, the British Political Warfare Executive operated *Gustav Siegfried Eins* and *Soldatensender Calais*, stations using exaggerated versions of Nazi rhetoric to undermine the legitimacy of German arguments (Briggs, *History* III:426, 433-4).

Whether successful or not, the intention of such propaganda is auditory camouflage, in which the true signal source (and, by extension, its national and ideological motivations) is obscured (Ellul 15-16).

Ambiguities about signal origins offered more than strategic opportunities; they lent a supernatural edge to the discourse surrounding wartime radio listening. John Durham Peters points out that the ability of broadcasting to connect people via invisible, apparently immaterial linkages approximates telepathy; the discourse of radio is, furthermore, characterized by an otherworldly vocabulary of medium, ether, and spectrum (*Speaking* 103, 108). Cultural historians must always be wary of overstating the degree of amazement or unsettlement generated by a given technology at a given time; however, despite the fact that radio had already seamlessly integrated itself into the lives of listeners, discourses about radio from the 1930s and 1940s occasionally slipped into a rhetoric that extolled the supposedly supernatural powers of the medium. Eugen Hadamovsky, head of the Reich Propaganda Office of the Nazi Party, considered radio “the characteristic means of expression of the National Socialist man” in that it “possesses all the internal and external premises to picture his new values: blood and soil, race, fatherland, and nation.” He extols the invasive power of radio:

We spell radio with three exclamation marks because we are possessed in it of a miraculous power—the strongest weapon ever given to the spirit—that opens hearts and does not stop at the borders of cities and does not turn back before closed doors; that jumps rivers, mountains, and seas; that is able to force peoples under the spell of one powerful spirit. (Qtd. in Rolo 14)

As an expansive medium, radio offers propagandists like Hadamovsky a technological corollary to the landscape-devouring rapaciousness of the Nazi *Wehrmacht*; radio could serve as a kind of auditory *Blitzkrieg*. But the boundlessness of the medium could be harnessed for democratic ends as well as fascist. In his 1942 volume *Radio Goes to War*, Charles Rolo claimed that “Radio speaks in all tongues to all classes. All-pervasive, it penetrates beyond national frontiers, spans the walls of censorship that bar the way to the written word, and seeps through the fine net of the Gestapo” (11). Though differently inflected—Hadamovsky emphasizes a powerful and dominating mobility, Rolo a discursive penetration—these accounts imbue the transnational medium of radio with political and affective force.

The potential of radio to diffuse democracy existed in tension with threats of invasion and domination. By the end of the 1930s, widespread access to radio programming had taught listeners that the same medium that brought news and entertainment within their reach could actually breach the private sphere of the home and cause catastrophe. Political threats, including turmoil on the continent, and human disasters, such as the explosion of the *Hindenburg*, rushed in with equal force. “The instantaneous experience of mass public tragedy by radio,” Jeffrey Sconce claims, “was a genuinely new human experience, as was the mass participation in the private tragedies of individual citizens” (Sconce 110). The simultaneous experience of global catastrophe is the sobering corollary to the supernatural rhetoric of radiophiles like Hadamovsky: whatever its potential to liberate, radio might equally usher in death as democracy. The famous success of Orson Welles’ 1938 *War of the Worlds* broadcast in the United States testifies to public apprehensions about the real-time prophecy of invasion by radio. By

mimicking formal attributes of radio (intermittent static, news bulletins punctuating “regular programming”), Welles’s adaptation camouflaged its artificiality in the tones of global catastrophe familiar to audiences made tense by the growing political unrest in Europe and other immediate intimations of disaster. Martian invasion became a code for German invasion.¹⁰

Radio, at the beginning of the Second World War, had induced anxious listening not only because it spread news of conflict. It also dramatically expanded the spatial authority of those determined to mobilize its political potential. Marshall McLuhan observed that Hitler came into power as a result of his use of radio and public-address systems. “It was Hitler,” he says, “who gave radio the Orson Welles treatment for *real*” by subjecting domestic and foreign audiences alike to a rhetoric of imminent and absolute Nazi victory (300). In doing so, Hitler aligned his message with the medium. As an extension of the voice, radio tends to increase the area over which a speaking subject exerts authority; the wireless allows the identifying feature of the voice to leave the body and requisition space. Steven Connor, in his cultural history of ventriloquism and disembodied voices, notes that space is essentially defined by our bodily ability to extend outwards and occupy an environment; “the meaning of human space,” he points out, “is changed drastically when it becomes possible to inhabit and command with one’s voice an auditory range far larger than that prescribed [by the] limits of the naturally audible” (12). Radio, like the loudspeaker, gramophone, and telephone, had expanded the scope of

¹⁰ As Sconce reminds us, however, retrospective reconstructions of the “Martian Panic” of 1938 were exaggerated. There are almost no first-hand accounts of public terror, and most newspapers simply reproduced the same Associated Press story which dubiously linked a single broken arm and a single heart attack to the broadcast (115-116). Rather than reflecting our susceptibility to the manipulations of radio, the legend of the broadcast-induced panic in fact highlights our desire to be manipulated, to believe in “a horror story in which the monster ultimately is not the invading Martians but the invasive broadcaster” (116).

vocal authority; dictators could now dictate at great distances instantaneously.

In 1936, Rudolf Arnheim noted the permeation of electronically extended voices in the soundscape of pre-war Europe, a soundscape he characterized as “chaos concretised” (238). Whether whispered or shouted, ideological clashes broadcast on the radio effect a contraction in the auditory environment of the listener by bringing the foreign and hostile near. Such technologically amplified voices, Connor writes, work to “cancel or close up space,” imitating technologically the sense of spatial collapse of a nearby human scream: “For when we shout, we tear. We tear apart distance; we disallow distance to the object of our anger, or of our ecstasy” (33). The strident oratory of Adolf Hitler urged a rhetoric of territorial expansion through timbres that threatened to destroy the medium of its communication. Brought close to the listener’s ear through the apparatus of microphone, cables, and speaker, the surge of verbal and vocal effects seem to overwhelm the medium itself, making speakers buzz and eardrums sting.¹¹

Anglo-Fascism and the Political Uncanny

Espoused in German, such ideological fervour sounded alien and hostile to most British listeners. Translated into English, belligerent broadcasts by Lord Haw-Haw and other Anglophone radio propagandists embodied the political uncanny by manifesting the unwanted return of ideologies and beliefs deemed alien to British culture.¹² Joyce’s

¹¹ Charlie Chaplin famously parodied the destructive potential of Hitler’s vocal onslaughts in *The Great Dictator* (1940), in which microphones cower and wilt under the force of the Dictator’s words.

¹² In using the term “political uncanny,” I am conscious of its prior application, in different contexts, by Lars Engle and David Collings. For Engle, working with the fiction of Nadine Gordimer, the political uncanny describes the unwanted return of South Africa’s repressed histories of violence and domination in macabre forms (see “*The Conservationist and the Political Uncanny*” in *The Later Fiction of Nadine Gordimer* and “*The Political Uncanny: The Novels of Nadine Gordimer*”). Collings, working at the intersections of modern political history and literature, reads the fictional monsters of nineteenth-century texts as allegories of political disenfranchisement. I am more interested in the anxieties produced by radio

broadcasts typify the uncanny through the interactions of a cluster of effects that link technology, ideology, nationhood, language, and class. Radio, as a medium of manufactured intimacy, lends itself to uncanny effects; the presence of the broadcast in the familiar world of the listener—its entry into their home, place of employment, or place of recreation—prompts in the listener the expectation of a corresponding familiarity of tone. Joyce's broadcasts were most unnerving because he communicated his message inside the homes of British listeners in tones that never approached the hyperbolic pitch of Hitler and other Nazi orators; instead, his rhetoric insinuated itself to listeners along the lines that were, as Matheson and Arnheim have argued, most appropriate to the medium.

This mediated intimacy amplified Joyce's linguistic proximity with many listeners. Although American by birth and raised in Ireland, Joyce had lived in England since the age of 16; he sounded English, even if listeners could not agree as to the exact origin of his accent. Writing in *The Times* of 8 January 1940, before William Joyce had been clearly identified as the voice behind Nazi radio propaganda, novelist Rose Macaulay speculated about his origins: "He seems to have a slight provincial accent (Manchester?) and to commit such solecisms as accenting the second syllable of 'comment'. I should not call it 'public school' English" (qtd. in Cole, *Lord Haw-Haw* 132). Others were convinced of Joyce's upper-class roots. American journalist William Shirer, interviewing the broadcaster in Berlin for the *Sunday Chronicle* of 14 September 1941, noted a discrepancy between Joyce's appearance and his voice: "On the radio, this

treason through its evocation of a culture's internalization of politically reprehensible ideas, and in the resulting demonization of figures like Joyce. Nonetheless, Collings' eloquent description of the transfer of Freud's theory to the political realm resonates with the story of Lord Haw-Haw: "In the monster one glimpses not the truth of the subject but the negated collective itself, not a psychoanalytic but a political uncanny" (Collings, *Monstrous Society* 22).

hard-fisted, scar-faced young Fascist rabble-rouser sounds like a decadent English blue-blooded aristocrat of the type familiar on our stage” (qtd. in Cole 175). Shirer does not seek to explain the dissonance between Joyce’s physical appearance and the sound listeners had come to expect; his silence on the matter seems to imply that the apparatus of microphone, antenna, and speaker do the work of transforming rabble-rouser into aristocrat.

Part of the confusion about Joyce’s accent results from his branding as Lord Haw-Haw, a caricature of upper-class radio treason invented by radio critic Jonah Barrington and the excitable and understimulated British radio press.¹³ Though their identities would later merge, Lord Haw-Haw and William Joyce began the war as entirely separate figures. In a column in the *Daily Express* on 14 September 1939, Barrington casually remarked: “A gent I’d like to meet is moaning periodically from Zeesen. He speaks English of the haw-haw, damit-get-out-of-my-way variety, and his strong suit is gentlemanly indignation.” A few days later, on 18 September, Barrington confirmed the nickname as “Lord Haw-Haw,” and added a physical description: “From his accent and personality I imagine him with a receding chin, a questing nose, thin, yellow hair brushed back, a monocle, a vacant eye, a gardenia in his buttonhole. Rather like P.G.

Wodehouse’s Bertie Wooster” (qtd. in Doherty 12).¹⁴ Barrington noted that the speaker

¹³ Most major daily newspapers at the time had at least one column devoted to radio listening. As the war loomed and finally broke over the late summer of 1939, the frequency and urgency of German propaganda broadcasts increased while home broadcasting dried up; in the absence of interesting programming from the BBC, these columnists occasionally turned their ears to the illicit broadcasts coming from stations such as Hamburg and Zeesen. Many commentators actively encouraged listeners to catch German broadcasts in order to mock Nazi propaganda efforts (Barrington, *Lord Haw-Haw of Zeesen* 9; Cole, *Lord Haw-Haw* 117-118).

¹⁴ The allusion to Bertie Wooster is ironic given that Wodehouse himself was later the subject of scandal for having broadcast, relatively positively, on German radio following his internment in Belgium in 1940. For a backhandedly sympathetic account of Wodehouse’s brief broadcasting career, see George Orwell, “In Defence of P.G. Wodehouse,” (*Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters* 3:388-403).

adopted an upper-class accent, but occasionally lapsed into German.

Barrington's invention spread quickly across a variety of media. After unsuccessfully attempting to popularize other nicknames for the male propagandists sounding out of Germany, rival newspaper columnists resigned themselves to using Barrington's coinage. Stage acts featuring a German propagandist based on Lord Haw-Haw appeared, including one called "Haw Haw," which was playing at the Holborn Empire by Christmas of 1939 (Kenny 149). Arthur Askey, of the BBC program "Band Waggon," premiered a character called "Baron Hee-Haw" in a broadcast on 18 November 1939 (Barrington 9). Books also emerged: Barrington capitalized on his own creation by publishing a comic biography, *Lord Haw-Haw of Zeesen* (1940), in which the ersatz peer's supposedly aristocratic roots are juxtaposed with cartoons of his imagined life. American novelist Elliot Paul, writing under the pseudonym Brett Rutledge, produced *The Death of Lord Haw-Haw* in 1940. A propaganda piece that blends elements of the hard-boiled thriller and documentary genres, Rutledge's novel follows an unnamed narrator on a transatlantic quest to find and arrest Haw-Haw (who, it turns out, has been broadcasting from Manhattan all along). William Wyler's *Mrs. Miniver* (1942), winner of six Academy Awards including Best Picture in 1943, incorporated the disembodied voice of a radio traitor in its depiction of the hardships of life in wartime Britain. Geared for an American audience, the film features one scene in which upbeat British pub-goers listen to a polished, sneering voice over the wireless from Germany describe Britain, inaccurately, as plagued by food shortages and crumbling morale.

Barrington's emphasis on the presumed aristocracy of the speaker, and the delighted uptake of this emphasis by later artists, indicates a willingness to mock the

English upper classes, and to explore the possibility of connections between fascist Germany and establishment England. Barrington, in *Lord Haw-Haw of Zeesen*, paints the broadcaster as privileged and unruly in his adolescence, exhibiting cruelties (throwing stones through windows, throwing bricks at a cat tied to a stake) that are excused by those in the nearby village as the eccentricities and energies of the “young master” of Haw-Haw House (13-20).



Figure 1: *Daily Mirror* cartoon by Norman Pett. (12 June 1940; reproduced in Cole)

Cartoons depicting Haw-Haw as an aristocrat, including one of him as a Nazi in formal attire, appeared in newspapers such as the *Daily Mirror* (Fig. 1). This image captures both the technological and class dimensions of public anger at Lord Haw-Haw. The fantasy of direct response to enemy broadcasts is here instantiated as a muscular, bare arm breaking out of the microphone to strangle the well-dressed traitor. This fantasy circumvents the spatial ambiguities attendant on broadcasting as a diffuse medium. It posits an immediate route back to the source of propaganda, a source that is locatable geographically, ideologically, and socio-economically.

The image of Lord Haw-Haw as fascist peer owes a great deal to other high-profile British fascists, most notably Sir Oswald Mosley, leader of the British Union of Fascists (BUF). As a former MP and respected politician, Mosley lent a degree of credibility to the BUF; he gave his organization an identifiably elite face. In fact, Mosley

had always encountered both resistance and support because of his upper-class background. Lewis Broad and Leonard Russell, in their anti-fascist tract *The Way of the Dictators*, disparaged him as “obviously not a man of the people, from the ranks come forward to lead the people. He stands but ill-disguised a patrician in Black shirt clothing, and that so faultlessly tailored” (qtd. in Gottlieb 196-7).¹⁵ Nonetheless, politicians like the Tory MPs Ivan Moore-Brabazon and Henry Drummond Wolff lent Mosley their support, as did Lord Rothermere, publisher of the *Daily Mail*, whose prominent headline “Hurrah for the Blackshirts!” in January of 1934 inaugurated six months of endorsement (Dorril 289, Pugh 149-151). Membership in Mosley’s fascist organization peaked at around 40,000 in mid-1934, before declining due to a variety of factors, including unfavourable public response to violence at the BUF rally at the Olympia in June 1934 (Dorril 288, Pugh 161-2). After a few years of association with more strongly pro-Nazi and anti-Semitic groups on the fringe of the far right in the later 1930s, the BUF received a significant if somewhat ironic boost in political respectability via the Munich Crisis of 1938, which allowed Mosley to redefine the party as pacifist and appeasement oriented (Pugh 261). Neither overtly condoning nor denouncing the violent expansionism of the Nazi Party, the BUF, with their motto, “Mind Britain’s Business,” became almost more Chamberlainite than Chamberlain himself.¹⁶

¹⁵ Figures such as Conservative MP Captain Maule Ramsay, who was implicated in a plot to pass military secrets to Germany, exacerbated the elite image of fascism Mosley conveyed; Ramsay was arrested along with Mosley on 20th May 1940 under Regulation 18B, which allowed for the internment of individuals thought to pose a danger to the state (Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz* 112). Other Conservative politicians, including Sir Henry “Chips” Channon, mingled casually with Nazi officials during the 1930s (Channon 105-113).

¹⁶ This ideological proximity between conservatism and fascism was in fact part of the problem for the BUF; in many ways, their political agenda was not different enough from that of existing political parties. In appealing to ideals of community, nationhood, kingship and hereditary leadership, the BUF platform seemed dominated less by alien innovations than by a return to English traditions (Pugh 10). Tory MP Colonel (later Sir) Thomas Moore went so far as to write in the *Mail* of 25 April 1934 that there were no

This impression of a link between fascism and the British political establishment was transferred to Haw-Haw: encountering the voice of the radio traitor in September of 1939, most listeners followed Barrington in reading Mosley's class position into that of the then-unidentified broadcaster. This image of privilege, however, had little to do with the man who would come to wear the Haw-Haw moniker during the war years. Most scholars agree that Joyce was not the speaker originally referred to as Lord Haw-Haw, and surviving recordings indicate that Joyce's accent was not of any variety commonly interpreted as "upper-class" (Cole 124; Martland 39; Doherty 12).¹⁷ Furthermore, German documents prove that Joyce spoke infrequently during the early weeks of the fall of 1939, contributing mostly news bulletins (Doherty 13). More likely, the original "Lord Haw-Haw" was a composite of propagandists whose voices tended towards an exaggerated Received Pronunciation, such as Eduard Dietze (a Glasgow-born German national) and Norman Baillie-Stewart (a former officer with the Seaforth Highlanders, once imprisoned in the Tower of London for selling sensitive information to Germany) (Doherty 8, 12; Cole 124). These men, already established at the RRG when Joyce arrived, provided listeners early in the war with the accent and character for the figure of Lord Haw-Haw. As Joyce began to provide more engaging and witty content, however,

"fundamental differences of outlook between Blackshirts and their parents, the Conservatives," which were "filled with the same emotions, pride of race, love of country, loyalty, hope" (qtd. in Dorril 289). Indeed, it is partly because the Conservative establishment could absorb the pro-empire, anti-Communist, protectionist message of the BUF that the latter never gained political traction in Britain. In 1934, as Parliament debated legislation intended to grant limited autonomy to the Indian provinces, Conservative MP Lord George Lloyd bluntly addressed the need for the Conservative establishment to shore up its pro-empire base of support by resisting decolonization: "You cannot be surprised if the Conservative Party will not look after the interests of this country as well as of India, that more and more people in this country will prefer a blackshirt to a White Paper" (qtd. in Pugh 188). By the time the BUF shifted gears and embraced a more stridently anti-Semitic platform in the latter half of the 1930s, the move appeared almost a political necessity; conventional conservatism had absorbed their more mainstream ideological elements, helping to direct the fascists towards ideological extremism.

¹⁷ Recordings of William Joyce and other German radio propagandists are available for download from many music websites, or can be heard on the CD that accompanies Doherty's *Nazi Wireless Propaganda*.

he began to broadcast more frequently and to attract a wider audience. Gradually, radio listeners and commentators in the UK began to apply the nickname to Joyce. While an exact timeline of shifts in public understanding as to the identity of Haw-Haw is difficult to elaborate, it appears that Joyce was relatively unknown as a voice through the fall of 1939, becoming more prominent in early 1940 until he was identified with some certainty as “the” Lord Haw-Haw in mid-1940. Joyce finally linked his own name to the Haw-Haw legend in a broadcast dated 2 April 1941 (Martland 42).

This delayed process of acoustic revelation led to considerable uncertainty as to the identity of the speaker to whom so many were listening and about whom so many were speculating. Macaulay’s insistence that Haw-Haw’s accent was not “public school English” is indicative of the class confusion that affixed itself to the figure of William Joyce/Lord Haw-Haw. Though audibly excluded from conventions of upper-class speech, Joyce took on the mantle of upper-class collaborationist in the minds of listeners. Thus unmoored from conventional class identities, Joyce attacked British policies from a variety of positions. He struck blows against British targets that were already the source of considerable internal grievance. Writing in *Public Opinion Quarterly* in 1940, Harold Graves, Director of the Princeton Listening Center, summarized for an American readership the catch-all nature of Haw-Haw’s critique:

Haw-Haw laid an appalling list of grievances at the door of Governmental neglect and plutocratic indifference. For housewives and heads of families, he traced the rise in commodity prices. For the religious, he traced the fall in church attendance. [...] For the labor-minded, he praised the trade unions as "the only organized body" of popular opinion opposing the Government. For

the middle class, he condemned—not profits, to be sure—but "enormous profits." For the poor, he condemned niggardly pensions. For youth, he attacked "antiquated politicians" and wished on the day when "the young people of England" would take a hand in their own affairs. (431)

As this epic litany indicates, Lord Haw-Haw's willingness to criticize from multiple perspectives made him a slippery opponent. Collectively, his attacks were inconsistent; individually, they could be difficult to repel, addressing as they did the complaints of many Britons as their country emerged from the turbulent 1930s.

Joyce's approach to the microphone was similarly adaptable. He moved between registers skilfully, often blending humour, analysis, and vitriol in the same broadcast (O'Connor 280). In his broadcast of 27 February 1940, for example, Joyce makes light of British preparations for possible German bombardment:

The British Ministry of Misinformation has been conducting a systematic campaign of frightening British women and girls about the danger of being injured by splinters from German bombs. The women have reacted to these suggestions with alarm by requesting their milliners to shape the spring and summer hats out of very thin tin plate, which is covered with silk, velvet, or other draping materials. (Joyce, "English Women")

In the atmosphere of prolonged waiting that characterized the Phoney War, such frivolity might have been welcome relief from the relentless posture of serious-minded preparedness promoted by the British government. Moreover, Joyce's delivery subtly mimics the conventions of broadcast news announcers: "girls" becomes "gells," while the phrase "very thin tin plate" is drawn out in a wry staccato that emphasizes the ludicrous

image of fashionable blast helmets. At other times, however, Joyce directed his energies into trenchant attacks on British policies and politicians, especially Churchill. On the first anniversary of Churchill's ascension to the role of Prime Minister, Joyce sneers, "*He* was the man to frighten Hitler. *He* was the providential leader who was going to lead Britain to victory. Look at him today—unclean and miserable figure that he is" (Joyce, "Churchill"). The contrast between Joyce's moments of dry wit and his more acerbic attacks is sharp; while the quiet irony of the former could be said to foster a bond between speaker and listener based on the intimacy of a shared joke, the latter is a blunter instrument more suited to the platform and the megaphone. In addition to appealing to the frustrations underlying the years of the blitz and the Phoney War, Joyce's broadcasts tread an unsteady line between approachability and polemic.

That his sometimes justifiable attacks served a fascist ideology that Britons were expected to oppose compounded the uncanny experience of class and spatial dislocation generated over the radio. As Petra Rau has argued, in her analysis of wartime representations of Germans and Germany, war "depends on distinct constructs of ipseity and alterity (selfsameness and otherness), and their short-circuiting has political and ideological implications: if it is not altogether clear what distinguishes the self from the (hostile) other, conflict is neither justifiable nor feasible" (Rau 186). While the words of Hitler or Goebbels might be tuned out as unintelligible and "foreign," the Anglophone fascism of William Joyce and the other propagandists collectively imagined as Lord Haw-Haw brought Nazi ideology into the homes of British listeners in the tones of their native language. This linguistic familiarity, furthermore, confronted the audience with a political rhetoric that was at once familiar and unfamiliar. Retrospective myths of the

Second World War contend that the lead-up to conflict engendered ever-clearer conceptions of national and ideological difference between Great Britain and the Continent, especially Germany and Italy (Rose, *Which People's War?* 20-21, 286). But as many writers of the period—Virginia Woolf and George Orwell, Elizabeth Bowen and Graham Greene—recognized, this myth of alterity obscured historical and ideological parallels between Nazi Germany and Great Britain. As an editorial in the *Manchester Guardian* of 18 December 1945 argued, “Joyce—and Amery, for the cases have much in common—held strongly certain opinions which were once shared by many [who] walk untouch[ed] among us. He carried his opinions, which he never hid, to their logical conclusions” (qtd. in Cole 289). Nazi hatred of Jews had its echo in the much less rabid anti-Semitism prevalent in Britain during the war (Rose 71-106); belief in racial superiority also subtended Britain’s rule over India and large parts of Africa. Pride in British traditions—including a rural, landed aristocracy and strong system of hereditary leadership in both the monarchy and the House of Lords—could likewise sound uncomfortably close to belief in non-democratic, authoritarian rule.

While Rau has explored this destabilizing sense of the familiarity of fascism in the blitz novels of Bowen and Greene, the literary representation of politically uncanny pro-German Anglophone broadcasters remains understudied (Rau 183-212). Yet Joyce was a prime figure for the blurring of the boundaries that demarcate national and ideological identity. As examination of the radio-centric works of West and Mitford shows, William Joyce and the figure of Lord Haw-Haw posed troubling questions about the British legacy of intolerance and imperialism; beamed directly into the domestic wireless set, Joyce’s vision of an autochthonous British fascism required solutions based

on containment. Mitford's and West's respective prescriptions for neutralizing the threat of the political uncanny, however, proved radically different; befitting a phenomenon based on the slippage between ipseity and alterity, sameness and otherness, they offer the choice between control through subsumption and control through expulsion.

Radio and the Political Uncanny in *Pigeon Pie*

For Nancy Mitford, daughter of the second Baron Redesdale, the uncanny tones of the radio traitor brought home a form of political extremism with which she was already familiar. Her sister Jessica was a fervent Communist who ran away as a teenager to fight in the Spanish Civil War and went on to work for the Communist Party in the United States. Her sisters Diana and Unity Valkyrie both attended the Nuremberg *Parteitage* (rally) in 1933 and were enthralled by fascism (Hastings 93-95).¹⁸ Diana left her first husband, Bryan Guinness, to become Sir Oswald Mosley's mistress, before marrying him in 1936. Both sisters had extensive personal contact with Hitler; while Unity was one of Hitler's friends, Diana occasionally served as a liaison between British fascists and the Nazi party. In 1939, Diana negotiated the lease of a German-controlled radio wavelength so that the BUF might broadcast from the continent to the UK in order to raise funds and spread their political message, though this plan was abandoned at the outbreak of war (Gottlieb 194-95; Mosley 381-383). The mix of personal and political passions went to extremes: Diana's marriage to Mosley took place in Joseph Goebbels' Berlin drawing room in 1934, with Hitler in attendance. Unity, on the other hand, was so fanatically devoted to both fascism and England that she shot herself with a pistol in the

¹⁸ At the 1933 Nuremberg *Parteitage*, Unity was seated near William Joyce, as can be seen in a photograph in Pryce-Jones; they also had mutual friends in Germany before the war (Pryce-Jones 77-78, Doherty 10).

English Garden in Munich upon the outbreak of the Second World War. She failed in her attempt and was eventually transported home to England via Switzerland, to be nursed for the final eight years of her life as a brain-damaged testament to fanatical ideological commitment (Mosley 143).

Nancy was never at ease with her sisters' violent political commitments; though she and her husband Peter Rodd had briefly joined Mosley's BUF in 1934, this seems to have been an ideological flirtation motivated by the novelty of the movement and by an interest in her sisters' strong convictions (Guinness 304; Hastings 96). According to Selina Hastings, Nancy was always "politically immature," professing a soft socialism while in fact adhering to a conservatism characteristic of the British upper classes (113). She had difficulty reconciling her deep love for her sisters with her hatred of their political positions, and tried to defuse the ideological tension by teasing them about their fascist conversion in both *Pigeon Pie* (1940) and its immediate precursor, *Wigs on the Green* (1935).

This close, familial experience of political polarization lends both novels a curiously casual attitude to what could be violent doctrines. *Wigs on the Green*, a fascist romp similar in tone to *Pigeon Pie*, illustrates Mitford's tendency to rewrite political clashes as domestic ones. The novel casts a Unity figure as protagonist under the name Eugenia Malmains, a recent and fervent convert to the doctrine of Social Unionism espoused by Captain Jack (a Mosley stand-in) and his Union Jackshirts. Eugenia advocates a revolutionary pro-Aryan ideology, admires Hitler, and carries a dagger on her belt. She and her Union Jackshirts take over an English pageant in the small town where they live, and turn it into a celebration of England's proto-fascist military conquests over

European and colonial victims. Rather than becoming the focus of sustained critique, Eugenia's militaristic ideology is dismissed by other characters as typical upper-class English eccentricity (13). Her expansionist rhetoric is downplayed as equivalent to domestic struggles. When Eugenia is denied permission to leave her room by her grandmother, she complains to her friends Noel and Jasper: "She misuses me and tramples upon me as for many years France has misused and trampled upon Germany. It does not signify. Germany has now arisen and I shall soon arise and my day shall dawn blood red" (26). The comedy of such comparisons is partly a matter of ironic juxtaposition: bloodthirsty, grandiose harangues ill befit familial squabbles. The scene also points to the inapplicability of revolutionary discourse in an establishment context; BUF leaders, predominantly of privileged extraction, seemed to suffer under the political system they wished to overthrow about as much as Eugenia under the guidance of her grandparents. The danger of such frivolity is, of course, that even by 1934 there were signs that the Nazis (and the BUF) were more than bumbling would-be tyrants.

The uneasy lightness with which Mitford treats the threat of fascism is the direct result of balancing her own wishes with family pressures. To placate Diana and Unity, Nancy removed large sections of the book, including all direct representations of Captain Jack, which Diana felt ridiculed Mosley (Mosley 58-60). In spite of the changes made, she wrote to Diana in June of 1935 that she was "very much worried at the idea of publishing a book which you may object to" (Mosley 59). Perhaps disingenuously, she claimed that the book "is far more in favour of Fascism than otherwise. Far the nicest character in the book is a Fascist, the others all become much nicer as soon as they have joined up" (60). This is not strictly true. More than anything, *Wigs on the Green* paints

fascism as ridiculous by contrasting the overblown rhetoric of a privileged, teenaged demagogue like Eugenia Malmain with the essentially stable, healthy landscape of rural England. Neither horrifying nor admirable, fascism appears instead as an ideological quirk: laughable but not ultimately very important.

Nancy was aware that her treatment contradicted the earnestness that her sisters found so inspiring about the movement. But that was partly the point. She wrote to Diana:

I also know your point of view, that Fascism is something too serious to be dealt with in a funny book at all. Surely that is a little unreasonable? Fascism is now such a notable feature of modern life all over the world that it must be possible to consider it in any context, when attempting to give a picture of life as it is lived today. (60)

In her resistance to the high seriousness of politics lies the kernel of the spirit which animates both *Wigs on the Green* and *Pigeon Pie*. Both are guilty of acts of political equivalence, in which wildly disparate aspects of life (extra-marital lust and political violence, snobbery and racism) are deemed equally valid targets for ridicule. A similar irreverence animates Evelyn Waugh's novels, with the crucial difference that Waugh's mockery bears the distinctive trace of a strong sense that morality has been perverted. For all their strengths as comic novels, Mitford's meditations on fascism lack this guiding principle. But by choosing to depict, in *Pigeon Pie*, a comic universe in which treason by broadcast is not ideologically impossible but rather an outgrowth of the natural inclinations of the British elite, Mitford enacts a revealing critique of the political mutability of conservative England.

Approaching once again the relationship between Britain's upper classes and fascism with *Pigeon Pie*, Mitford handled the material with a similar levity and familiarity. When she wrote *Pigeon Pie* over three months during the winter of 1939-1940, the war had yet to start in earnest, British listening to German propaganda was at its peak, and Lord Haw-Haw was still an unambiguous caricature of upper-class fascism. As a result, her novel is a disarmingly lighthearted Phoney War tale in which themes of broadcast treason and domestic fascism rub up uncomfortably against the shallow banter, petty intrigues, and infidelities typical of a high-society farce. While clumsy in parts—Mitford composed the novel as a potboiler to compensate for the wartime loss of her allowance from her father—*Pigeon Pie* captures the atmosphere of political receptivity characteristic of the early months of the war. While the British public awaited definitive signs of battle, the mediated conflict of the propaganda war continued to invade their homes. At the same time, echoes of pro-German feeling—whether actively fascist, appeasement-oriented, or anti-Semitic—circulating in British society at the time find their image in *Pigeon Pie*. The novel serves as a microcosm for the sense of conjoined familiarity and unfamiliarity that marked reception of Anglophone fascism: treasonous propaganda was an unwanted intrusion of the alien into the domestic sphere, and yet it resounded with familiar appeals to conservative and imperial British culture.

Pigeon Pie revolves around a radio traitor, a massive, elderly singer named Sir Ivor King, based on Nancy Mitford's close friend Mark Ogilvie-Grant (Hastings 125). Though a "faintly farcical old figure," King is something of a national treasure because of his vocal talents: "the idol of the British race, [he] reigned supreme in the hearts of his countrymen, indeed of music lovers all over the world, as the King of Song" (*Pigeon Pie*

30-31). One day early in the Phoney War, King disappears. His goddaughter, Sophia Garfield, is determined to track him down. King rather quickly resurfaces on a German propaganda station, having apparently defected to the Nazis and taken the name Lieder König—"The King of Song." Between bouts of praising the German war effort, the Lieder König sings beautifully. He often takes both the male and female parts in opera pieces, and generally stuns both sides of the conflict with his vocal prowess: "He was received like a king in Germany, the Führer sending his own personal car and bodyguard to meet him at the airport, and he celebrated his first evening in Berlin by singing 'Deutschland über Alles' on the radio in a higher and then a lower key than it had ever been sung before" (85-86). Sir Ivor King is the human manifestation of absolute voice, a mesmerizing font of hyperbolic sound beyond human comprehension. Millions of listeners tune in to his campaigns of propaganda through song, including a weekly show of music performed especially for pets, taking advantage of the Lieder Koenig's ability to produce sounds both higher and lower than human ears can detect. All of this has members of the British cabinet panicked, because they fear that the popular singer will win over British citizens.

Following Sir Ivor King's programs, Lord Haw-Haw often succeeds him at the microphone. Mitford spoofs Haw-Haw's jabs at the British military, his exaggerated claims of British food shortages, and his name-calling of British politicians. Mitford even explicitly parodies a specific line of German propaganda: over the course of the novel, Haw-Haw repeatedly demands that the British government disclose the whereabouts of the *Ark Royal*, a British aircraft carrier, implying that Germany's navy has sunk it. German propagandists repeatedly posed this question from the end of September 1939

until December of the same year, at which point it was revealed that the Ark Royal had turned up safe and sound in Cape Town (Doherty 47). By tying historical German propaganda to the fictional broadcasts of Sir Ivor King, Mitford reduces Haw-Haw to a hack propagandist grasping for any chance to sow doubt in British minds.

Despite this ridicule, both King and the fictional Haw-Haw succeed more substantially at stoking British fears of German intelligence capabilities; throughout the novel, the radio propagandists display a surprisingly accurate knowledge of events in London, often within minutes of their occurrence; “the mere fact of such accurate knowledge having reached Berlin so quickly was disquieting to the authorities” (105). Such examples of omniscient broadcasts have their parallel in the “scoops” that German propagandists made due to legislation limiting the release of information by the BBC before newspapers could print their version. Less plausible rumours of Haw-Haw’s omniscience circulated during the war, most famously that he would note on-air certain specific local details of which he should not be aware or that he had prophesied the death of a certain individual over the airwaves days before it occurred. These rumours were never substantiated, but they are indicative of the willingness of listeners to endow Lord Haw-Haw and other radio propagandists with uncanny powers of divination, projection, and perception (Doherty 111-115).

Sir Ivor King’s status as a celebrity traitor parallels Haw-Haw’s rise to the top of the news feed: “Henceforward the doings of the Lieder König were a kind of serial story, which appeared day by day on the front pages of the newspapers, quite elbowing out the suave U-boat commanders, the joy of French poilus at seeing once more the kilt, and the alternate rumours that there would, or would not, be bacon rationing, which had so far

provided such a feast of boredom at the beginning of each day” (104). For Sophia, such celebrity-mongering is the necessary effect of the boredom characteristic of the long wait of the Phoney War. As for the BBC, she considers it not so much an organ of national pride as “a definite and living force for evil in the land”:

What is the inspiration which flows to them from this, the fountainhead, as it must seem to them, of the Empire? London, with all its resources of genius, talent, wit, how does London help them through these difficult times? How are they made to feel that England is not only worth dying for but being poor for, being lonely and unhappy for? With great music, stirring words and sound common sense? With the glorious literature, nobly spoken, of our ancestors? Not at all. With facetiousness and jazz.

(61)

While any attempt at high calls to patriotic duty would likely have met with derision by satirists like Mitford, this passage indicates that listeners expected a degree of guidance from the semi-official voice of the state. A notion of national identity, in particular—a sense that “England is worth dying for”—seems to Mitford the least they could provide. In a Phoney War media environment in which the BBC offers not consolation but frustration to British listeners, it is little wonder they tune in to other stations and other ideologies.

Yet the ideologies embodied by Hitler and Nazi propagandists like Lord Haw-Haw are emphatically familiar to the characters of *Pigeon Pie*. A very plausible backdrop of genteel appeasement and fifth column sabotage accompanies the more implausible elements of the novel. Sophia’s husband, Luke Garfield, is a caricature of appeasement;

from Munich to the invasion of Poland and beyond he insists that Hitler is a decent man and in fact might help crush Communism in the countries he has invaded. "Herr Hitler will never let the Bolsheviks into Europe," he predicts, despite the partitioning of Poland between Russia and Germany. "We have no quarrel with Germany that our Premier and Herr Hitler together cannot settle peacefully" (23). Mitford points out that such complacency about the threat Germany posed was not unusual, and that it in fact fuelled much internal debate in the United Kingdom, both in the political sphere and the domestic sphere. "Carlyle has said that identity of sentiment but difference of opinion are the known elements of pleasant dialogue. The dialogue in many English homes at that time was very far from pleasant" (23). Apparently free of such debates are the working-class characters who make brief appearances in the novel to proffer matter-of-fact, patriotic statements of support for the war effort; as one anonymous mechanic says, "we could never have held up our heads if we hadn't finished it now" (10).

Mitford indicts the English upper classes for their complicity in the war, though her condemnation takes the form of condescension as often as it does anger. Sophia confides in her lover Rudolph that she blames Luke and his kind for the war, as they were "always rushing off abroad and pretending to those wretched foreigners that England will stand for anything" (29-30). Rudolph, for his part, considers the elite the dupes of the regime: "The Germans were told to make a fuss of English people, so of course masses of English stampeded over there to be made a fuss of. But it never occurred to them that they were doing definite harm to their own country; they just got a kick out of saying 'mein Führer' and being taken round in Mercedes-Benzes" (30). Though different in the degree of severity, both forms of appeasement indicate a willingness to flatter and be

flattered, and to see in the power structures gaining strength in Germany a social network in which English elites would not be full outsiders but integrated, active agents. Political allegiance—even to extreme ideologies—comes down, in Sophia’s mind, to a question of birth: “Aristocrats are inclined to prefer Nazis while Jews prefer Bolshies” (52-53). That aristocracy and Jewishness are inherently opposed in her mind indicates broader patterns of cultural division and exclusion.

Worse than pro-appeasement dupes like Luke, a sizable network of fifth columnists is at work in London. As Sophia continues to investigate the defection of Sir Ivor King, she realizes that the Brotherhood, a pacifist religious cult of which her husband is a member, is serving as a front for an elaborate network of spies. Luke’s dull lover and fellow member of the Brotherhood, Florence, is actually a calculating German agent, as are several other members. Much as he seems blind to the threat posed by Nazi Germany on the world stage, Luke is unaware of the threat concealed within the Brotherhood; his complicity with fascism remains at the level of appeasement rather than active assistance. Hosting frequent Brotherhood get-togethers in the Garfield home, Luke literally welcomes fascism into the British domestic sphere. The slow revelation that Luke unconsciously shelters anti-democratic agents under the guise of religion is also, for Sophia and the reader, a revelation that conservative domestic ideologies of appeasement, non-interference, and pacifism have given fascism free reign at home and abroad.

Pigeon Pie foregrounds the problem of locating fascism on the home front by posing as its central mystery the question of Sir Ivor King’s whereabouts. We are led to believe he has defected ideologically and bodily to Germany, as his broadcasts are announced as if emanating from Berlin (98). Sophia suspects otherwise, and her

suspicions are confirmed when she discovers King and the spies of the Brotherhood broadcasting from within her own house. The source point for persuasive fascist broadcasting is, in fact, the British upper-class home itself. This anxiety about signals originating from within Britain is paralleled in Elliot Paul's *The Death of Lord Haw-Haw*, in which the unnamed narrator embarks on a quest from Sweden to France and finally to America in an attempt to determine Haw-Haw's spatial location, only to find that the traitor has been broadcasting from a ship docked at a Manhattan pier, near the seat of American financial power (Rutledge 218). The spatial ambiguities that fuelled such narratives reflect anxiety about the extent to which fascism is an internal, rather than an external, political threat; locating the traitor, even if he is in your back yard, is the first step to containing him.

Mitford concludes her story happily. The guileless heroine Sophia foils the Fifth Columnists' plot and rescues her godfather Sir Ivor King who, it turns out, had been approached about defecting and had done so in order to pass along information to the British authorities. The plan, as discovered by King and Sophia, had been to plant and detonate explosives in the sewers under London, thus disabling infrastructure in advance of an aerial invasion by parachutists (*Pigeon Pie* 195). Destruction from within the bowels of the city—a form of internal unrest that gestures both comically to the digestive and more critically to the ideological—is thus neatly aligned with aerial conquest, both in terms of radio propaganda and material invasion. When German parachutists descend, expecting an easy conquest, the well-prepared British authorities capture and detain them (197). Their treatment, however, is exceedingly cozy and generous. The German soldiers are given comfortable lodgings and are sung German folk songs by Sir Ivor King; indeed,

they are compared to “members of an Australian cricket team which had come over here and competed, unsuccessfully, for the Ashes” (197).

In her preface to the second and subsequent editions of *Pigeon Pie*, Mitford seems shyly aware of its playful and lighthearted approach to a war that claimed millions of lives: “I hope that anybody who is kind enough to read it in a second edition will remember that it was written before Christmas 1939. Published on 6th May 1940, it was an early and unimportant casualty of the real war which was then beginning.” The date is important: four days after its publication, Germany invaded Belgium and the Netherlands; three weeks after the publication, France had fallen. From then on, the jokes either stopped or became decidedly more astringent. As Mitford wrote to Evelyn Waugh concerning republication of her earlier novel, *Wigs on the Green*, in 1951, “Too much has happened for jokes about Nazis to be regarded as funny or as anything but the worst of taste, so that is out” (qtd. in *Wigs* ix). She resisted republication of both novels until her death, and indeed both *Wigs on the Green* and *Pigeon Pie* were more often than not out of print until 2010.

Mitford’s admission of the poor timing of her work does not detract from its decidedly light treatment of an enemy that, by 1939, was known to be violent, hateful, and motivated by territorial ambitions. Mitford’s familiar experience of fascism colours her evocation of its dangers; her claim early in *Pigeon Pie* that, even after the declaration of war, many households across Britain were the site of debates between appeasement and the eradication of fascism, raises the question of whether she is taking her own family as a model (23). The happy return of the radio traitor and the warm treatment of the German invasion force enact a philosophy of “forgive and forget” that folds political

extremism back into the family, as if to say that when the war is over Axis and Allies would all laugh and shake hands. For Mitford, this was not simply an irreverent take on a serious conflict. Rather, it reflected persistent claims of the ideological, racial, and cultural sameness of Germany and Britain.

This is not to say that Mitford's text takes the "wrong" approach to the early war months, but rather that its complicated and contradictory messages emerge from a particular historical moment, now lost, in which substantial irony inhered in the similarities between radio traitors and Conservative patriots. Through its parody of upper-class sympathy with Nazi propagandists, Mitford's novel articulates the anxieties of a society whose collective ear is as open to illicit and antagonistic discourse as it is to official truths. It is a nervous response to the fear that the persuasive rhetoric of radio propaganda might find an echo in the hearts of many Britons and an acknowledgement that the private experience of listening to a radio voice that seems to speak to one listener alone can in fact engender public and political consequences. The resonant voice of the supposed enemy is heard to speak in tones uncomfortably familiar, because uncomfortably similar to one's own.

"Tiny, Alien, and Ineradicably Odd:" West's Diminutive Vision of Treason

If Nancy Mitford was anxious to minimize the uncanny effects of radio treason by containing it within an acceptable sphere of domestic political disagreement, Rebecca West pursued a different tack, by fixing William Joyce within precise legal structures that named him as simultaneously alien and treasonous. By the time Rebecca West began documenting the story of Joyce, the war was over and Joyce was on trial for High

Treason. Her work took several forms. She initially wrote two lengthy articles for the *New Yorker* magazine, in September of 1945 and January of 1946, recounting Joyce's trials for treason: his first trial in September of 1945, a subsequent appeal at the Royal Courts of Justice in October, and a final appeal to the House of Lords in December. She later compiled these articles, along with accounts of other post-war treason trials, as *The Meaning of Treason* in 1947. This work was revised substantially over the years, most notably in an edition twice as long as the original, featuring new material on the atomic treason trials of the 1950s and 1960s, published as *The New Meaning of Treason* in 1964¹⁹.

Much of Joyce's trial, and much of West's account of it, centred on the question of whether or not he owed allegiance to the British Crown at all; born in America to parents who had been naturalized as American citizens, Joyce had never formally taken up British citizenship. He had, furthermore, been naturalized as a German citizen in September of 1940, losing his American citizenship in the process, well before the beginning of German-American hostilities (Doherty 15; Hall 38). Thus, while he had lived in pre-independence Ireland from the age of about three until the age of sixteen, and from sixteen to thirty-three in England, he was not technically a British citizen. The prosecution at his trial secured a conviction on the grounds that Joyce's British passport, obtained thanks to his fraudulent claim to be a British subject, provided him with the protection of the British crown. State protection, according to case law dating back to the seventeenth century, draws a duty of allegiance; possession of the passport therefore required Joyce to refrain from lending support to the enemies of Britain (Hall 23).

¹⁹ All references in this chapter to *The Meaning of Treason*, unless otherwise noted, will be to the 1947 edition. Joyce's treason plays a more central part of this original work than in later versions, whose tone and conclusions are adapted to address a variety of treasonous behaviours.

The ruling against Joyce raised considerable, vocal opposition from members of the legal community and the broader public; despite their abhorrence for what Joyce had done, some observers read a measure of scapegoating in the willingness of the British government to execute an alien for actions committed in Germany while he was an American and German citizen. West notes, anecdotally, substantial popular support for the conception of a miscarriage of justice: “‘Of course he can’t be guilty of treason,’ it was said in all the London pubs. ‘He’s a dirty little bastard, but we’ve no right to hang him, he’s an American’” (57). Others were concerned that the punishment might not be proportionate to the crime: an editorial in the *Manchester Guardian* of 18 December 1945, shortly after Joyce’s conviction, notes that “One could wish that he had been condemned on something more solid than a falsehood, even if it was one of his own making” (qtd. in Cole 289). The *Columbia Law Review*, in an anonymous summary of the final trial written in March of 1946, noted with measured concern that “[g]eneral approbation of the sentence should not obviate critical consideration of the process by which it resulted”; rather than presuming that possession of a British passport in Germany afforded the kinds of protections which demand allegiance, the Review expresses regret that the prosecution had not provided a “factual... basis on which to support a conviction” (“Treason—Passports—Lord Haw-Haw” 322). In *Trial of William Joyce*, J.W. Hall remarks that while treason “is the greatest of crimes, ... there are degrees even in treason” (35). He questions whether Joyce’s crime, “detestable though it was,” deserved “the same punishment as the mass murders and torture of prisoners of which the Belsen criminals were convicted” (35).

In this atmosphere of judicial uncertainty, West aligns herself firmly with those in

favour of conviction. From the opening pages of *The Meaning of Treason*, she emphasizes the role Joyce played in supporting the much larger existential threat posed by Germany. More specifically, West links the threat of material invasion by Germany with the auditory invasion of Joyce's broadcasts. This invasion was unsettling in its usurpation of domestic spaces, as Joyce's broadcasts crowded British airspace and permeated British homes. For West, the entry into the home violated the core unit of familial and political stability. Joyce became an uncannily intimate enemy:

Never before have people known the voice of one they had never seen as well as if he had been a husband or a brother or a close friend; and had they foreseen such a miracle they could not have imagined that this familiar unknown would speak to them only to prophesy their death and ruin. All of us in England had experienced that hideous novelty. (3)

Treason was no longer strictly about material assistance given to the enemy; it was about psychological infiltration, the slow erosion of morale on the home front. Joyce's acoustic treachery "climbed into the ears of frightened people," encroaching on the boundaries between listener and speaker (28). The fascination Joyce held for listeners, West claims, was tied up with his hostility: "there was an arresting quality about his voice which made it a sacrifice not to go on listening... He was not only alarming, he was ugly; he opened a vista into a mean life" (3).

For West, Joyce amplified the political uncanniness of his treachery through national and class slippage. She notes that Joyce's accent was "difficult to identify" (6); not only had his family moved between America, Ireland and England, they had "consciously ironed out the Irish brogue from their tongues" once they arrived in England

(53). While Joyce may have largely eradicated the “Irishness” in his voice, he could not approach the cultured sound of most radio broadcasters. Instead, his voice carried the tones of one who attempted to hide the national and social implications of dialect: he “could not open his mouth without betraying that he had been born of the people and reared amongst them and had tried frantically to annul that destiny” (139). While his voice lacked obvious class and region markers beyond his exclusion from conventional circles of English power, Joyce’s vocal idiosyncrasies became part of the legend of Lord Haw-Haw. Most famously, the introduction to his regular program, “Germany Calling,” became in his mouth “Jairmany Calling.” This refrain was such a constant fixture of satires of Haw-Haw that, upon his arrest, Joyce was subjected to its mocking repetition by dozens of British soldiers (West 178). Ambiguously non-elite, regionally unspecific, Joyce’s voice conveyed its power through timbre, cadence, and tone. As West describes it, Joyce used

his harsh, sneering, cajoling, denatured, desperate voice, his quick and twisting humour, his ability to hammer a point home on a crowd’s mind... to persuade the men and women he saw before him of the advantages of dictatorship, the dangers of Jewish competition and high finance, the inefficiency of democracy, the greatness and goodness of Hitler, and his own seriousness. (99-100)

Unable to shake the linguistic indeterminacy produced by his complex vocal history, Joyce relied on a bombastic style, sharp wit, and persuasive rhetoric to focus the audience’s attention and overwhelm them with his arguments.

In tracing Joyce’s history and trial, West is at pains to reconcile this acoustic

impression of Lord Haw-Haw with the figure of William Joyce himself. The impressions West and others formed from the broadcasts were directly challenged by the sight of the small, scar-faced man in the courtroom. In their broadcasts, she noted, “[t]he Nazi-Fascists shouted as if their lungs and more were in superb condition. When heard over the air their voices suggested tall, stout, virile bodies, under perfect control, which were either richly invested with sex or lacked it because it had been displaced by some still fiercer daemon” (200). Popular conceptions of the fascist body—fuelled in large part by the self-mythologizing stereotypes of the Nazis—led West to envision, however ironically, the hyper-masculine ideologue of Aryan type. But, confronted with the reality, West notes that “[t]he strong light was merciless to William Joyce, whose appearance was a shock to all who knew him only over the air. His voice had suggested a large and flashy handsomeness. But he was a tiny little creature and, though not very ugly, was exhaustively so” (4). Indeed, West appears unable to refer to Joyce without emphasizing his size: he is “the little man” (21), “puny and colourless” (40), disadvantaged by “pygmyhood” (41), a “little creature” (100). Deprived of the stature implied by his broadcasts, Joyce appears to West as “tiny, alien, and ineradicably odd” (69).

Her insistence on the dissonance between Joyce’s body and his voice points to the ability of media to generate what Steven Connor has named the “vocalic body.” In any situation in which a voice sounds out, disembodied, the absence of a visible source compels the listener to seek out and, if necessary, imagine a body for the voice. In the scene from *Mrs. Miniver* in which pubgoers listen to Lord Haw-Haw over the wireless, for example, the camera anxiously fixes on the radio itself in an attempt to give a shape to the speaker’s voice, before abandoning the attempt in order to frame the other characters

in the pub. Rather than being subordinate to the body (which serves as the vehicle of its emergence into the world), the disembodied voice in fact dictates its own source in the mind of the listener; it “seems to colour and model its container” (Connor 35). Joyce sounded a bigger man on the radio, and his smallness in court visually contradicted the aural evidence of his broadcasts. Likewise, the graphic and textual representations of “Lord Haw-Haw” as monocled peer emerged from the acoustic evidence of early, posh-sounding speakers. Observers like West had to overcome the dissonance between Joyce’s deracinated but powerful voice, the aural myth of an elite “Lord Haw-Haw,” and the visible size and shape of the vocal source.

Tension between body and voice remained; Joyce’s only words during his initial trial were his plea of “Not Guilty,” but these contained, for West, the same quality of political contagion that had characterized his broadcasts: “It was as we had heard it for six years, it reverberated with the desire for power. Never was there a more perfect voice for a demagogue, for its reverberations were so strong that they were certain to awaken echoes in every heart that was tumid with the same appetite” (6). By insisting on vocal “reverberations,” West links acoustic effects with the danger of political contagion: in the echo chamber of the human body, illicit ideologies resound and multiply. Joyce’s voice is, to West, so powerful that individuals are unable to resist its invitation, provided they are open to a fascist desire for control. Whether or not the majority of British listeners believed him was beside the point: “Joyce was not tried because he had succeeded in recommending German National Socialism,” West asserts. “He was tried because he had filled space with his statement: ‘I am a traitor. Why are you not so too?’ It does not matter how his question was answered” (61).

As auditory invasions of the acoustic environment, Joyce's words were bombs that shattered the peace of the British home front. His broadcasts presaged and paralleled the raids of the blitz that would reduce large sections of London to rubble. Myths developed that fused the notion of radio as a telepathic medium with the home-wrecking invasiveness of air raids: during the long nights of the blitz, rumours circulated that Joyce—under the name of Lord Haw-Haw—would nightly predict which areas were to be bombed, noting particular local details such as a tea-shop sign or a stopped town clock to indicate he had intimate knowledge of the country (Doherty 111-12). The BBC Monitoring service, which made transcripts of all German propaganda broadcasts, actively disproved such rumours, but the powerful myth of Haw-Haw as omniscient and thus prophetic predominated throughout the war. British listening to German stations spiked noticeably in the second half of 1940 as bombing raids intensified and invasion seemed imminent. Rumours likewise circulated more freely during periods of heavy bombing. As Doherty notes, both increased listening and rumour-mongering reflected anxieties about such threats and dissatisfaction with official sources of news as the war exerted ever-greater pressure on British citizens (115-16). The bombing of particular British homes, neighbourhoods, and cities was impossible for individual citizens to predict, but listening to German broadcasts at least lent the illusion of fuller access to the narrative of destruction unfolding around them.

While she notes that the Haw-Haw rumours were baseless, West emphasizes the ruins of London throughout *The Meaning of Treason*. She brings readers' attention back to the physical effects of the war for which Joyce was a major propagandist. London appears as a "melancholy-mad landscape, stranger than the surface of the moon" (31); the

Church of St. Clement Danes, designed by Christopher Wren and gutted by bombs, stands as a “poor lovely charred skeleton” (31); birds fly through the “empty sockets” of blackened churches (4). Even the jury at Joyce’s first trial appears beaten down by the toll of the war (5). The physical degradation endured by London buildings echoes the physical violence that Londoners themselves suffered; both forms of damage fuel anger. “The hatred against him in the world outside,” West says of Joyce, “remained constant and severe. It was related to the ruin that had touched and surrounded every building in which he was tried” (32). While Londoners had mourned their dead and fought to keep their city from burning, “a man who had lived all his life amongst them had mocked at their misery and rejoiced at the thought of their deliverance to their enemies” (32). Vengeance had a personal ring to it during the postwar trial of the radio traitor. West recounts that one man attended Joyce’s execution at Wandsworth Prison on the morning of 3 January 1946 because he remembers turning on the wireless set one night after coming back from seeing his grandchildren’s bodies in the mortuary following a V-1 rocket raid. ““There he was, mocking me,”” West records him as saying (54).

If the public desire for vengeance against Joyce was related to the buildings and bodies lost in the war, it is appropriate that vengeance is enacted through cultural institutions whose architecture bespeaks their history. Each of his three trials took place in a different building. For West, each building (and its attendant legislative or governmental body) emerged from and embodies a particular tradition. Joyce’s first trial happened at the Old Bailey, which West describes as staid and official in a way particular to government buildings designed early in the twentieth century; its drab form seems representative, for West, of the legalistic and bureaucratic neutrality of the long-standing

British civil service, “unimaginative but well adapted to its purposes” (32). By contrast, the Law Courts, which housed Joyce’s second trial in October, are heavy with the excesses of the nineteenth-century Gothic revival. West emphasizes the ecclesiastical appearance of the building, “a swollen replica of a medieval monastery” complete with an “abbey church,” “a crypt,” and a subterranean “monastic cell” (32-3). Joyce’s final appeal took place before a legal committee of the House of Lords. Because heavy bombing had damaged large sections of Westminster, Parliament had taken over the House of Lords until repairs had been completed. The Lords were therefore relegated to the Robing Room, usually reserved for royal guests at coronations and the opening of Parliament. The Robing Room, West notes, greeted Lords and onlookers alike with “the most horrible Edwardian frescoes imaginable” demonstrating “the notorious obsessional devotion of the British aristocracy to the horse” (38). The only fresco that does not feature a horse, she observes, features a “divine person” instead (39).

West’s painstaking detail in recounting the historical and physical conditions under which Joyce’s trials took place builds a narrative of his complete rejection by British society. By noting the physical locations of the trials, West emphasizes the full range of British cultural, legal, and governmental institutions arrayed against Joyce. He was not merely convicted by one court, or even by three; Joyce was alternately punished by British civil authority and the system of laws which it manages (in the form of the coldly bureaucratic Old Bailey), religious traditions (as embodied in an architectural tradition that mimics ecclesiastical space), and the political and cultural establishment (in the form of the House of Lords, which is at once a hereditary system founded on aristocratic traditions, and a part of a broader system of democratic representation). For

West, these institutions are the cornerstones of the civil society on which Joyce had turned his back; to emphasize their unity in convicting him of treason is to show the power of democratic institutions over dictatorial ones. Aligning the visibly bomb-damaged institutions of Britain against their uncanny assailant enacts a domestic purge of violent political tendencies that, as West herself hints, inhere in British social life as in the life of all nations. The English, she argues—enacting a slippage between Britain and England that was common during the war—have over the years conquered the inherent anarchy of the human animal, but fascism threatens to disrupt these achievements. It endangers “the civil order which generation after generation of Englishmen had insisted on creating in despite of tyranny and the lawlessness of their own flesh” (76). The full cooperation of bureaucratic, political, cultural, and pseudo-religious institutions enacts English “civil order” while ensuring its perpetuation.

West insists on this rejection of the politically aberrant Joyce in part because his audio assault on British ears was predicated on a seeming reverence for British history and culture. In a broadcast made in August of 1944, on the fifth anniversary of his flight from England to Germany, Joyce had reflected on his departure in tones of martyrdom and mourning: “Those who have never felt for England as I was taught to feel, those who had never suffered for England as I was made to suffer during long years, will not know or understand what that decision meant” (qtd. in Martland 30). Joyce had sought to steer Britain towards fascism as a means of avoiding Communist influence and maintaining a strong empire, and saw nothing contradictory in applying Nazi policies to sustain British traditions. As Attorney-General Sir Hartley Shawcross, lead prosecutor for the Crown, stated in his opening remarks during the first trial, Joyce had “enveloped himself in the

Union Jack,” not only by securing for himself a British passport (despite his American citizenship), but also by embracing a distinctly imperial British past (qtd. in Cole 260).

By his own admission, Joyce was in love with an older Britain. In a statement given to British authorities upon his arrest, Joyce had claimed that he was raised as “an extreme conservative with strong Imperialistic ideas,” and that he had turned to fascism partly out of discontent with British policies that he felt “would lead to the eventual disruption of the British Empire” (qtd. in West 179). He occupied the fringe right which, disappointed with the inability of Lloyd George, Winston Churchill, and other members of the India Defence League to maintain total dominance over India in the mid-1930s, had turned his back on traditional Conservatism. As Britain belatedly recognized the injustice of imperialism, and as the Conservative Party began to adapt to a changing reality of imperial contraction, Joyce ended up on the wrong side of history.

Sitting in the courtroom during his trial, in love with an “obsolete England” which was “to be rebuffed by contemporary England,” Joyce appeared to West as out of step with a nation in a process of evolution (17). “It was this love,” West claims, “slanting across time, which made him a Fascist” (18). For all that West condemns the rapaciousness of the Nazis and hints at the outdatedness of Joyce’s imperial vision of England, she shies away from actually condemning British imperialism as analogous to Nazi imperialism. “[N]ow we see the severance of England and Ireland as a historical necessity,” she writes, making decolonization sound like a regrettable reality rather than the belated and morally imperative abandonment of an occupation by force (17). She is amused to note “African Negroes and Hindus” in attendance at Joyce’s trial, not as “discontented members of the British Empire’s subject races, sympathetically attending

the trial of a fellow-rebel” but rather as delighted observers of the “technicalities of Western Law” (33-4). West invokes anti-imperial anger only to sublimate it into a passion for the intricacies of British culture. Historically immediate concerns about the legitimacy of British imperialism, once raised, can be safely ignored as less relevant to West’s narrative than a fascination with the legal structures of empire itself.

Published in 1947, the year of Indian independence, *The Meaning of Treason* might have used its discussion of Joyce’s merged vision of British and Nazi imperialism to reflect on their fearful symmetry. Instead, West takes pains to distance Joyce from any contemporary vision of England, not only by means of his anachronism, but also, and more consistently, by insisting on his Irishness. From the first pages of *The Meaning of Treason* West depicts Joyce as overdetermined in his Irishness. “He had the real Donnybrook air,” West remarks upon first seeing Joyce at trial, calling him “a not very fortunate example of the small, nippy, jig-dancing type of Irish peasant” (6). His countenance in the years before he left for Germany, she observes, was that of “a queer little Irish peasant, who had gone to some pains to make the worst of himself,” and he behaved tyrannically to his wife “in the peasant way” (95-6). Likewise, his fascist followers, who had gathered in court to support him throughout his trials, were “a group of wild and unhappy young men in Hitler raincoats with a look of Irishry about them” (32). As a woman of Irish descent on her father’s side, West’s caricature of Joyce as “too Irish” may be born of personal and familial experiences. In any case, it is an odd reversal of Joyce’s historical stance vis-à-vis Irish nationalism; as a fervent supporter of Britain and reputed informant for the Black and Tans near Galway, Joyce had to flee to England with his family in 1921; one account claims this flight followed his narrow escape from

an IRA assassination attempt (Kenny 59).

Given Joyce's strong identification with Britain, rather than Ireland, West's attempt to tie Joyce's anti-Semitism to his Irish ancestry is striking: "Every time he spoke of those whom he called, in a drawled, sneering dissyllable, 'The Jeeoos,' his acquired accent cracked and fell away and his strong native Irish had its own way" (122). "Jews" is the only word in Joyce's considerable vocabulary that West identifies as sounding "Irish"; for the most part, she observes, he had succeeded in "ironing out" his Irish accent. This metaphor of vocal disguise or camouflage—an accent "cracking" and "falling away" to reveal the "true" accent beneath—indicates that treachery inheres in the voice itself. Joyce, in taking on an accent he was not born with, obscures a central aspect of his past. He enacts a deception with every syllable he utters. By insisting on the "Irishness" of his pronunciation of "Jews," West also implies that Joyce's anti-Semitism emerges not from his conservative and nationalist Anglophilia born at the centre of a global empire during Joyce's tenure in England, but from a residual, provincial bigotry originating somewhere in County Mayo. Despite Joyce's tendency to side with the subjugating power over the subjugated, to see himself as more British than Irish, West imagines Joyce as returning linguistically to a condition of "Irishness" as the source of racism. West seems unable to imagine that the will to power itself might be as liable as the condition of disempowerment and deprivation to catalyze bias, hatred, and racialized thinking.

Anti-Semitism, while nowhere near as extreme as it was in Germany, was nonetheless fairly widespread in wartime Britain. Sonya Rose notes that, as refugees continued to arrive in Britain and bombings threatened social cohesion during 1940 and

1941, regions across Britain began to report increased anti-Semitic sentiment; Jews were often criticized, both directly and obliquely, as lacking the wartime virtues of self-sacrifice, community involvement, and patriotic sentiment. Racialized notions of national identity could thus be folded into claims about the obligations of the citizenry; as Rose argues, “[a]nti-Semitism and wartime rhetoric cooperated in making the Jews’ status as British problematic regardless of their legal status as British citizens and they underscored the Britishness of ‘the people’ who ‘naturally’ belonged to the national community” (98). Similarly, Martin Pugh notes that Manchester police officers tasked with reporting on fascist meetings in 1936 reported them to be “in no way provocative” despite clear references to Jews as “the international enemy” and attacks against particular Jewish citizens (Pugh 225). Joyce biographer Mary Kenny, who conducted substantial interviews with those who had listened to Joyce during the war, notes with some concern that none of these listeners remembered his speeches as anti-Semitic, despite prominent evidence to the contrary from the BBC Monitoring service (Kenny 197). She attributes this omission to the fact that casual anti-Semitism was common enough during the war not to be remarked upon.

In attempting to distance Joyce linguistically and ethnically from English traditions of civil society and tolerance, West not only ignores this considerable streak of casual British anti-Semitism, she also undermines her own arguments about the duties Joyce owed to the British state. Elsewhere she describes his treason as a violation of a familial bond, calling him “the Judas of our blood” (44). Joyce, she claims, “sinned that sin which is the dark travesty of legitimate hatred because it is felt for kindred, just as incest is the dark travesty of legitimate love” (3). Even when admitting that a degree of

resistance to authority is inevitable, West invokes metaphors of bloodlines: “All men should have a drop or two of treason in their veins, if the nations are not to go soft like so many sleepy pears. Yet to be a traitor is most miserable” (306). Treason, in this sense, is a kind of necessary internalized opposition which must be contained and controlled. As novelist Elizabeth Bowen noted in a 1949 “Conversation on Traitors” on the BBC, many instances of treason amount to “perverted patriotism” in that the traitor “believed it was for the good of the country he loved, that it should go through this drastic experience to be remade” (*Listening In* 320). West hints at the notion that treason manifests an inverse or perverse allegiance to the nation; yet her persistence in rendering Joyce as the colonial Irishman, different in blood and tongue from the English, works against any claim of obligation to the Crown. While West herself notes that in England Joyce “had been sniggered at as a queer little bog-trotter with a brogue” and denied any position of political agency (139), she seems incapable of depicting him as other than “tiny, alien, and ineradicably odd” (69). In the context of widespread British resistance to the entry of Jews and other aliens during the war, and new awareness of the full horror of the Holocaust, such attention to morality and ideology as genetically determined is questionable at best.

West gestures towards a doctrine of proximity, rather than racial affinity, as a means of regulating the questions of citizenship and national obligation, but does not resolve tensions established by the rhetoric of bloodline and accent. Rationalization and secularization, she claims, have tempered the excesses of nationalism, but have rid patriotism of its purpose—namely, the creation of unity among neighbours in the interest of self-preservation. “Today we have forgotten that we live outwards from the centre of a

circle and that what is nearest to the centre is most real to us,” she declares (301). And yet, given her admission that Joyce had been excluded from meaningful participation in English democracy on account of his status as a former colonial subject, and given her own mobilization of race as an ideological determinant, her notion of “nearest is dearest” rings hollow.

Though West insists on defining Joyce as Irish, she remains perturbed by the hypermobility of this Anglo-Irish-German-American radio polemicist. Like his broadcasts and his migrations, Joyce’s doctrine was international; West, asserting that treason inheres in fascism, notes the tendency for fascist leaders to seek ideological and material support from outside their borders, as Spain, Italy, and Germany had done. As dictators and would-be dictators look beyond their borders for powerful allies of similar ideological stripes, fractures within states naturally follow (191). Treason, in a sense, is for West the natural inheritance not of all political communities but of fascism exclusively: though Joyce might proclaim loyalty to Britain as he imagines it to be, his ideological commitments to overseas domination, ethnic nationalism, and social conservatism led him to split from Britain as it evolved in another direction. West hints that this is not only a question of Joyce’s opposition to anything like the postwar welfare state emerging in Britain. It is a symptom of the age: she bemoans the “high degree of political fluidity” of the early twentieth century, in which “the life of the political conspirator offers the man of restricted capacity but imaginative energy excitements and satisfactions which he can never derive from overt activities” (21). The “international character” of fascism, she argues, “makes a man ready to be traitor to his country, his county, his town, his street, his family, himself, and loses its dynamic power if it does not

act by and through this readiness for treachery” (89). The supra-nationalism of fascism is dangerous precisely insofar as it obviates local and national allegiances.

Against this atmosphere of political fluidity and international ideologies, West seizes on the passport as a means of fixing Joyce in national, spatial terms. As the prosecutors in Joyce’s trial had argued, passports had shifting significances in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Though increasingly necessary in the mid-nineteenth century, passport use dropped away as trains accelerated travel and exchange across Europe and the regulation of national borders became more difficult. Among European nations, only Russia and Turkey required British citizens to carry a passport by the beginning of First World War; tightening of border controls post-war, however, meant that passports once again became generally necessary for travel (Hall 27). Travellers grown accustomed to the laxity of pre-Great War border controls saw this restricted mobility as contrary to the connective possibilities of technology. E.M. Forster, writing in 1928, explicitly contrasted the technological and the bureaucratic: “Wireless etc. abolishes wavings of handkerchiefs, etc. Death the only farewell surviving...Opposed to wireless etc. are passports etc.—the desperate attempt of humanity to raise new barriers” (qtd. in Hughes and Walls 6). For idealists like Forster, passports work against the climate of perpetual connection afforded by technologies of communication and transportation.

In contrast, passports seem to West an important means of ensuring political allegiance in a time of shifting geopolitical affiliations. National identification offers a system of rights and responsibilities that stabilizes what she saw as dangerously fluid ideological movements. In a broadcast aired on 22 April 1942, West indicated that the

modernist ideal of cosmopolitanism had run its course, and that nations, like individuals, must elaborate their own identities before seeking to contribute to a global culture:

In the past people disliked the idea of nationalism and were inclined to think only of the beauty of internationalism. Some of us, when we were young, used to hope that we would all speak the same language, all wear the same sort of clothes, all practice the same sort of customs, and forget the difference in our origins and consequently the history of our races, because we thought that that way there would be peace. We forget that if an individual wants to work or study or think deeply he must be alone, and if a nation wishes to develop its faculties it too must be alone. It must shut itself up within its frontiers and concentrate upon what is within its experience. That is true nationalism, and many of us English realize that true nationalism is necessary if humanity is to rise above its present level. (West, "Nationalism and Internationalism")

Joyce's crime, in West's view, was to have pursued an internationalist doctrine under cover of nationalist documentation. Joyce was not British and never had been, but his fraudulently obtained passport served as sign of his expectation of protection from the country he eventually left and sought to undermine. His abuse of a system designed to confirm and regulate political identities mirrors the technologies that system was meant to control. West explicitly contrasts the mobility of the passport with other, "static" official documents susceptible to forgery: unlike a marriage license, for example, a passport is specifically designed to enable movement while fixing identity. "If a man obtains control of a dynamic object, such as an automobile, and uses it to the danger of

the community, he is prosecuted, even if he obtained that control fraudulently” (60). In the same vein, “A stolen or forged railroad ticket gives a man no contractual bond with the railroad company; but it is very strong evidence that he intends to travel to the place mentioned on the ticket, in a train owned and controlled by that railroad company” (60). In betraying the state apparatus regulating spatial location and national identity, Joyce enacted a dangerous mobility that mirrored both his statelessness and his fluid and international ideology of power.

Fixing Joyce into a particular national pattern of political membership, notably through the passport that secured him protection and thus claimed his allegiance, becomes for West the means of clarifying his obligations. While West distances William Joyce from normative British political configurations by locating his fascism somewhere between the cosmopolitanism of fascism and the parochialism of Ireland, his pretensions to British subjecthood are enough to ensure he pays for treason with his life. The banishment is complete: never having had access to the full benefits of British citizenship, and isolated as an ethnic, class, and ideological outsider, Joyce’s attempts to articulate a fascist vision of British identity earns a rebuke that West frames as coherent across the entire spectrum of British political institutions. As a response to the threat of an internalized ideological enemy, her approach is the opposite of Mitford’s: total exclusion, as against an acknowledgement that Joyce’s uncanny political spectre has deep roots in Britain.

Conclusion

Radio treason is the public performance of an intimate betrayal; broadcasting

actualizes treason as a performative utterance. Writing in 1942, Charles Rolo appears to disdain the publicness of radio treason more than the act of betrayal itself:

The spy, the saboteur, the assassin, is a creature of the night, who works silently, alone, underground—and freely risks his life. The radio traitor is ten times more damned. He commits high treason in cold blood daily, almost hourly, for months, perhaps years on end. His treachery is public, loud, insistent, and unashamed. His risks—except in the event of defeat and capture—are no greater than those of the ordinary civilian in wartime. And what he seeks to destroy is not one object—a power plant, a factory, a battleship—but his own country; the whole set of institutions, traditions, and ideals he grew up with, was taught to respect and expected to defend. His is total treachery—the most sordid product of World War II. (Rolo 79-80)

The act of bringing to audition—“loud, insistent, and unashamed”—something that should best have lain silent reveals the fundamental disagreements that fracture normative political identities in wartime. William Joyce was not hanged simply for being pro-Nazi; he was hanged for being both pro-Nazi and pro-Britain, and for publicly calling for a merger of those positions despite the state of war between the two nations.

Indicting Joyce for his propaganda work is not difficult; he never relented from his repellent views, up to and including his final message to the world. On 3 January 1946, a few hours after his execution, BBC announcers read a brief statement composed by Joyce that resounds with nationalist and anti-Semitic impenitence. “In death,” it reads, “as in this life, I defy the Jews who caused this last war: and I defy the power of Darkness

which they represent” (qtd. in Cole 302). The historical ignorance and contortions of logic necessary to produce this hateful version of events are obvious and dangerous. But in explaining the effect of Joyce’s broadcasts on an entire population, West mobilizes national caricatures that display the same racialized thinking that she attacks in Joyce and others. Joyce is simultaneously British enough to betray the nation, Irish enough to display racial hatred, and international enough to threaten the stability of a nation-state supposedly built on a doctrine of neighbourly proximity. Joyce’s personal history of fraud, propaganda, and betrayal represent violations of the obligations attendant upon citizenship. West’s complex and contradictory meditations, however, weave a narrative of ethnicity, race, and class carried in the blood and voice of the human body, indicating that any new vision of national belonging must overcome these persistent tropes that refuse to acknowledge the political other within our shared institutions, and within ourselves.

In speaking Anglophonic fascism to an English audience, William Joyce blurred important wartime distinctions between the alien enemy and the home country. For both Mitford and West, the solution to such ideological placelessness was to fix the radio traitor in space: Mitford by treating British fascism as part of the domestic political landscape at the level of both the nation and the home, and West by branding Joyce as Irish in body, British in the allegiance he owed, and dangerously international in his political orientation and technology of diffusion. Despite her own ideological blind spots, West’s account of Joyce’s trial emerges as the less problematic of the two; her insistence on the fairness of Joyce’s punishment, despite his alien status, may be symptomatic of a culture intent on purging those elements that elide the difference between self and enemy,

but it treats Nazism with the seriousness it demands. However, Mitford's novel reveals the source of much of West's eagerness to punish Joyce; at an earlier moment of the war, the differences between ideological self and other had not been so audible.

Chapter 2: *Out of the People*: J.B. Priestley's Middlebrow Radicalism

The period later known as the Phoney War—September 1939 to May 1940—represented a sustained low ebb for British morale and for British broadcasting. While a host of wartime restrictions had materialized in the fall of 1939, including the blackout and, for a few weeks, the closure of theatres and cinemas, the conflict itself had largely failed to materialize in such a way as to justify the constraints imposed by government. The BBC shifted to its emergency wartime broadcasting schedule on 1 September, two days before war was officially declared (Nicholas, *Echo* 25). The new schedule involved the abandonment of a great deal of familiar programming in favour of regular news bulletins, recorded music played on gramophones, and untold hours of Sandy MacPherson at the BBC Organ. This rather unstimulating output led British listeners to seek out entertainment and war information elsewhere (Nicholas, *Echo* 40; Doherty 88-9). The success of German propagandists like Lord Haw-Haw in the early months of the war demonstrated that British listeners were sufficiently tired of official pronouncements, blandly delivered, that they would seek out more colloquial assessments of the war wherever they might be found, including enemy airwaves.

Fear of losing listeners to Lord Haw-Haw and other propagandists prompted the BBC to undergo what Siân Nicholas calls “the greatest shift in the philosophy of broadcasting since its inception” (*Echo* 41): the Corporation began listening back to its audience, and thereby implicitly acknowledged that the BBC could not simply give the public what it *ought* to want at the expense of what it *did* want. This shift resulted in the progressive expansion of the Listener Research Department and, in January of 1940, the

establishment of the Forces Programme. An alternative broadcast wavelength designed to provide light entertainment for British troops stationed on the continent, the Forces Programme was extremely popular with civilian audiences as well, and eventually became the Light Programme in 1945 (Briggs 3:125-140). The slow process of democratizing the Home Service during the Phoney War included the expansion of popular music programming in a bid to increase both listenership and morale (Baade 3-5, 34-50).

As part of the larger effort to give British listeners a reason to tune out Lord Haw-Haw and other German propagandists, the BBC launched a series of talks under the title “Onlooker” in early 1940; by March of 1940 these broadcasts were known as “Postscripts” owing to their schedule placement immediately after the nine o’clock evening news. While the news had quickly become “the aural focus of every day,” as Nicholas puts it, many listeners had developed the habit of switching over to German stations as soon as the bulletins ended (Nicholas, *Echo* 5). The aim of “Postscripts” was to dissuade channel hopping by staging a vigorous defense of what broadcaster and labour activist John Hilton called “the philosophy and doctrine of the democratic way of living” (qtd. in Briggs 3:146). Maurice Healey, a well-known barrister, handled most of the Sunday night “Postscripts” in early 1940, but he failed to connect strongly with listeners. Following a misstep in which he bemoaned the fact that a friend’s annual income had declined by £1000 because of the war, the BBC decided that it was looking for “a contrast in voice, upbringing and outlook” (George Barnes, 6 May 1940, qtd. in Briggs 3:210).

In selecting J.B. Priestley, the producers of “Postscripts” knew they were getting a

popular novelist and essayist raised in Northern England—specifically Bradford, in Yorkshire—whose accent placed him outside the conventional acoustic profile of BBC announcers. They could not have predicted the immensity of Priestley’s success. In the span of a few months, between June of 1940 and March of 1941, Priestley went from being a widely read “middlebrow” author to a wireless celebrity whose impact rivalled that of Winston Churchill. Aspects of Priestley’s radio career are now firmly established elements of the “People’s War” mythology: he first heartened his audience with a heroic account of the Dunkirk evacuation and nostalgic evocations of English and British traditions. In his subsequent broadcasts, he went on to plant the seeds of a minor social revolution whose final form would be realized in the recommendations of the Beveridge Commission on Social Security as adopted by the Labour government after the elections in July 1945. Priestley’s left-leaning ideas and his influence over millions of listeners twice led to his ouster at the behest of Conservative Party officials: once in October of 1940 (to end his first series of twenty “Postscripts”) and once again in March of 1941 (to end a second series of eight broadcasts).²⁰

Across the two series, Priestley captured a third of the British listening audience on average, and peaked at 40.4% in the second series (Baxendale, *Priestley* 140; BBC Listener Research Reports LR/231). His broadcasts were not just widely listened to; they excited an unprecedented written response from listeners across Britain and around the world. Between June 1940, when he began his first series, and October of the same year, when the series ended, the BBC received 1700 letters about the broadcasts from listeners.

²⁰ Accounts of Priestley’s wartime radio career and conflicts with the BBC and the Conservative Party can be found in John Baxendale’s *Priestley’s England* 140-65; Asa Briggs’ *History of British Broadcasting* 3:210-2, 320-2, and 618-21; Angus Calder’s *The Myth of the Blitz* 195-205 and *The People’s War* 138-9; and in Siân Nicholas’ *The Echo of War* 57-61, 242-5. Nicholas and Baxendale provide the most thorough overviews.

Of these letters, 1500 were appreciative of Priestley's contributions, and 200 critical (A.P. Ryan to Frederick Ogilvie, 7 Oct 1940, RCont1/Talks/JBP/2). The press heaped praise on the "Postscripts." "Mr. Priestley's broadcasts are a privilege," wrote the *Daily Mail* on 2 July 1940; "The Government ought to appoint Mr. Priestley Director-General of Broadcasting," enthused the *Nottingham Guardian* on 3 December 1940 (qtd. in Briggs 3:210, 321).

In addition to praise from the general public, Priestley personally received dozens of letters, now preserved among the Priestley papers at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, from literary celebrities and other public figures. Storm Jameson, writing to him in June 1940, called the broadcasts "magnificent" and said, "you get out the poetry of the English"; H.G. Wells and Rebecca West wrote individually to say that they enjoyed listening to the broadcasts; Desmond McCarthy called Priestley's radio contributions "splendid." Even George Bernard Shaw offered grudging appreciation: "The broadcasts are a fearful waste of your time," he wrote, "but they are very enjoyable" (Ms. [Priestley, J.B.] Recip, HRC). Other writers praised his "Postscripts" publicly. Graham Greene, in the *Spectator*, called him "a leader second in importance only to Mr. Churchill" and noted that "he gave us what the other leaders have failed to give us—an ideology" ("Lost Leader"). Louis MacNeice, though less adulatory than Greene, noted in the American periodical *Common Sense* (May 1941) that Priestley manifested the potential of radio to return society "to the conditions of the Greek City State where the man who can hold the people's ear—or most of their ears most of the time—will acquire the most astonishing influence" (MacNeice, *Prose* 115). MacNeice generally agreed with what Priestley said during his "Postscripts," but (characteristically for MacNeice) he did

not commit to full endorsement: “we must hope,” MacNeice writes, “that the man who thus influences millions with his Yorkshire cooing, will go for his ideas to the right little batch of people” (*Prose* 115).

In positioning the “cooing” Yorkshireman as an intermediary—one who influences millions by communicating the ideas of others—MacNeice captures the particular role Priestley enjoyed in wartime Britain, and highlights the centrality of Priestley’s voice to that role. Priestley positioned himself as the voice of radical common sense, a focal point for collective aspirations and ideas that were excluded from mainstream political discourse during the war. Taking the term at its most capacious, he was a public intellectual with considerable emphasis on the “public”; his approach was geared to accessibility and populism, while his message emphasized broad public participation in politics and culture. This configuration of the intellectual as everyman was well suited to the changing cultural and media landscape of “The People’s War.” While he was not the only agent of democratization at the BBC, Priestley’s trajectory charts the struggles over how the Corporation represented the nation to itself. These struggles began with fitful attempts to meet popular demands over the course of the 1930s and moved towards a postwar cultural and political scene that had embraced demotic culture, the egalitarian promise of the Labour government’s welfare state, and a more accurate and representative acoustic profile of the nation.

The foundation of Priestley’s success as a wartime broadcaster was his ability to translate a middlebrow literary sensibility into a middlebrow political ideal through a carefully calibrated mode of address adapted to the intimate medium of radio.²¹ The

²¹ In the interest of avoiding excessive punctuation, the terms middlebrow, broadbrow, highbrow, and lowbrow will appear without quotation marks for the rest of the chapter, except where treated explicitly as

exercise of individual artistic taste was for Priestley a means of manifesting critical judgement; furthermore, aesthetic critique was inseparable from political critique, in that both emerged from the same faculties of evaluation. His literary mode and his chosen medium complemented each other: if the middlebrow, as a literary form, is concerned with destabilizing cultural hierarchies, the medium of radio is capable of collapsing not only physical distances but the perceived distance between producer and consumer, speaker and listener, through rhetorics and technologies of intimacy. While the technological capacity of radio to spotlight the nuances of quiet speech privileged an intimate mode of address, its incorporation into household routines facilitated its seamless integration into everyday life (Smith, *Vocal* 88). Priestley's warm voice, casual manner, and attention to the everyday capitalized on the inherent tendencies of both radio and the middlebrow to bring listeners into a close and seemingly personal relation with him and, through him, with his perspectives on the nation at war. Priestley invited them to understand their daily experience of the conflict as metonymically related to the larger struggle. Furthermore, he allowed them to understand emotional responses to the war as valid, and indeed productive of a political momentum that might yield a new order after the war.

Priestley, the Middlebrow, and the BBC: High, Low, Broadcasting

J.B. Priestley's ability to capture the attention of a vast audience during the "People's War" depended in large part on his status as a writer who resisted the established hierarchies of British literary and political life. Before Priestley was a

terms being defined; this does not reflect a naturalization of the categories, which remain constructions embedded in social, economic, and gender hierarchies.

wartime radio celebrity, he was an advocate of cultural omnivory. A prolific artist who produced novels as well as works for stage, screen, periodicals, and the radio, Priestley encouraged a reciprocal breadth of taste in his audience. In his essay “High, Low, Broad,” published first in *Saturday Review* on 20 February 1926, Priestley sought to establish a productive grey area between the “equally contemptible” positions of Highbrow and Lowbrow (*Open House* 163). Priestley identifies himself as a “Broadbrow,” claiming that this self-positioning reflects a difference “not merely of degree but of kind”—a move from the vertical hierarchy of high and low to an implicitly democratic horizontal plane of cultural consumption (163). Priestley argues that conventional vertical hierarchies disable aesthetic judgment, rendering both High and Low “the mere slaves of fashion, moving in herds to decry this and praise that” (163). Broadbrowism, he contends, leaves one able to define one’s own tastes:

If you can carry with you your sense of values, your appreciation of the human scene, your critical faculty, to Russian dramas, variety shows, football matches, epic poems, grand opera, race meetings, old churches, new town halls, musical comedies, picture galleries, boxing booths, portfolios of etchings, bar parlours, film shows, symphony concerts, billiard matches, dance halls, detective stories, tragedies in blank verse, farces, and even studio teas and literary parties, and enjoy to the full what there is there worth enjoying, giving even the Devil his due, then you are a Broadbrow. In short, you are the salt of the earth, and, of course, one of us. (167)

As this breathtaking and comically long list suggests, to be a broadbrow is to adopt a

pluralist vision of cultural production, disruptive of the “socially recognized hierarchy of the arts” that for Pierre Bourdieu “corresponds to a social hierarchy of the consumers” (1). For Priestley, such cross-cultural taste involves entry into a community of its own; the reader, listener, or viewer becomes “one of us” at precisely the moment when they accept the diversity and idiosyncrasy of modern, mass-mediated, and increasingly populist cultural production.

In this plural approach, Priestley presages the work of latter-day theorists of the middlebrow including Faye Hammill and Nicola Humble. The term “middlebrow” was not in common circulation when Priestley wrote “High, Low, Broad,” but it represents a cultural stance roughly analogous to Priestley’s “broadbrow.” Middlebrow scholars argue that the split between high- and low-brow was never Manichean. Rather, as Hammill frames it, the early twentieth century was characterized by fluid processes of exchange across cultural boundaries, with middlebrow cultural producers serving as sophisticated intermediaries “borrowing from both modernist and mass cultural forms” and thereby “diminish[ing] the apparent distance between them” (Hammill 11). If, as critics including John Carey have argued, modernism was a reactionary formation that emerged in response to the proliferation of print media and an increasingly educated public, the middlebrow stance offered a kind of reaction to the reactionaries (*Intellectuals* 18). To be a middlebrow writer in the early twentieth century was to adopt a position of knowing skepticism regarding the modernist concern with form and with difficulty for its own sake. Both ideology and economics inflect the middlebrow stance: cleaving to popular artistic conventions was an implicit declaration of anti-elitism that ensured the artist a wider audience.

In terms of the British novel in the 1920s and 1930s, the middlebrow aesthetic represented not so much a step beyond modernist experimentation, as a stylistic loyalty that bound the middlebrow to patterns established by Victorian realism. According to Priestley, this view meant that a novel should serve as “a large mirror of life” featuring “vital figures in whose existence, no matter how wild and strange they may be, we are compelled to believe while we are reading” (*English Novel* 3). Against a modernist aesthetic of fragmentation, alienation, and difficulty, Priestley’s version of the middlebrow emphasized (to a greater extent, if not entirely) stable mimesis, comprehensibility, and accessibility. The verisimilitude promised by middlebrow realism may have been as much a construction as more highly experimental literary modes, but it was at the very least accessible to a wide readership. Priestley believed this accessibility was crucial to the novel playing a political role in the charged environment of the 1930s (Baxendale, “Priestley” 77).

The political stakes of the “battle of the brows” play out in Priestley’s novels, which often feature villainous or laughably affected highbrow characters. Building on caricatures of highbrows in *The Good Companions* (1929) and *Wonder Hero* (1933), his radio-novel *Let the People Sing* (1939) features “a slender, wavy-haired youth of about fifty-five” named Mr. Churton Talley, a “great art critic and expert” with an effete demeanour, a “mincing” walk, and a tendency to hiss his sibilants until he sounds “like an outraged serpent” (*Let the People Sing* 204-205). Class snobbery likewise distinguishes heroes from villains in *Black-Out in Gretley* (1942) and *Daylight on Saturday* (1943). Priestley’s clearest articulation of the problem with “brows” as a means of categorizing art, however, comes in *These Our Actors*, a novel he began in early 1940 and later

abandoned.²² Protagonist Humphrey Pike is an actor and an archetypal broadbrow; his equal enthusiasm for performing music-hall farce and the plays of Chekhov confuses and disarms his fellow actors in the fictional Midlands city of Birmanpool. When a journalist accuses Pike's friend of being a "highbrow," Pike jumps in to defend him. He objects to the journalistic tactic of labelling those with artistic and intellectual predispositions "highbrows"; the tactic of pre-emptive brow-baiting, Pike claims, is designed "to confuse the good with the bad so that the whole thing will be regarded with contempt":

Tell the people that some affected lily-handed pansy who dabbles in poetry is a highbrow. Then call a poet, a real poet, a chap who's got more vitality and sense and guts than five ordinary men, a highbrow. The trick's done then... The trick of keeping the people silly and ignorant. (92)

The sexual politics of this passage—turning the collective sights on "pansies" as a source of cultural decadence and ineffectuality—are unfortunately typical of Priestley's castigation of "highbrows." As with many writers of his generation (notably George Orwell) Priestley conflates heterosexual masculinity with creative and interpretive agency. Priestley's prejudices manifest themselves both in the attention to effete intellectuals with hissed sibilants, and in his appeal at the end of a 1932 broadcast called "To a Highbrow" that his imagined listener should "Be a man. Be a broad-brow" ("To a Highbrow" 6).

Priestley's point, however, is not about the relationship of sexuality to artistic

²² Correspondence between Priestley and his American publisher Cass Canfield (of Harper & Brothers) in March and April of 1940 provides the provisional title *These Our Actors* (Priestley Collection, Bradford University, File PR13/22). A 93-page, 30,000 word fragment of the first section of the novel, entitled "Birmanpool," resides at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center (HRC); according to a note Priestley appended to the manuscript, the novel was to follow the career of actor Humphrey Pike as his career took him from obscurity to fame and finally to a tragic (though unspecified) end.

vitality, but about the connections between discourses of cultural competence and political participation. Debates about high- and low-brows, Priestley argues, are a means of clouding the cultural and political judgement of the broad public; a means, in the words of Pike's friend Elliot Dunster in *These Our Actors*, of "taking care they won't have any encouragement to think and feel for themselves" (92). Wandering the deserted streets of Birmanpool at night, and distraught by the lack of vibrant entertainment on offer to its urban residents, Humphrey Pike had already begun to ponder the links between cultural and economic segregation in Britain:

Sometimes at that hour, his imagination a bright torment, Humphrey would feel as if he were some insect wandering among the shafts and cogs of a gigantic money-making machine that had been stopped for a little while. He began to wonder if the real life of England began behind high walls built to exclude the mob, if not only the gold but also nearly all the colour, interest, character were drained out of such streets and people as these to enamel and perfume a privileged life elsewhere. (34)

Though he has ensured himself a measure of cultural sophistication through his independent study of theatre, literature, and visual art, Pike understands that the exclusionary operations of late-1930s elite culture reserve the pleasures of artistic sophistication for those with the material plenty and leisure time to afford them. Instead, Pike hopes to play a role for theatre-goers analogous to the paintings that offer fragile insights to the viewing public at a municipal art gallery: "All that he asked then was to serve such people, but all he could do was to act for them, to work and work until at last they sat in their balconies wearing the same strangely beautiful look they had here,

watching another kind of window fly open” (80). Given that Pike’s thoughts on the debates about brows mirror the author’s own concerns and self-assessments, it appears that in early 1940 Priestley was already interested in the figure of the artist as both celebrity and public intellectual, months before the war thrust him even further into these roles. Already established as a middlebrow novelist of great popularity, Priestley would turn to the BBC to further his reputation as a leading public figure. Gaining access to the airwaves, however, meant navigating the often torturous cultural politics of the brows.

On a certain level, Priestley and the BBC seemed a natural fit. As a national broadcaster devoted to providing listeners with products of high cultural value, the BBC was both the hub of public intellectual life in Britain and the middlebrow medium *par excellence*. The monopoly of the BBC meant that virtually all cultural content broadcast in Britain passed through a single channel. Under the direction of Sir John Reith, the BBC was designed to be an instrument of cultural uplift, bringing the best that had been thought and said to the ears of an undereducated nation with the goal of creating “an informed and enlightened democracy” (Scannell and Cardiff 7). Music programming blended the canonical concert repertoire with challenging modernist works from the continent and from up-and-coming British composers (Baade 20). Sundays were reserved for religious programming and serious music; variety and comedy programs were, in general, frowned upon. Reith was clear about his paternalistic intentions in his 1949 memoir *Into the Wind*: “It is not insistent autocracy but wisdom that suggests a policy of broadcasting carefully and persistently on the basis of giving people what one believes they should like *and will come to like*... The supply of good things will create the demand for more” (qtd. in LeMahieu 146, emphasis in original). This mission of mass

enlightenment, condescending as it may sound today, in many ways worked against class hierarchies by attempting to level the playing field in a manner that spoke to the cultural aspirations of a working- and middle-class listening public (Scannell and Cardiff 14). Reith's vision, as D.L. LeMahieu frames it, was about freedom of access to culture, if perhaps not freedom of choice (147).²³ It brought its notion of "culture" in mass quantities to a mass audience.

Precisely because of its mission of cultural outreach, the BBC could not escape charges of meddling with the tastes of its listeners. The Oxford English Dictionary cites as its second printed instance of the word "middlebrow" a quotation from a December 1925 issue of *Punch* magazine: "The B.B.C. claim to have discovered a new type, the 'middlebrow'. It consists of people who are hoping that some day they will get used to the stuff they ought to like" (*OED*). Scholars including Humble and Hammill have cited this aspirational quality as central to the concept of the middlebrow. It reflects the upward cultural mobility of a broadening middle class with increasing access to cultural production of all kinds (Humble 12-24; Hammill, 6-13). If middlebrow literature is the literature of the middle classes, "paying a meticulous attention to their shifting desires and self-images" (Humble 3), the BBC became at its inception in 1922 the newest medium of middle-class aspiration through its dedication to the promotion of an Arnoldian array of European and British culture. The broadcasts of the BBC reflected and promoted a middle-class yearning for self-improvement, in both the individual sense of

²³ Indeed, it was only with the splitting of the BBC into the Home Service and the Forces Programme (later the Light Programme) in 1940 that the Corporation abandoned an explicit commitment to cultural homogeneity, the application of a single set of cultural tastes to the entire population of Britain. While a measure of regional programming existed prior to the declaration of war in 1939, LeMahieu argues that Reith's model of strong, centralized programming meant that far less regional content obtained than would have been the case under a broadcast model focused on local stations (145).

learning for moral and intellectual betterment, and in a relational sense: they enabled the acquisition of cultural competence as measured against established taste (LeMahieu 184).

The position of the BBC as an intellectual and artistic intermediary indicates a tension, inherent to the term middlebrow, between cultural form and cultural function. A middlebrow work of art might display formal characteristics (such as melodrama, thrilling action, or overt moralizing) that are minimized in more highbrow works. And yet the adjective “middlebrow” can be applied to individuals or agencies operating as suture points between more elite forms of art and a broader public. Though BBC programming in the 1920s and 1930s could plausibly be labelled highbrow through its melding of literary and musical classics of previous centuries with more challenging modernist works, the BBC was thoroughly middlebrow in terms of its networks of transmission and reception. It served a middlebrow function by endorsing highbrow forms to the broadest possible public in Britain. This role of cultural transmission proved particularly threatening to those invested in the spatialized hierarchies of *élite* culture. Though he would become one of the most important writers and producers in the BBC Features department, Louis MacNeice initially thought radio “a degrading medium, both vulgar and bureaucratic and not even financially rewarding” (qtd. in Coulton 44). John Middleton Murry declared his “instinctive aversion to wireless” in 1925 (qtd. in LeMahieu 180), while Wyndham Lewis blamed the radio (along with cinema and the popular press) for “destroying individuality in the masses” (Carey 190). While such staunch position-taking points towards an initial resistance to the wireless among *élite* intellectuals, it also reflects the inescapability of radio in debates about the cultural field in interwar Britain.

One of the landmark texts of middlebrow studies, Virginia Woolf's "Middlebrow" (1932), captures in radio-centric terms the doubled meaning of "middlebrow" as an adjective capable of describing both those objects that aspire to the quality of high art (without quite achieving it) and those individuals and institutions that serve as cultural intermediaries. In this complex and occasionally vituperative essay, Woolf takes particular aim at Priestley, who had recently delivered the broadcast entitled "To a Highbrow" and had referred to Woolf as "the High Priestess of Bloomsbury" in a separate review ("Tell Us More" 11). In response, Woolf offers a thinly veiled indictment of a recent tea at the Priestley home, and disparages his novel *Faraway* without, as she admits, having read it ("Middlebrow" 116). Beyond her rejection of middlebrow fiction, Woolf seems to resent middlebrow attempts to transfer the codes of cultural capital from one economic class to another. Middlebrows, she writes, "are the go-betweens; they are the busybodies... They are neither one thing nor the other... Their brows are betwixt and between" (115). The BBC, as an agent of cultural education occupying the middlebrow space of knowledge transfer, is for Woolf a mischief-maker: "If the BBC stood for anything but the Betwixt and Between Company they would use their control of the air not to stir strife between brothers, but to broadcast the fact that highbrows and lowbrows must band together to exterminate a pest which is the bane of all thinking and living" (118). In Woolf's mind, high- and lowbrows "cannot exist apart... one is the complement and other side of the other" (115), the implication being that it is better to embrace one's class-cultural identity than to betray it by striving. In staking out this position, Woolf occludes the economic foundations of such cultural polarizations: the ways in which, in Pierre Bourdieu's words, "[a]rt and cultural consumption are predisposed to fulfil a social

function of legitimating social differences” (7).

Priestley was far more sanguine about the role radio might play in modern life, in part because he understood the material benefits attendant on such technologies. Despite a posthumous reputation as a conservative proponent of an exclusively rural “Olde Englande,” he had in fact praised the benefits of modernization and mass media from a relatively early stage. Scholars who characterize Priestley as “a vehement critic of mass culture” miss the matter-of-factness with which Priestley accepted the collectivizing technologies of modernity, and the benefits he saw therein (Carey 38). “I like the wireless,” he noted in a *Saturday Review* essay of 1927. “It has made life even more fantastic and ridiculous than it was before” (qtd. in Baxendale 126-7). Priestley saw radio as part of a larger pattern of acceleration of daily life, an acceleration that brought individuals into closer and more complicated relations with each other. In *English Journey* (1933), he documents the “new England” that he sees emerging:

This is the England of arterial and by-pass roads, of filling stations and factories that look like exhibition buildings, of giant cinemas and dance-halls and cafés, bungalows with tiny garages, cocktail bars, Woolworths, motor-coaches, wireless, hiking, factory girls looking like actresses, greyhound racing and dirt tracks, swimming pools, and everything given away for cigarette coupons. (401)

For all that this list reads like a critique, Priestley insists that this new England is “essentially democratic. After a social revolution there would, with any luck, be more and not less of it. You need money in this England, but you do not need much money” (401-2). While the citizens of this modern England occasionally indulged too heartily in a

fantasy of cheap consumption, Priestley was heartened by the fact that this traffic in goods and information contributed to the material well-being of a broad swath of people.

When Priestley brought these ideas to the radio—in the broadcast that so rankled Woolf—they emerge in a slightly more confrontational form. “To a High-Brow” (1932) was part of a longer series in which speakers address a fictionalized, archetypal interlocutor (“To a Day-Dreamer,” “To an Old Man,” “To a Politician”). Priestley wastes no time in branding his target as that “small but irritating section of the community” (2). The highbrow, Priestley claims, “mustn’t share his pleasures with the crowd... He’s simply Low-brow’s opposite... He is just as much the slave of fashion as Low-brow, but it’s always the opposite fashion” (3). As formerly acclaimed writers become too popular, the highbrows abandon them for fear of being tainted with the brush of common taste. This abandonment of the popular writer seems to be a sensitive point for Priestley:

So-and-so suddenly writes a book that sells more than two or three thousand copies, and what is the result? So-and-so immediately begins to lose prestige with you. The dreadful word popular begins to creep in any reference you make to him and his work. Poor old So-and-so is finished now that he’s popular. Of course it’s impossible to read poor So-and-so any more. And you don’t seem to realise—you dunderhead!—that all artists want to be popular. (4)

Priestley struggled with his relationship to the arbiters of modernist literary taste for years.²⁴ By insisting on the common imperatives of all writing—the need for economic

²⁴ Only during the war did he sense that things had started to change; on 27 March 1940, he wrote to his American publisher Cass Canfield: “A few years ago I was that despised thing, the popular novelist, the best-seller, the rich mountebank, fair game for any young highbrow. But now,” he notes, “they are all turning round... and I receive solemn tributes from the solemn young” (PRI 13/22, Priestley Papers,

and cultural capital alike, not to mention the emotional effects of artistic success— Priestley attempts an act of levelling between his own derided craft and that of more avant-garde writers.

Priestley's informal tone and asides ("you dunderhead!") indicate that his attempts at levelling applied to the delivery as much as to the ideas of his broadcast. Informality is a means of bridging the gap between speaker and listener, thereby destabilizing the hierarchies between cultural producer and cultural consumer. That this broadcast is directed "To a Highbrow" means that, along with bridging the divide between speaker and listener, Priestley can simultaneously collapse the distance between the elite literary practitioner and more workmanlike scribes like himself. Priestley closes "To a Highbrow" with a wink at broadcasting, as if to foreground the broadbrow medium that would define his legacy after 1940: "I warn you now. If you persist in your high-browism, I shall denounce you in some place where we might possibly be overheard, perhaps actually in public" (6). Alluding to radio's illusion of intimacy between speaker and listener, and to the conceit of a series based on direct address ("To a..."), Priestley reinforces the wide cultural reach of the BBC, a reach that mirrors the breadth of appeal Priestley enjoyed as a popular novelist. "To a Highbrow" offers a preview of Priestley's wartime ability to engage with a radio public through populist rhetoric, a demotic register, and a carefully orchestrated aura of familiarity.

During the war years, Priestley continued to extol the liberatory potential of radio, so long as it remained relatively unrestricted. In a broadcast from October 1944, Priestley claimed that media such as radio "make democracy much easier" by facilitating public

Bradford University). Priestley credits his autobiographical works and his more experimental plays, along with the praise of Desmond McCarthy, for the change in reputation.

debate and education; echoing Louis MacNeice's praise of the "Postscripts," Priestley tells an interlocutor in the same broadcast that wireless transmission emulates the acoustic democracy of the Greek city-states by allowing broadcasters to "address a gigantic number of citizens all at once through this microphone" ("Getting Things Done"). But radio not only implicates individuals as members of a listening public; it also serves as a metaphor of implication itself. In his wartime tract *Out of the People* (1941), he imagined a society receptive to the lives of others:

The fact is, that modern man is troubled by a kind of conscience that did not worry his great-grandparents. It is the social conscience... But the real difference between us and our forefathers is not so much in our ethics or even in our strictly personal sensitiveness, for our ancestors were often delicate-minded where we are now casual and almost brutal, but seems to lie in the fact that willy-nilly we are bound up with our community, as if we had developed mysterious nerve-ends outside ourselves, were like wireless receivers that had suddenly and greatly enlarged their range of reception. (*People* 27)

Technologies such as radio do not automatically increase human qualities of empathy and understanding, but they make it harder to ignore the everyday successes and troubles of other individuals. Priestley's image of a networked community ceaselessly receiving transmissions is, as Ina Haberman points out, a particularly rhizomatic one in which individuals are connected not in a vertical hierarchy of class or status, but in a diffuse web of common receptivity and awareness (107). The image represents a fantasy of simultaneous transmission and reception; it is a metaphor derived not so much from

broadcasting as from the early days of ham radio operators.

“A Representative Englishman”: Priestley’s Accent and the Radio Periphery

While some critics stigmatized the BBC as being “vulgar” or middlebrow, there was considerable pressure from within the Corporation to maintain the high cultural standards established under Reith. Priestley’s own experience at the interwar BBC indicates the persistence of a complex of values linking class, audience, literary reputation, and accent. While his voice would become a vehicle of national solidarity in wartime, Priestley found that his Yorkshire accent was a liability rather than an asset in his attempts at broadcasting during the late 1920s and 1930s. Early correspondence in Priestley’s file at the BBC Written Archive Centre (WAC) suggests that BBC officials initially did not want Priestley to broadcast at all. In the fall of 1929, he offered to read a selection from his best-selling novel *The Good Companions* (1929) on the air, but Talks Producer Hilda Matheson recommended against such a proposal in a memo to the Director of Programmes, Roger Eckersley. Writing on 18 November 1929, Matheson notes first of all that authors reading from their own works “are not good programme value” unless they are gifted speakers; secondly, she argues, presenting a work in this way offers “such a terrific boost” to the author that the BBC should limit such endorsements to works that have not already received the high level of publicity of *The Good Companions*. Finally, Matheson notes that “Priestley himself has a very unattractive voice on the microphone, and after using him once or twice we have rather ploughed him” (BBC WAC: RCont 1/Talks/J.B. Priestley 1 [1927-1939], hereafter Talks/JBP1). Responding to Matheson’s memorandum, Eckersley rules against

Priestley's voice but speaks of the merits of authors broadcasting from their works: "I agree that Priestley has not a very good voice. But there is the point here, an old one I know but in regard to which I am still doubtful as to the value of the author reading his own work with a poorish voice against some one else with a better voice. I... only think the fact of the author himself reading has a great deal of value" (Talks/JBP1).

While Eckersley equivocated, others in the Corporation connected Priestley's peripheral accent to a host of values to be excluded from the metropolitan voice of the BBC. On 21 November, Lionel Fielden of the Talks department wrote to Matheson, echoing her dislike of Priestley's voice, but going further. While he claims to be in favour of broadcasting authors reading their own work "whenever possible and desirable," he balks at Priestley's offer:

I am pretty sure that Priestly [sic] is unknown to two-thirds of our audience, and that to the remaining third he is not in any way an exciting figure; I do not think that "The Good Companions" (which I have read with great enjoyment) is at all suitable for reading [on-air]; we know his voice is extremely unattractive, and I consider that his suggestion is dictated purely by self-advertisement. There is no end to our troubles if we once create a precedent of this kind. (Talks/JBP1)

This brief exchange among Matheson, Eckersley, and Fielden typifies the default BBC opinion about Priestley, his voice, and his writings over much of the 1930s. The presumed authority of the authorial voice, which Eckersley seeks to harness, collides with a cluster of biases: resistance to Priestley's accent; rejection of his prose on unspecified, though possibly formal and stylistic, grounds; a paradoxical resistance to Priestley as a

literary figure both too highly praised and not important or widely read enough to justify putting him on the air; and a disdain for any broadcaster motivated by what Fielden calls “self-advertisement.” Fielden seems to find it hard to imagine that the BBC audience might enjoy Priestley’s writings, as he himself claims to have done; Priestley must either be “unknown” or unexciting to listeners, implying that broadcasting exists to furnish more sophisticated fare to a more sophisticated audience than would normally read Priestley. For Fielden at least, and arguably for Matheson, broadcast value is tied up with the economics of literary production, and the acoustics of authority with those of class.

For listeners throughout the 1920s and 1930s, this complex of cultural and class values conveyed itself through a homogeneity of accent on the air. News announcers and program presenters tended towards an educated, southern English pronunciation whose purest manifestation was the Oxbridge accent. According to unofficial BBC policy, regional dialects and accents were deemed “unclear” or “extreme variants”—as, interestingly, was the upper-class drawl (K. Williams, 30-31). In an ostensibly national broadcaster, the favouritism shown to a particular form of educated, upper-middle-class pronunciation could not help but arouse resentment. George Orwell derided the “BBC Voice” as unlike anything spoken outside of Broadcasting House; dreaming of a popular wartime revolution in his diary on 24 June 1940, Orwell assured himself that “the first sign that things are really happening in England will be the disappearance of that horrible plummy voice from the radio” (*CEJL* 2:356). More diplomatically, Asa Briggs notes that the BBC “never found it easy fully to penetrate the working-class world which provided it with by far the largest part of its audience.” This shortcoming resulted from linguistic difference (“accent, vocabulary, style”) and from the Corporation’s highly conscious

performance of gentility, typified by the fact that male announcers wore dinner jackets into the 1930s (Briggs 2:40). The situation was so widely recognized that the 1936 Ullswater Committee, launched to determine the future direction of the Corporation, criticized the BBC for hiring such a disproportionate number of Oxford and Cambridge graduates (LeMahieu 183).²⁵ Although partly motivated by a desire for clarity of speech, the choice of accent at the BBC also provided persuasive evidence of an undercurrent of cultural elitism within the Corporation. In the words of Keith Williams, “The BBC did not invent bias against the demotic, it merely perpetuated one with ancient roots in literary convention” (31).²⁶

The BBC did not ban all varieties of non-standard accent and dialect, but it tended to bracket them off from the main. Other varieties of English were subtly branded as the voice of a radio “other” through such framing devices as documentaries about the working classes, or comical evocations of regional differences in variety and music hall programming. Pioneering features writer and producer D.G. Bridson, in his memoirs of broadcasting in Manchester and London, recalls that with the limited degree of Regional programming that occurred alongside the National Program during the 1930s, “occasional purlings of a genteeler local Doric were permitted,” but only “out on the perimeter, in

²⁵ As if to compound the monologism of the Corporation, news announcers remained anonymous until the war. “In peacetime,” Charles Rolo explains in *Radio Goes to War* (1942), “the BBC announcer had been just a voice—a voice with an exquisitely bored, impeccably impeccable Oxford accent. The possibility that the enemy might ‘fake’ British broadcasts made it vital to enable listeners to recognize instantly the authentic speakers of the BBC. So the voice at the microphone became a personality with a name, and listeners were now told: ‘This is the news—and this is Alvar Liddell reading it...’” (142-3). For the entirety of the 1930s, however, announcers remained anonymous.

²⁶ Compare Louis MacNeice’s ironically self-conscious account of listening to the wireless from Scotland in 1937 in *I Crossed the Minch*: “I listened to the voice of London enunciating facts for the masses with a soi-disant impartiality. I heard my late landlord in Birmingham, a professor of economics, discuss the industrial midlands. I heard an art critic whom I know discuss the portrait of a writer whom I know. And the glorious fact dawned on me that really I knew everybody. I knew hardly a soul in the Hebrides, but that’s not where everybody lives. How lovely to belong to that wider civilisation—how lovely to belong to that clique!” (MacNeice 40, qtd. in K. Williams 64).

Scotland and Wales and Northern Ireland” (Bridson 53). The inclusion of strongly non-standard accents, especially those voicing political dissidence, often met with disapproval from superiors within the BBC, as when Manchester-based producer E.A.F. Harding interviewed northern hunger marchers en route to London (Bridson 39). Such disapproval partly reflected the potential power of documentary portrayals of the working classes; as Keith Williams notes, radio programs including *S.O.S.* (1933), *Other People’s Houses* (1933), and *Time to Spare* (1934) spurred debate in Parliament and in the press about the living and housing conditions of Britain’s unemployed and working poor (28). Despite such attempts to represent the lives of a large band of the population on the air, announcers and presenters—those voices framed as authoritative—remained almost entirely southern, middle- or upper-middle-class, and “educated” in their intonation (K. Williams 160). Even delivery was policed: over the 1930s, the BBC Talks Department sought to reinforce distinctions between “authoritative” and “personal” talks by ensuring that the heightened vocabulary and tone of the former contrasted with the slightly informal character of the latter (Nicholas, “Sly Demagogues” 251).

Given their reticence about peripheral dialects in the pre-war period, it is unsurprising that, when the BBC did court Priestley, officials sought to limit his radio engagements to regional—namely, Northern England—themes. Over the course of the 1930s, the BBC approached Priestley several times to present talks on various topics relating to regionalism in general, or to the North specifically. In a letter from 11 July 1930, for example, Priestley refuses to participate in a program called “Tour Round the North,” noting that there is no such thing as the coherent “Northern point of view” the BBC had requested and that in any case he has not lived in the North for over a decade.

He closes by adding:

I have done nothing for the B.B.C. for a long time, & when I do talk to that vast public of yours, I am not anxious to appear as a North Country man. I am anxious to avoid the charge of being a 'regional' novelist (my new novel [*Angel Pavement*] is all about London). This for your future guidance.

(Talks/JBP1)

The BBC appears not to have heeded; he was asked again in January of 1931 to represent the North, to which he replied curtly: "I am not—as the BBC seems to imagine I am—an authority on Yorkshire" (Talks/JBP1). In refusing to broadcast on regional topics exclusively, Priestley rejected the ghettoization facing broadcasters with non-standard accents. Categorization as a regional novelist meant exclusion from the ranks of important British writers and intellectuals; until he could be treated as a novelist *tout court*, he would absent himself from a medium whose increasingly widespread influence on British taste was not yet matched by a broad definition of culture.

This widespread exclusion of non-standard accents on the interwar airwaves—on the grounds of a presumed connection between accent and cultural respectability—indicates the ambiguous position of the BBC with regard to middlebrow cultural politics. Castigated by elite intellectuals as "vulgar" and populist, the BBC performed its own gentility as a defensive manoeuvre designed to shore up its own cultural respectability. In keeping Priestley at bay, the BBC was in many ways resisting its own typification as the definitive middlebrow medium; it aped a highbrow posture in order to continue its mission of middlebrow cultural transmission.

While this approach held sway well into the 1930s, it could not survive broader

technological and social shifts of that decade. These changes largely arose due to competition from commercial broadcasters based in Normandy and Luxembourg but aimed at British listeners; unfettered by Reithian standards of culture, these stations could broadcast as much light entertainment as listeners wanted (Briggs 2:350-369). Though these stations ceased broadcasting during the war, the light music and entertainment transmitted by German propaganda stations maintained the competition. The 1930s therefore saw the BBC revise its attitude towards popular culture and popular taste and allow some diversification in the kinds of performances that made it on the air. Variety programs increased from 4 per week in 1932 to 25 per week in 1936-7; over the same period, chamber music and highbrow “talks” became less frequent, while hours allotted to dance and light music increased and the dour Sunday schedule lightened considerably (LeMahieu 285-6; K. Williams 32-3). Among the other consequences of this renewed attention to listeners’ tastes was the launch of the Listener Research section in 1936, later to become Audience Research. Listener Research would prove influential in assessing the impact of wartime broadcasts including those of Priestley, Louis MacNeice, and Lord Haw-Haw.

While the 1930s had seen changes in program content, diversification of the accents of presenters and announcers was slower to change. In 1941, Wilfred Pickles, a Yorkshire bricklayer turned radio announcer, became the first northerner to serve as a regular newsreader, creating what Asa Briggs claims was “as much of a stir—and almost as much controversy—as a war-time naval engagement” (3:59). Similarly, John Arlott’s cricket commentaries, which began after the war, were immensely popular, not only for

his gift of phrasing and knowledge of the game, but also for his regional accent.²⁷ Before Pickles and Arlott, however, Priestley had used his Sunday night *Postscripts* to destabilize the reigning linguistic, political, and cultural orthodoxies that had, up to this point, defined public discourse on the BBC. Speaking on a BBC Radio Four program in 1991, Briggs emphasized Priestley's contribution to this transformation:

[T]here were a lot of problems of verbal communication in England before the war and in the early part of the war which we've now forgotten. We now find it very easy to communicate with each other whatever our accents. People did find a good deal of problem in communicating across the class dividing lines and across the different regional lines and Priestley broke through all those barriers. ("Radio Lives: J.B. Priestley")

Contemporary audience responses to Priestley's voice support Briggs' interpretation. A Listener Research Report from August of 1940 attributed Priestley's success to "the homeliness of his voice, the quiet confidence of his manner, and the virile commonsense of his matter" (LR/151, BBC WAC). The same report cites a Swindon railway clerk, who calls Priestley "[e]asy to understand, sincere and honest. Not highbrow"; a miner from Staffordshire notes that "[h]is voice and manner appeal to the working man." In an article in *London Calling*, the overseas journal of the BBC, an unnamed overseas listener summed up Priestley's central role by calling him "a representative Englishman" and noting that "[h]e truly can speak for England" ("The Men Who Speak for Britain").

This voice, as recordings convey, is not of a Yorkshire dialect that would have been impenetrable to listeners; rather, Priestley's voice is most often described as

²⁷ Arlott's broadcasts attracted the attention of West Indian listener (and future theorist of vocal creolization) Edward Kamau Brathwaite; Brathwaite heard in Arlott's thick Hampshire burr a soft acoustic revolution, one which "subverted the Establishment with the way and where he spoke" (*Voice* 30).

“broad,” “mellow,” and “warm,” reflecting a measured regional inflection that drew out vowels without altering them beyond the recognition of non-Yorkshire listeners.

Commentators describe the voice in terms that veer into the gustatory: biographer John Braine calls it a Yorkshire “intonation... or perhaps *flavour*” (qtd. in R. Calder 212), while radio critic W.E. Williams describes it as a voice “nicely flavoured with Yorkshire relish” (“Critic on the Hearth: The Spoken Word: Priestley Steals the Show” 903). For *Time* magazine, it was a voice “compact as a beer mug” (qtd. in R. Calder 212).

Priestley’s educated Bradfordian voice invoked wisdom without indulging in pretensions of intellectual sophistication. In a discussion of wartime propaganda films, one of which was narrated by Priestley, Mass Observation’s Tom Harrisson claimed that Priestley’s voice “provides a bridge between middle and working classes” (qtd. in Baxendale, *Priestley’s England* 146), at once homely and poised, refreshingly anti-elitist and intelligent. If Priestley’s claims about class relations during his upbringing in Edwardian Bradford are to be believed, the cross-class acceptability of his accent emerged naturally from his home town roots. “[I]n a city like this in the industrial North there was little of the class demarcation by accent,” he claims; rather, citizens of diverse economic backgrounds sought to downplay divisions by producing an acoustic effect of commonality (*Edwardians* 97). Priestley’s broadcasting success lay in bringing this erasure of class difference, however superficial, to a medium whose acoustics of distinction had begun to breed disaffection in a population being asked to give everything to the cause of total war.

Even Priestley was surprised by the efficacy of his wartime “Postscripts.” “I have been hard at it getting through to the public mind, in one way or another, for about twenty

years,” he writes in the introduction to the printed edition of *Postscripts* (1940), “but as a medium of communication this broadcasting makes everything else seem like the method of a secret society” (vi). During the war, he professed humbly that “[t]he tricks of the writing trade and some fortunate accidents of voice and manner” conspired to make him a success (*Postscripts* vii). Later, however, Priestley would speak of the uncanny effects his aural persona seemed to have exerted over others: “I found myself tied like a man to a gigantic balloon, to one of those bogus reputations that only the mass media know how to inflate... Voices cannot be disguised, and if I went into a crowded shop or bar all the people not only had to talk to me but also had to touch me—I had thousands lay hands on me—as if to prove to themselves that I was more than a disembodied voice” (qtd. in Calder, *People’s War* 161). The enduring popularity of these broadcasts, and the waning popularity of his written works after the war, would come to irritate the elder Priestley, who thought the “Postscripts” overrated (*Margin Released* 220).

Priestley’s success lay in his ability to match a demotic tone of voice with a populist message of collective effort in the “People’s War.” Matter, manner, and medium conspired to lend the first of his “Postscripts” both immediate appeal and historical endurance; indeed, few transmissions outside of those by Chamberlain, Churchill, and the Royal Family can be said to have shaped discourse about the war as effectively. The only Wednesday “Postscript” to be broadcast, Priestley’s debut aired on 5 June 1940, after the British military had wrapped up the final stages of the Dunkirk evacuation. While Churchill’s speech to the House of Commons the day before—parts of which were read out that evening by BBC announcers—had lifted national spirits with its rhetorical loft, Priestley opted for the demotic. The kernel of the astounding Dunkirk success was, for

him, “the little pleasure-steamers,” those small ships that ferried holiday-goers from one seaside town to the next or, at best, a brief crossing of the English Channel (*Postscripts* 2-3). The broadcast begins on a note of nostalgia: Priestley revels in an evocation of what in 1939 was already a disappearing world of “pierrots and piers, sand castles, ham-and-egg teas, palmists, automatic machines, and crowded sweating promenades” (3). His point is not that this fading world represents some kind of essential England. Rather, the past must be abandoned in order to move forward. It is in the movement of these ships from “that innocent foolish world of theirs... to sail into the inferno, to defy bombs, shells, magnetic mines, torpedoes, machine-gun fire” that they enter history (3). Priestley closes by eulogizing one such ship, the “Gracie Fields,” lost during the evacuation:

But now—look—this little steamer, like all her brave and battered sisters, is immortal. She’ll go sailing proudly down the years in the epic of Dunkirk. And our great-grandchildren, when they learn how we began this War by snatching glory out of defeat, and then swept on to victory, may also learn how the little holiday steamers made an excursion to hell and came back glorious. (4)

This peroration captures Priestley’s knack for drawing allegory from the everyday; the flotilla of common little ships serves as a shorthand for the banding together of British citizens under attack. That he chooses to focus on a ship called the “Gracie Fields,” named after the popular Lancashire singer and actress who rose from working-class beginnings to become one of Britain’s biggest stars, emphasizes that for Priestley the triumph of Dunkirk is a triumph fuelled from below.

More importantly, this closing passage demonstrates the remarkable process by

which he and other writers busied themselves transforming events like the Dunkirk evacuation into myth even as they happened. Radio accelerated this process of mythologization; it gave writers the means by which to cast the present in terms of the past, instantaneously. A large part of Priestley's effectiveness as a broadcaster lay in his ability to orient listeners in a historical trajectory; this historical orientation illustrates Greene's comment that Priestley gave listeners "an ideology" in a way few speakers had ("Lost Leader"). Ideology is a lens, a way of seeing oneself in relation to the world and of seeing that present world in relation to the past and the future; in fixing the summer of 1940 as a moment of transition between England's lost and foolish interwar holiday and its pending victory, Priestley gave listeners such a lens, allowing them to view the conflict as a productive transformation. Throughout the "Postscripts," Priestley transforms recent traumas—including Dunkirk, the Battle of Britain, and the blitz—into a usable past, a series of successive trials through which the British people continued to prove their worthiness to inherit a brighter future.

Often, the technique of linking the everyday to the broader experience of the war gains specific power by opening a window on Priestley's own emotional experience of the war. Recalling a night spent on watch for German planes, Priestley speaks frankly of the simultaneously tender and violent feelings generated by the increasing conflict: "I remember wishing then that we could send all our children out of this island, every boy and girl of them across the sea to the wide Dominions, and turn Britain into the greatest fortress the world has known; so that then, with an easy mind, we could fight and fight these Nazis until we broke their black hearts" (*PS* 12). Such tightly woven emotions of protectiveness and aggression gain much of their subtle meaning from their delivery;

while no recording of this “Postscript” exists, it is plausible that it was delivered in a manner similar to Priestley’s other talks. With his measured, deliberate, and familiar speaking style, Priestley could have inflected such ideas with more pathos than rage. The tragedy of war, he indicates, is not that Britons are threatened with death, but that they are made to wish death upon others.

Priestley could not overtly stress the moral ambivalence of the war effort in broadcasts to the home front; such equivocation would have suited neither the propaganda imperatives of the government nor the mood of a people under German assault and bracing for a possible invasion (Calder, *People’s War* 145-162). But in his Overseas Service broadcasts on the program “Britain Speaks,” Priestley felt more free to question certain aspects of the war. On one occasion, Priestley refused to downplay the underlying violence of the conflict, especially the violence visited upon innocent civilians of both sides. Visiting a munitions plant in July 1940, Priestley contemplates the long line of workers and focuses on one “spectacled and studious-looking girl” hard at work:

[T]he little machine she bent over was presenting her, all with an awful regularity and rapidity, with beautifully turned, tiny pieces of metal, and these, it appeared, were the strikers, which somewhere in distant mid-air would be released to detonate the shells. And then perhaps, because of one of these strikers and one of these shells, another girl far away, perhaps spectacled and studious-looking and sentimental like this one, wouldn’t be able to see properly the machine she might be bending over, because the shell had done its work, a young life had gone, and she would be suddenly blind with tears and despair. All of which comes of imagining that because

you have machine tools you no longer need God. (*BS* 135)

Up to this point in the broadcast, Priestley's report had been more concerned with the impressive increases in productivity this factory, and British industry more generally, had seen in recent months. The turn to contemplate the logical result of arms production is sudden and striking. Because Priestley's broadcasts to America formed part of a larger Ministry of Information plan to secure support for the British war effort, this frank assessment of the brutality of war seems ill-advised.²⁸ But Priestley, for all his patriotism, had never shied away from either sentimentality or a contrarian position. From the lingering resentments about the First World War expressed in *English Journey* and his many volumes of autobiography to his postwar work with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Priestley had consistently rejected militarism. Violence was a necessary evil, not a cornerstone of British identity.

Priestley's ability to portray an inner world of confusion and vulnerability, as a natural accompaniment to struggle and resistance, lends the best of his broadcasts an emotional depth unusual in most wartime propaganda. One of Priestley's most moving "Postscripts," usually overshadowed by the Dunkirk broadcast, aired on 1 September 1940. Looking back on the first year of the war, Priestley details his own experience of 3 September 1939, travelling from the Isle of Wight to Broadcasting House to present the first instalment of *Let the People Sing*, a "novel for radio" commissioned by the BBC.

²⁸ Beginning in May of 1940, Priestley made two to three broadcasts a week in the series "Britain Speaks," aimed mainly at American listeners. These broadcasts occasionally repeated themes and entire passages from his "Postscripts." It was a lucrative, as well as patriotic, endeavour: the Ministry of Information paid Priestley £21 per 15-minute broadcast at first, compared to an initial fee of £10 per 7-minute "Postscript" (Memo 17 May 1940, RCont 1/Talks/J.B. Priestley/File 2/1940, BBC WAC). The MoI provided the funds through an account known as the "American Commentators Special Allowance" (Contract, 30 May, Talks/JBP/2/1940). Priestley's literary agent, A.D. Peters, was the head of the Authors Planning Committee, the MoI agency responsible for coordinating the propaganda contributions of British writers (R. Calder 47).

Because he was in transit all day, he missed Chamberlain's announcement of war over the wireless, only to learn of it as he entered London an hour or so later. Priestley litters his account of that day with details: the excessive heat, the deserted streets, the conversely crowded platforms at Paddington station. As his train pulls out of Paddington, Priestley notices an unusually brilliant sunset, distinguished by a single patch of cloud "shaped like a dragon." In a deft move from the intensely personal to the intensely public, he pauses his remembrance to ask the radio audience, "Do you remember that, any of you? Yes, a rampant dragon, etched in fire" (63). Priestley's thoughts enter a distinctly melancholic register as he remembers the deepening sunset:

The light had grown unbelievably tender. How was it possible to believe that such a sky could spill ruin and death[?] It caught at the heart—that sky; not the heart that is entirely human and can go home and be content, but that other homeless heart we all possess, which even when there's no war, is never at peace, but dimly recognises that long ago it was conscripted for a bitter campaign and nameless battles in the snow. The train gathered speed; the Bowl of Heaven paled and expanded, and the dragon smouldered and then utterly faded. (63-4)

Far from the sentimentalism that characterized the middlebrow in the ears of most detractors, this aside builds intimacy with remarkable concision. Moving from his own personal memories as a public figure, Priestley brings the audience in through a direct question, and then returns them with force to a rather dark place within himself. Few propagandists would extend the metaphor of shared suffering and wartime perseverance to the realm of the existential; that Priestley manages to do so without sounding maudlin

is a greater achievement still. It was a delicate balance, however; writing in *The Listener*, critic W.E. Williams praised “how brilliantly Priestley can navigate the dangerous waters of sentiment” and noted that in his first “Postscript” Priestley “went perilously close in but he never took the mud” (“Critic on the Hearth: The Spoken Word: Studio Stratagem,” 13 June 1940).

“Ordinary British Folk”: The Invention of the Wartime Public

Priestley’s mythologization of the everyday wartime present consistently put what he called “the people” at the centre of history. Speaking on 30 June 1940, Priestley expressed his admiration for “ordinary British folk” who, not content to serve as passive vessels of larger events, responded to the crisis of the war by taking up “the responsibility of manning this last great defence of our liberal civilisation” (*PS* 22-3). Tapping into a similar historical consciousness as Churchill, whose “Finest Hour” speech of 18 June still reverberated in many listeners’ ears, Priestley invoked the proleptic gratitude of later generations:

Already the future historians are fastening their gaze upon us, seeing us all in that clear and searching light of the great moments of history. That light may discover innumerable past follies and weaknesses of policy and national endeavour, but here and now, as the spirit of the people rises to meet the challenge, I believe that it will find no flaw in the sense, courage and endurance of those people. (*PS* 23)

As a motivation to greater effort and perseverance, Priestley’s push for historical perspective among ordinary citizens fits with a more widespread sense that Britons were

living in world-changing times. But Priestley goes further by insisting that the duty of interpreting those times, marking not only their place in a trajectory but naming the very trajectory itself, lies with the people. Attempts to frame the Second World War in the nationalist terms of the Great War have failed, he claims:

The queer thing is that these attempts, which have been deliberate and often well organised, are frustrated by masses of people who could give no explanation of why they shrug their shoulders and turn away. I suspect that the wisest historian resides somewhere in the collective unconscious minds of whole populations... He knows that this conflict is not a repetition of the last war. (46)

The notion of a diffused historical consciousness represents an apotheosis of the “People’s War” myth; the population knew what they wanted, even if they could not put it into words. Priestley saw his role in the war as giving voice to the silent majority: “People may be almost inarticulate in themselves and yet recognise in an instant when something that is at least trying to be real and true is being said to them” (*PS* vii). The line between spokesperson and demagogue can be a tricky one, especially through a one-way medium like the radio; one suspects that Priestley’s version of the “wisest historian” of the collective unconscious of Britain might have looked and sounded quite a lot like Priestley himself.

Indeed, the question of just who “the People” were, according to Priestley, is somewhat unclear. Priestley’s wartime writings and broadcasts exhibit some slippage between national categories. For most of his career, he showed little interest in Britain; he chose to focus his intellectual energies on England and the English. But the Second

World War effected a temporary transformation of Priestley's national horizons, as the word "Britain" began to supplant "England" in his works.²⁹ Though he refers to Britain in his wartime broadcasts and writings, and occasionally mentions Scotland and Wales, Priestley seems to reserve the affective dimensions of nationhood for "England" while treating "Britain" as a primarily political affiliation. An excerpt from one of his broadcasts to America in the series *Britain Speaks* illustrates this complementary form of dual nationalism. Priestley describes the bond he sensed while watching a German raid from a hilltop in the presence of a group of Local Defence Volunteers (later known as the Home Guard):

I felt up there a very powerful and rewarding sense of community. And with it too a sense of deep continuity. Ploughman or parson, shepherd or author, we were Englishmen, turning out at night, as our forefathers had often done before us, to keep watch and ward over the sleeping English hills and fields and homes. (*BS* 27)

In this tableau, the affective bonds of Englishness provide continuity with traditions in which English men guard a "sleeping" landscape explicitly rendered as vulnerable and implicitly gendered as feminine. The pastoral role of the men on guard—watching over a landscape peopled with those in need of salvation from the menaces of the war—blends Christian and rural symbolism to produce a version of the nation as if seen through a Church of England lens. The passage glosses the links between national geography and the family by zooming in on successive metonymic layers of "hills" and "fields" before

²⁹ The use of the terms "England," "Britain," and their derivatives in the titles of Priestley's works charts a telling course. *The English Comic Characters* (1925), *The English Novel* (1927), *English Humour* (1929), and *English Journey* (1934) all appear pre-war; *Britain Speaks* (1940), *Britain at War* (1942), and *British Women Go to War* (1943) all appeared during the war. *Topside, or The Future of England* (1958) and *The English* (1973) appeared post-war.

arriving at the “homes” from which the men have reluctantly turned themselves out. At the end of the same broadcast, Priestley contemplates the stresses and deprivations of the war and claims “we can only live from week to week. That’s how it is with us, the British” (*BS* 28). Englishness offers a reservoir of psychic support in times of struggle, but Britishness names only the political collectivity united under common threat.

It is of course quite possible to draw one’s identity from two or more overlapping conceptual categories; as Linda Colley notes, “Identities are not like hats...human beings can and do put on several at a time” (6). Nor is the formation of a national identity through a defensive posture particularly novel. Colley has argued that such conversions of existential struggle into testimonies of national character fit a pattern typical of post-Reformation Britain; while the enemy might change (represented at various times by Catholic France, colonial “Others”, and Nazi Germany), the narrative of national endurance, even triumph, persists (Colley 28-9). When the blitz on London began in early September, Priestley joined other public figures in rendering the experience of shared vulnerability as an opportunity for forging the nation:

[J]ust now we’re not really obscure persons tucked away in our offices and factories, villas and back streets; we’re the British people being attacked and fighting back; we’re in the great battle for the future of our civilisation and so instead of being obscure and tucked away, we’re bang in the middle of the world’s stage with all the spotlights focused on us; we’re historical personages, and it’s possible that future generations will find inspiration, when their time of trouble comes, in the report in their history books of our conduct at this hour. (“Postscript,” 8 September 1940, *PS* 69)

Priestley's rhetoric of Englishness and Britishness affords listeners the comfort of both a strong national bond formed synchronically—through the common experience of shared suffering during the blitz—and diachronically, through connection to both a deep past and a proleptically imagined future.

When faced with the task of addressing the country as a whole, Priestley had difficulty specifying what exactly constituted “the British” as a people, aside from membership in a polity. In the rousing pro-planning tract *Out of the People* (1941), Priestley repeats many of his arguments from the “Postscripts” about the war being waged not for the maintenance of the previous status quo, but so that the British people might enjoy a better quality of life. Britain, he argues, is not a collection of property or of economic concerns; it is quite simply “the home of the British” (42-45). As for British identity, Priestley simply states that his intended audience is “the people” as opposed to those who see themselves as members of a particular class, religion, or other subgroup; “we are all the people,” he argues, “so long as we are willing to consider ourselves the people” (13). This apparent tautology in fact inscribes the affiliative logic of Warner's public (*Publics* 55-6): the nation Priestley addresses is one in which individual volition contributes to the common good through the formation of a progressive collectivity. Priestley is not addressing all British citizens as “the people,” but rather an imagined group of individuals willing to set aside class, regional, gender, and other distinctions in order to commit themselves to a better life for all those governed by the political entity called “Britain.” Every time Priestley invoked this inclusive group through such simple statements as “you and I—all of us ordinary people,” it was not so much an interpellation as an invitation to participate in a newly democratic public (*PS* 19). Priestley was actively

constituting the parameters of his imagined community of listeners with every appeal to “the people”; British listeners populated that community by tuning in and choosing to recognize themselves in Priestley’s descriptions of the wartime radio public.

As the “Postscripts” went on, the equation between “the People” and a specific political commitment became increasingly apparent. On 30 June, Priestley told listeners that if he had his way, he would “tell people to forget their old ordinary life because ultimately, anyhow, we’ll have a better life than that, or bust” (*PS* 20). Surveying the seaside community of Margate in July of 1940, a town drained of holiday-goers because of the war, Priestley argues that most Britons can accept the temporary loss of such pre-war institutions “if we know that we can march forward—not merely to recover what has been lost, but to something better than we’ve ever know before” (*PS* 32-3). But Priestley went beyond generic appeals for “a better life” for Britons: in his “Postscript” of 21 July, he claimed that the war was not simply an interruption in an otherwise stable world order. Rather, Priestley invokes an explicitly dialectical view of history by arguing that listeners should “regard this war as one chapter in a tremendous history, the history of a changing world, the breakdown of one vast system and the building up of another and better one” (*PS* 36). “We must stop thinking in terms of property and power,” Priestley argues, “and begin thinking in terms of community and creation” (36-7). As an example of how this transformation might occur, Priestley suggests that homes left unused by absentee landlords should be requisitioned for communal uses like agriculture and billeting (38). In a broadcast to the United States a few days later, on 28 July, Priestley went further, suggesting that since total war had already forced considerable taxation on the British, they should move to a system where all wages are collected by the state, with each

individual given a certain allowance for the necessities of life (*Britain Speaks* 130). This may have been bluster designed to exaggerate British sacrifice for an American audience, but it demonstrates how far Priestley was willing to push socialist ideas in his broadcasts.

The call to abandon the property model of ownership ruffled some feathers within the government, but Priestley's producers held firm against complaints. A broadcast on 6 October 1940, however, proved too much for some listeners. Priestley describes Britain as precariously balanced between two stools, one of which is labelled "Every man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost," while the other bears a more collectivist message: "The other stool, on which millions are already perched without knowing it, has some lettering round it that hints that free men could combine, without losing what's essential to their free development, to see that each gives according to his ability, and receives according to his need" (*PS* 90). This reference to Marx (from "The Critique of the Gotha Program" [1875]) did not go unnoticed. The BBC received complaints about the broadcast from former Conservative Party Chairman Lord Davidson and Colonel Scorgie of the Ministry of Information, and German radio happily reported on Priestley's "communist" broadcast (Nicholas, "Sly Demagogues" 257). Priestley, citing fatigue, willingly stepped down from the "Postscripts" on this occasion; since May, he had been delivering one "Postscript" and two Overseas broadcasts on the series "Britain Speaks" every week, in addition to writing articles for periodicals as well as continuing to work on book-length projects. Priestley and his producers agreed that this was to be a temporary break from the "Postscripts" series.

By January of 1941, Priestley was back for a new series of "Postscripts," his fee having increased from an initial 10 guineas per broadcast to 50 guineas (Ronald Boswell

to Priestley, 22 Jan 1941, RCont 1/Talks/JBP/3). Though he initially claimed that this second series would be even more politically strident than the last, only the first of the new “Postscripts” offered much political bite. Nonetheless, when Priestley stepped down after eight broadcasts in the second series of *Postscripts*, listeners presumed he had been muzzled. It was an impression Priestley seemed keen to reinforce. Priestley complained, in the *Daily Herald* of 26 March, that “[p]owerful influences” were working against him, and he labelled Conservative Central office a “political Gestapo” (qtd. in Nicholas, “Sly Demagogues” 260). As Siân Nicholas has argued, the situation was more complex than such narratives of top-down suppression of dissent suggest. Priestley had only been contracted for six talks in the new series; the seventh and eighth had been added because of the positive reception of those first six. Priestley had seen renewal of this contract as a mere formality; indeed, the BBC’s failure to renew seems to have reflected a measure of pressure from above. The BBC Home Board Minutes from 21 March 1941 record that “Priestley series stopped... on instructions of Minister”; that is, the Minister of Information, Duff Cooper (qtd. in Briggs, *War of Words* 322n). Nonetheless, his removal prompted few complaints from within the BBC, despite the potential of such a move to incite criticism of censorship within the Corporation. Nicholas reads this as an indication that many within the BBC had already decided that Priestley felt entitled to dominate on-air debate: “Priestley wanted the freedom of the air, but to many what he had been granted was [a] unique privilege” (“Sly Demagogues” 265). He had become a victim of his own success, a radio celebrity too popular for the BBC’s measured preferences.

Conclusion: Priestley and the People's War

Priestley's ultimate impact on the politics of wartime and postwar Britain are somewhat difficult to quantify. He was, first of all, not as radical as he sometimes claimed to be. Despite occasionally giving voice to quasi-Marxist principles of wealth redistribution, his political roots lay less in doctrinaire communism than in an English radical tradition that rejected class warfare in favour of building alliances across classes (Baxendale, *Priestley* 41-2). Many of Priestley's wartime works emphasize this political tradition, and link it explicitly with forms of cultural expression. "In a certain limited sense," says Professor Kronak, one of the protagonists of the radio novel *Let the People Sing*, "all the English may be said to be anarchists" who share a "limited and natural anarchy of the national soul" (30). The "inner quality" of the English, the Professor claims, "is deeper than politics, though possibly it would not exist now if there had not once been revolutions here" (45). Rather than manifesting itself directly in politics, the "deep unspoken poetry" of the English expresses itself "only in instinctive conduct and in your literature" (45). Less than a year after *Let the People Sing* aired, Priestley returned to this theme in the "Postscript" of 11 August 1940:

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, and not when we've gone to sleep and allowed some Justice Shallow to represent us, 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. (*PS* 52)

Sentimental and mystical as such pronouncements might be, they indicate Priestley's firm belief in the guiding role that imaginative powers can play in collective governance. He draws a clear line between two tendencies in British cultural life: on the one side, the "property and power" view endorsed by the Justices Shallow of the nation, and on the other side, the alliance of "community and creation" identified in the "Postscript" of 21 July.

The material deprivations of the war reinforced Priestley's longstanding commitment to the broadbrow approach to culture. Individuals must have access to the full spectrum of cultural production in order to feel as though they are participating actively in society. Priestley's celebration of the imaginative characteristics of the British in the "Postscript" of 11 August 1940 emerges in the context of a visit to a factory, where he notes the enthusiasm of the workers for a slightly hackneyed lunchtime variety show organized by the Entertainments National Service Association (ENSA). "Let us, by all means, have four young women in green silk playing 'Oh Johnny, Oh Johnny,'" he says, "but at the same time let's have the great symphony orchestras peeling out the noblest music, night after night, not for a fortunate and privileged few, but for all the people who long for such music" (*PS* 53). A truly open and vibrant cultural democracy is the only just reward for those struggling through the war: "We must all have at least a glimpse, while we labour or fight, of those glorious worlds of the imagination from which come fitful gleams to this sad, haunted earth" (*PS* 53). Three years later, Priestley published a fictionalized account of such a scene in *Daylight on Saturday* (1943), a novel of wartime

factory life. The narrator of that novel sees in the workers' clamour for middlebrow or lowbrow entertainment the trace of something almost spiritual: "there was about it an air of release and innocent happiness; a kind of struggling goodness in it; a mysterious promise, not mentioned, not tried for, not even understood, but there somewhere all the time, of man's ultimate deliverance and freedom, a whisper of his homecoming among the stars" (*Daylight* 99).

Priestley at first avoided describing, in detail, how his vision of a vibrant cultural democracy might actually be brought about in the postwar period. It seemed enough to declare, as he did in one of his few broadcasts before the "Postscripts," that "a nobler framework of life must be constructed" ("A New English Journey," 24 April 1940). Faced with criticisms that his calls for a postwar plan were not matched with constructive suggestions, Priestley responded in a broadcast of 25 August 1940 that it was his job to deliver "a seven-minute postscript to the Sunday night news bulletin, and not to give a four-hour lecture on all possible political, economic, and social developments" (*PS* 57). He became increasingly frustrated that Churchill and his War Cabinet were unwilling to declare war aims, let alone peace aims, and in 1941 began to move beyond vague assertions about the need for democratic change. He helped to form the 1941 Committee, a progressive counterpoint to the 1922 Committee, a long-running Conservative Party lobby group. The 1941 Committee took postwar planning as one of its main goals, and eventually merged with socialist MP Richard Acland's Forward March movement to form the Common Wealth party, which won a handful of seats from Conservatives in by-elections (Calder, *People's War* 253; Baxendale 155). The 1941 Committee was also responsible for the publication of Priestley's *Out of the People*. Much of the book

consists of the same spirited but indefinite attempts to rally “the People” as are found in his broadcasts. In an appendix to the volume, Priestley lays out his objectives for postwar Britain relatively clearly, though not before cautioning readers that “[t]here must first be a change of values and atmosphere” before detailed plans for reform can be put into play (112). Too often, he says, “What is lacking is the emotional force, the compulsive drive, of a general idea... It is in an attempt at least to sketch that idea, to generate a little of that emotional force, that I have written this book” (114).

Among the recommendations contained in *Out of the People* are a firm rationing policy, a wages policy that gives “equal wages for equal work everywhere,” and a system of family allowances (115). Unused accommodations should be requisitioned, and workers of all kinds coordinated in a national employment strategy that prioritizes the war effort. Most strikingly, Priestley calls for the nationalization of “essential services” including “banking, transport, fuel, and power” (116). Priestley claims that nationalization is necessary to avoid not just a postwar bust like that of the 1920s, but a worse fate: “Big Business backed by the state is not democracy,” he claims, “but Fascism” (116). Furthermore, Britain needs to align its international policies with the democratic principles for which it claims to be fighting. “We shall gain more than we shall lose by pursuing a generous policy with India, and indeed with all our colonial possessions” (117).

The extent to which these policies line up with later developments—the Beveridge Report, the Labour Party’s postwar nationalization of industry, the break-up of the British Empire—lends Priestley the aura of a soothsayer, if not an active determinant of public opinion. That he was an enormously popular broadcaster is not in doubt; the

question remains whether he reflected the mood of a population already undergoing significant ideological shifts, or whether he actively determined the nature of those shifts. Most scholars agree that Priestley could not have changed the perspective of an entire nation, at least not on his own (Calder, *People's War* 139; Nicholas, "Sly Demagogues" 265). But at the very least, he managed to channel a widespread disaffection with the prewar status quo into a much broader social conversation about just what the postwar world would look like. By November of 1940, Mass Observation reported a shift in thinking about the war, with an increasing number of respondents seeing it as revolutionary or radical (Calder, *People's War* 139). Other, more anecdotal signs that the cultural conversation was changing appeared. On 25 March 1941, the *Times*—no bastion of radicalism—featured an article entitled "Eclipse of the Highbrow," which prematurely celebrated the fact that war had sounded the death-knell of modernism: "What changes of taste this war, and the reactions following it, may produce, no one can foresee. But at least it can hardly give rise to arts unintelligible outside a Bloomsbury drawing-room, and completely at variance with those stoic virtues which the whole nation is now called upon to practice" (qtd. in Baxendale, "Priestley and the Highbrows" 79). Whatever Priestley's personal role in such shifts, the times were changing, and rapidly.

Siân Nicholas downplays Priestley's radicalizing force. She claims that by voicing complaints and wishes for a better world (in a socialist vein, without advocating outright revolution) Priestley worked to lull listeners into complacency (Nicholas, "Sly Demagogues" 262). But if Priestley was a kind of surrogate dissenter for a public uninterested in radical change, the fact remains that he transformed the wartime BBC into a place where debate and disagreement with the status quo could be voiced, within the

limits of wartime censorship. Perhaps more importantly, Priestley was one of the first figures of the radio war to become a common cultural icon for the British public.

Regardless of what one thought of Priestley and his opinions, he offered an accessible and intelligent framework through which to read the events of the war. Consider this account from the diaries of Conservative MP and eminent highbrow Harold Nicolson, who dined with a retired Major General and his wife one evening early in the blitz of September 1940:

Priestley gives a broadcast about the abolition of privilege, while I look at their albums of 1903 and the Delhi Durbar and the Viceroy's train.

Priestley speaks of the old order which is dead and of the new order which is to arise from its ashes. These two old people listen without flinching. I find their dignity and patriotism deeply moving. I glance at the pictures of the howdahs and panoply of the past and hear the voice of Priestley and the sound of the guns. (Qtd. in Hewison 43-44)

Like the falling bombs and booming anti-aircraft fire, Priestley's voice—once spurned, now celebrated—sounded the changes visited upon wartime Britain. While postwar transformations did not amount to a revolution, they did bring a measurable improvement to the lives of many of Britain's less privileged subjects. Priestley had discovered in the radio an opportunity of fusing cultural politics and progressive politics through an intimate medium of address; in the process, he helped to shape not only the popular conception of the war, but of Britain's postwar future as well.

Chapter 3: Castles on the Air: Radio Modernism and Propaganda in Louis

MacNeice's Wartime Broadcasts

“It’s all very well for everyone to go on saying “Destroy Hitlerism,” but what the hell are they going to construct?”

(Louis MacNeice, letter to E.R. Dodds, 13 October 1939; *Letters* 360)

While it was the war in general that brought Louis MacNeice back to London in December of 1940, it was the BBC in particular that lent structure to his wartime activities and his later creative output. Returning from a brief stint teaching poetry at Cornell University, MacNeice was eager to contribute, in one way or another, to the war effort. Not that such work would prove easy; in a letter dated 27 April 1941 to Elizabeth Dodds, a friend from his days teaching Classics at Birmingham and wife to his eventual literary executor E.R. Dodds, MacNeice expressed the mingled excitement and resentment of wartime propaganda work:

May be going on B.B.C. in the regular way soon if M.I.5 don't turn me down... I am beginning to write poems again, so very pleased with myself. But am rather fed up with thinking up ingenuities for the air & then having them chopped about by genteel halfwits; *if* I join the B.B.C. I shall eventually produce my own stuff. When I've learned about the knobs.

(MacNeice papers, MS. Eng. Lett. C.465, Bodleian)

The “knobs” in question were the technical controls of the studio, which were to serve as the material link between MacNeice's new occupation as radio artist and his ongoing role

as poet. Unlike many other writers during the war, MacNeice moved quickly to master the technical aspects of broadcasting, thereby minimizing the violent chops dealt to his written works by “genteel halfwits.” In a field where collaboration and compromise were essential to the creative process, MacNeice came to exert a greater degree of control over his material than did many other literary broadcasters by virtue of the fact that he could oversee their translation from printed page to produced sounds.

Between January of 1941 and his death in September of 1963, MacNeice wrote over 120 broadcasts, of which he produced the majority. In broadcasting, he found not only an alternative artistic outlet and a meaningful wartime role, but also the comfort of regular labour. Remembering the early days of his broadcasting career in Canto IV of *Autumn Sequel* (1954), MacNeice meditates on the curious balance of bureaucracy, creativity, and seeming magic he found at the BBC:

To work. To my own office, my own job,
Not matching pictures but inventing sound,
Precalculating microphone and knob

In homage to the human voice. To found
A castle on the air requires a mint
Of golden intonations and a mound

Of typescript in the trays. What was in print
Must take on breath and what was thought be said.

(*Autumn Sequel* [AS] IV, l. 4-8)

The gentle colloquialism of this passage, with its simplicity of phrasing and diction, belies a density of metaphor that borders on paradox. From the delicate, almost insubstantial material of timbre and onionskin paper could emerge fantastic structures, “castles on the air.” If the voice is the currency of radio—its “mint,” the strongest claim it has to immediacy and value—its sonic castles rest on a mountain of paper.

The materiality of airborne structures could have political valences. In his long poem *Autumn Journal* (1939), MacNeice had seen in Chamberlain's Munich settlement the empty procedures and false promises of interwar politics coming to dust:

Conferences, adjournments, ultimatums,
 Flights in the air, castles in the air,
 The autopsies of treaties, dynamite under the bridges,
 The end of *laissez faire*. (VII.1-4)

The rhyme of “castles in the air” with *laissez faire*—shorthand throughout *Autumn Journal* for both deliberate strategies of appeasement and the wilful blindness of the English political establishment—bridges political denial and the technologies that communicate them. Whereas the image of the castle would come, in *Autumn Sequel*, to mean the ethereal, sonic structures of broadcasting, its use in *Autumn Journal* is clearly pejorative, referring to the incongruity between the threats to European peace and the attempted solutions offered by what would become the Allied powers. Insubstantiality might be aesthetically pleasing as an attribute of radio art, but it makes for deadly politics.

Not all castles, however, are fanciful. Against castles of air, MacNeice posits a more stable and pedestrian architecture: the everyday. In *Autumn Journal*, quotidian

routines of work and human relationships give shape and meaning to life in the face of the “heavy panic” (V.23) of historical rupture:

Who am I—or I—to demand oblivion?
 I must go out to-morrow as the others do
 And build the falling castle;
 Which has never fallen, thanks
 Not to any formula, red tape or institution,
 Nor to any creeds or banks,
 But to the human animal’s endless courage. (II.46-52)

Whatever fanciful solutions politicians might have been crafting in 1938, the engaged citizen performs the core act of social perpetuation by setting out every day to live life as an inherited, renewable practice. To “build the falling castle” is to commit oneself to an endeavour less foolish than it may first appear; though ever falling, the castle has “never fallen,” making the project of keeping up civilization less a question of Sisyphean effort and more one akin to maintaining the family home. MacNeice’s vision of the importance of everyday life—and by extension work, including the work of poetry and radio—is neither a revolutionary one nor a reactionary one. No “formula” or “institution” can bind a society to a past or future vision of itself; rather, the castle remains standing by virtue of its incremental renewal, like a body made new over time by the progressive replacement of cells.

This iterative approach to creation—art as workmanlike labour—translated to MacNeice’s work building “castles on the air” as a broadcaster. A salaried BBC employee after May of 1941, MacNeice punched the Corporation clock by making art.

Though he admits, in the introduction to the published version of his play *Christopher Columbus*, that some artists might find the notion of “radio-writing as a *craft*” to be “repugnant,” MacNeice counters that the BBC model represents a version of the patronage system that has long guided artistic production through a triangle of patron, professional artist, and public (“Some Comments on Radio Drama,” *Selected Plays* 397-8). Moreover, the revamped patronage system implicit in radio production has its advantages: “it insists on a function of words which salon-writers are perhaps too apt to forget; this function is communication. [...] If compelled to communicate with a fair-sized public, a writer may sometimes find himself expressing bits of himself that he had lost” (*Plays* 398). Radio becomes a means of communing with oneself as much as with the broader listening public; its sounds shape collective and individual experience alike.

To conjure form out of formlessness and weave substance out of sound, and to do so in a popular and accessible medium, was to testify to the enduring social relevance of art as an ordering system. For MacNeice, already interested in poetic form, radio provided a new medium with its own technical limitations, generic possibilities, and productive constraints. In bending his aesthetic ear to the task of political persuasion, MacNeice struck an uneasy balance between what he called the “complex of spiritual intimacies” of lyric poetry and the “group life” of a collaborative mass medium with a large public (*Plays* 406). The “typescripts in the trays” in *Autumn Sequel* become not simply the triplicate trace of administrative ritual, but the foundation of a new form of art, a form whose broad reach and affective depth promised to bind listeners together in defense of a common cultural heritage. From the early features in the *Stones Cry Out* series (1941), through his first verse epic, *Alexander Nevsky* (1941), to the triumphant

Christopher Columbus (1942), MacNeice built ever more complex soundscapes in which a listening audience might lose themselves, if only to rediscover a sense of collective purpose. The formal properties of radio broadcasting served as a bulwark against deterioration on all fronts: from the looseness of “free verse,” the material devastation of the blitz, and even the inherent ephemerality of the broadcast medium itself. Moreover, as the focus of wartime radio propaganda shifted from the resilience of Britons under fire to their plans for the future, MacNeice’s radio parables began to urge that these plans be pursued with an urgency and scope to match both the determination of protagonists like Christopher Columbus and ambition of cultural producers like MacNeice and his collaborators. Landmark iterations of the modernist radio spectacular, MacNeice’s “castles on the air” became his means of “building the falling castle,” instances of collective radio labour for collective social gain.

The Formal Potential of Radio: Collaboration and Communication

Louis MacNeice’s interest in the formal possibilities of radio grew out of an earlier interest in poetic form. Like many poets of his generation, MacNeice turned to more highly structured verse forms as a means of distancing himself from an earlier generation of modernists. Most of the so-called Oxford poets—W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Christopher Isherwood, and Cecil Day Lewis—were, in MacNeice’s words, “obsessed with technique” (*Strings Are False* 114). Edna Longley has put it less psychoanalytically by noting that these poets had, individually and collectively, “devoted considerable architectonic effort to the renewal of traditional forms” (107). Longley’s adjective is apt: throughout MacNeice’s critical writings, structural and spatial terms limn

the boundary between the Pound era and the Auden generation.

MacNeice's most sustained defense of the uses of poetic form is his 1938 volume of autobiographical criticism *Modern Poetry*. Against the Eliotic tradition of "fragments I have shored against my ruin" ("The Waste Land" l.430), MacNeice claims that "the contemplation of a world of fragments becomes boring and Eliot's successors are more interested in tidying up" (*Modern Poetry* 13). Though he admires Eliot, MacNeice recounts that, initially, "I did not like his form, and I found him very obscure" (*MP* 56). Free verse had initiated a crucial break with outdated forms, but MacNeice argues that the pendulum ought to swing back: "There is a chance for poets of today to retain the *élan vital* of Whitman or of Lawrence... but to girder it with a structure supplied partly by reason, partly by emotion intelligently canalized to an end, partly by the mere love of form" (17). MacNeice's vocabulary of form, fragments, girders, structure, and canals implies a dynamic tension between order and disorder, structure and its breakdown. This tension would animate MacNeice's poetry throughout his career, as well as his radio work.

For MacNeice and company, the goal was not to renounce modernism but to renovate it; their plea, to borrow a phrase from Auden, was that readers and listeners might "Look shining / At new styles of architecture, a change of heart" ("Petition," *Collected Poetry* [1945], ll.13-14). Poetic form need not mean the constraints of a straitjacket; as MacNeice and Auden put it, in their jointly-authored poem "Letter to Lord Byron (in *Letters from Iceland* [1937]), "I want a form that's large enough to swim in, / And talk on any subject that I choose" (Auden and MacNeice 19). In a 1941 broadcast as part of the series *Well Versed*, MacNeice noted to L.A.G. Strong, "I'm not sure that a

prescribed form doesn't often help the poet to clarify his original impulse" (qtd. in Marsack 63). Poetic structures enable a thinking through of ideas; rather than hindering expression, formal constraints give shape to ideas and emotions. In the same broadcast MacNeice, quick to qualify the role of formal technique, urged a balance of freedom and discipline. "[T]he point of having rules is that you can break them. The artist needs a limit within which to work and he needs a norm from which to deviate" (qtd. in Skelton 43). Writing in 1946, MacNeice further clarified his personal understanding of the role of poetic form: rather than an arbitrary and inflexible set of rules, "[t]he classical notion of form is the maximum of expressiveness... Rhythmical variations are *not* the death of rhythm" (*SLC* 140-141). Against the stable orthodoxies of metrical regularity, variations offer a productive flux, the mutation necessary for the evolution of meaning. Form is important insofar as it serves lyrical or dramatic expression.

Already interested in a flexible poetic structure, MacNeice embraced radio as a medium through which he could explore new, dynamic notions of form. Among wartime British writers, MacNeice wrote more than anyone else about the formal possibilities of radio, especially radio drama. Though primarily a poet and critic, MacNeice had some experience writing and translating verse plays, including the Irish fascist fantasy *Station Bell* (rejected by Rupert Doone's Group Theatre in 1934), the prescient air-war satire *Out of the Picture* (1937), and a version of the *Agamemnon* (1936). Well before he joined the BBC, he mused in *Modern Poetry* that poets might gain from the experience of writing for different media: "It is particularly likely that they may find a good medium in radio plays... It is very good for the poet that he should employ certain forms which demand collaboration with other craftsmen" (*MP* 196). In 1946, after several years of radio

collaboration, MacNeice reiterated such claims with more authority:

In this age of irreconcilable idioms I have often heard writers hankering for some sort of group life... we cannot but envy playwrights, actors or musical executants. And here again I for one have found this missing group experience, in a valid form, in radio. Radio writers and producers *can* talk shop together because their shop is not, as with poets, a complex of spiritual intimacies but a matter of craftsmanship... we are fully entitled to discuss whether dialogue rings true, whether the dramatic climax is dramatic, how well the whole thing works. This is refreshing for a writer. ("Introduction to *The Dark Tower and Other Radio Scripts*," *Selected Plays* 406-7)

Radio offered MacNeice a community of cultural craftsmanship through which dramatic form could be refined. For a poet who valued craft and tradition, if only as a background against which experiment and variation may be measured, this collaborative atmosphere condensed the processes of trial and error through which works of art are revised.

Collective composition for radio, furthermore, accelerates the entry of a work of art into the public sphere. Measured against the "complex of spiritual intimacies" of lyric poetry, radio broadcasting is an inherently communal and public medium. But in sharing the process of creation, writers must first please their collaborators, who ideally stand as informed surrogates for the audience itself.

As MacNeice notes, radio drama is "a popular art form which is still an art-form" ("Some Comments on Radio Drama," *Plays* 393). In the context of the wartime BBC, whose offerings had to please a large percentage of the British population, this meant that the audience for a given radio play "should be reckoned in millions" if radio drama

wanted to remain relevant (*Plays* 394). As Allan Hepburn has pointed out, this large but transient and temperamental radio audience exerted persistent demands on the radio artist: “the ear of the audience tunes in and out; at any point in a radio talk or drama, one listener might shut off the radio while another listener tunes in. The radio drama, therefore, has no moment when intensity can flag” (*Listening In* 11). In MacNeice’s terms, radio productions could not afford the padding or impressionism of fiction and narrative poetry. “The first virtue of a radio script is construction,” he writes. “[A] radio play or feature must have a dramatic unity; in the jargon of the trade, it must have the proper ‘builds’ and an ‘overall’ shape” (“Some Comments” 396).

Writing for a large radio audience meant a change in approach, but MacNeice refused to see this change as a step backwards from poetry. Rather, radio alters modernist poetics by enforcing a return to aurality: “This subordination in radio of words to words-as-they-are-spoken has for the writer both its regrets and its rewards. He may have to lay aside some of his technical equipment but, provided his piece is well produced, he can count on his words regaining those literary virtues which literature has lost since it has been divorced from the voice” (“Some Comments” 394). For MacNeice, the emphasis on aurality offered by radio mirrored the social role of poets in the pre-print era. This return to oral forms of poetry and drama has the added effect of disarming many of the visual prejudices related to poetry as a read (or unread) form. For the average person, MacNeice writes,

the mere sight of verse on the page (like a menu printed in French) is enough to frighten him off. Verse, however, when coming out of his radio set, will not strike him—at least not too aggressively—as *verse*; instead of prejudging

it as a piece of highbrow trickery he will, like the audience of the primitive bards, listen to the words, or rather to the sounds, as they come and will like them or not according to their emotional impact. (“Some Comments” 396)

Radio becomes a way of sliding art in through the back door; while listeners think they are being entertained in a non-elite way, they are being exposed to poetry in the broadest sense, as language distilled and refined to heightened effect. MacNeice is not very concerned with whether or not the so-called average listener hears the metrical structure of verse, or if she detects nothing more than “a powerful bit of language” (“Some Comments” 396). His emphasis is on a direct engagement with sound, an engagement that he acknowledges will be almost pre-intellectual. Radio, he writes, “appeals to the emotions rather than to the reason and requires a sensitive more than an educated audience” (“Some Comments” 395).

Initially, the risks MacNeice perceived in such a “popular art form” made him wary of contributing to radio. In his autobiography, *Missing Persons*, E.R. Dodds records that MacNeice “thought it [radio] a degrading medium, both vulgar and bureaucratic and not even financially rewarding,” though he adds that MacNeice “may have been a snob at the time” (qtd. in Coulton 44). The problem, as MacNeice saw it, was that the Corporation pandered to its audience; in a 1938 essay entitled “The Play and the Audience,” MacNeice deduced from his own experience of listening to broadcasts that the BBC assumes their public to be “stupid and vulgar” (*Selected Literary Criticism* 91). In the same essay, however, MacNeice bemoans the lack of a shared British mythology and “community creed” (*SLC* 93). Though its programs tended to fall short of his personal aesthetic ideals, broadcasting had the potential to connect MacNeice to millions

of listeners in a way that his poetry never could, by offering them thought-provoking and entertaining programming. A decade later, in a jocular essay entitled “An Alphabet of Literary Prejudices,” MacNeice expanded on the balance a writer must strike in seeking to connect with an audience:

Writing Down to the presumed masses and writing up to a factitious élite are both pusillanimous activities, for in either case the writer is false to his views and to himself. Yet one and the same man can often write honestly and valuably for a small public at one time and for a large one at another; most people after all have lots of different things to say—some esoteric, some ‘popular’. What we should never do is write for any public, real or presumed, which is so alien to ourselves that to meet it we have to lie. (*SLC* 147)

Though he does not mention radio directly in this essay, MacNeice’s scheme matches the split between the small public of his poetry and the large public of his radio career. From 1941 until his death in 1963, MacNeice struggled to balance the demands of popular success at the microphone and critical success through his poetry; moreover, he sought to infuse each medium with the other’s aesthetic values, rejuvenating poetry through colloquialism and radio through flashes of philosophical meditation and dense imagery.

With the advent of the war, MacNeice knew that radio offered the most efficient means for a writer to contribute to the political and cultural environment of Britain. Throughout the late 1930s, radio was ubiquitous, its instrumental application to the impending war inescapable. The “Cushendun” section of his poem “The Closing Album” (1940) begins with a landscape before slowly zooming in on a cottage and, finally, on a single room:

Only in the dark green room beside the fire,
 With the curtains drawn against the winds and waves
 There is a little box with a well-bred voice:

What a place to talk of War.

(“The Closing Album II: Cushendun,” ll.13-16)

As in many accounts of radio during the war, the medium is here presented as a domestic intrusion. Private individuals might hope to keep the war from their lives, but radio penetrates the walls of the home and brings the political to bear on daily life. This intrusion is, for the self-proclaimed independent intellectual, an unsettling displacement of autonomy:

No wonder many would renounce their birthright,
 The responsibility of moral choice,
 And sit with a mess of pottage taking orders
 Out of a square box with a mad voice—
 Lies on the air endlessly repeated
 Turning the air to fog,
 Blanket on blanket of lie, no room to breathe or fidget...

(*Autumn Journal* XVIII: 105-111)

This suffocating atmosphere imposes a dilemma: whether to withdraw from public engagement, or take up the tactics of the Axis propagandists. Such tactics risk forging false gods, should the British “model ourselves upon the enemy, / A howling radio for our paraclete” (*AJ* VII.71-2). The Greek term “paraclete” is deployed ironically here: in Christian theology, a paraclete means an advocate or a comforter and is usually applied to

the Holy Spirit or, more rarely, to Christ. Etymologically, it derives from *παρα* (*para*, alongside or analogous to) + *κλητός* (*klitós*, called out or invited) (*OED*). The ironic inversion is thus doubled: the howling radio offers little comfort, and is an agent of acoustic interpellation rather than an intercessor invited by the listener.

Determined that radio was both nefarious and inescapable, MacNeice had channelled its cultural resources long before the war started, in his stage play *Out of the Picture* (1937). Written for Rupert Doone's Group Theatre in London, *Out of the Picture* is a parable about the coming of war and its effects on both sensitive, artistic individuals and acquisitive cultural powerbrokers. Set in London, the plot concerns a frustrated painter, Portright, whose sole completed painting is auctioned off to a wealthy film star who has decided to begin collecting art as a means of bettering herself. The denouement of this plot, however, is scuppered by a sequence of events: the declaration of war against an unnamed foreign power; the subsequent total destruction of Paris by aerial bombardment; and, in the final scene, an air raid on London. Throughout the play, the radio plays a role not unlike a tragic chorus, offering commentary on the action, and framing the day-to-day concerns of the characters onstage in terms of the impending global conflagration.

The play opens with an onstage radio blaring news of impending war, until Portright shuts it off. Though Portright will not listen, the audience must; between scenes and acts, a Radio Announcer and a "Listener-In" stand before the curtain, offering a blend of comic relief and oblique commentary on the action of the play. While the Listener-In desperately turns the dial, searching for entertainment of value, the Radio Announcer steps up to the microphone as a succession of broadcasting "types"—a

crooner, an abstruse professor giving a talk, a jazz singer—and intermittently returns to his announcer persona just long enough to narrate the continued approach of war.

Between the second and third scenes of the play, however, broadcaster and listener enact the fraught symbiosis by which radio operates:

*[...LISTENER-IN marches in, L., and stands to attention beside his radio.
The ANNOUNCER marches in, R., and stands to attention beside the
microphone. They stand silently for a minute. Then, to a drum beat they
make one a right, the other a left, turn and stand facing each other, still
at attention.]*

LISTENER-IN. I only take what you can give.

RADIO-ANNOUNCER. I only give you what you want.

LISTENER-IN. You who supply the meaning.

RADIO-ANNOUNCER. You who supply the matter.

LISTENER-IN. Is it an important matter?

RADIO-ANNOUNCER. Is it an attractive meaning?

LISTENER-IN. Come to me, crystallize out of the air.

RADIO-ANNOUNCER. Hypocrite auditeur, mon semblable, mon frère. (45-6)

In breaking the auditory divide enforced by broadcasting, announcer and listener subvert the usual one-way path of information via the radio. Radio interpellates its listeners as “hypocrite auditeurs,” blending the supposed passivity of listening with the moral performance involved in deceit (keeping in mind that “hypocrisy” derives from *hupokrisis* [ὕπόκρισις], the acting of a part onstage [*OED*]). Though not properly an instance of Brechtian alienation, this moment invites the audience to consider the collapse

of such divisions of agency in the theatre and in the audience's relationship to the radio in their own homes. As a poet, MacNeice yearned for a direct relationship such as he models in *Out of the Picture*; in *Modern Poetry*, he laments that "[a] poet should always be 'collaborating' with his public, but this public, in the mass, cannot make itself heard and he has to guess at its requirements and criticisms" (MP 196). The result of this silence on the part of the poet's audience can be a literary solipsism that denies the role played by reading publics in the generation of meaning among and between circulating texts.

Radio, of course, does not offer any more democratic mode of interaction; the dialogue between Listener-In and Radio-Announcer is as fanciful as any between reader and writer. MacNeice's staging of this dialogue is a fantasy of connection, and of the possible political repercussions such connection might bring about. As they march together and embrace, the pair begins to chant an indictment of sensationalism in the press:

BOTH: The news that blows around the streets
 Or vibrates over the air
 Whether it is rape, embezzlement or murder
 Seems frivolous, if not farcical, without dignity.
 Whereas the actual fact before it becomes news
 Is often tragic even when commonplace. (46)

The fusion of the distraction-hungry listener and the callous announcer serves to rehabilitate both, as they realize their mutual implication in a distortion of daily tragedy. MacNeice seems to imply that the consumers and producers of radio entertainment can

only redeem themselves by remembering that the voices coming through the wireless are not pure fancy, but the echo of a world tearing itself apart. In MacNeice's ideal world, radio literacy would entail radio empathy. In this formulation, the visible presence of actors on stage reminds the audience of the bodies at stake in the communication of news and entertainment. By staging a vision of empathetic broadcasting practices in a live theatrical setting with visibly embodied actors, MacNeice seems to glean some of the ethical relationships established when text, audience, and performer share physical space.

MacNeice's journey towards radio broadcasting was thus characterized by conflict and self-doubt. The same medium that promised to fuse a nation together through a shared body of cultural production could be pedantic, intrusive, and ideologically suspect. Involvement in radio broadcasting seemed fraught with risks: participation in large-scale hectoring of a populace uninterested in his art; dilution of that art in a misguided attempt to reach a broad audience; collusion in a war whose motivations and goals MacNeice could not bring himself to endorse. "The world no doubt needs propaganda," MacNeice wrote in response to a 1938 issue of *New Verse* on "Commitment," "but propaganda (unless you use the term, as many do, very loosely indeed) is not the poet's job. He is not the loudspeaker of society, but something much more like its still, small voice" ("A Statement," *Selected Literary Criticism* 98). But as war moved from possibility to reality, and as Britain itself came under attack, MacNeice began to see the conflict as a means of resolving many of the problems he saw as plaguing Britain. His participation became a means of contributing to the cultural and aesthetic re-shaping of the country.

MacNeice was no ardent patriot, and indeed spent the first 16 months of the war

mostly in Northern Ireland and America, uncertain as to what kind of a contribution, if any, he should make to the British war effort. After some hesitation, he came to understand that his reservations about Britain's colonial past and its economically unjust present were no reason to sit passively by while Europe fell under Nazi rule. In a letter to E.R. Dodds from 19 November 1939, MacNeice writes:

Obviously there is plenty wrong with the British Empire & especially India & no doubt our present government have no intention of mending this state of affairs. However the war they are supposed to be running may mend it in spite of them. I find myself liable to use things like India or interferences with liberty at home to rationalise my own cowardice. It does however seem to be clear that, in this choice of evils, Mr. Chamberlain's England is preferable to Nazi Germany (& anyhow it won't if people have any sense, remain Mr. C's England). (*Selected Letters* 366)

Though by the fall of 1939 he had realized that to abstain from supporting the war was ethically problematic, the extended ennui of the Phoney War robbed this newfound political commitment of any urgency. Furthermore, a commitment to teaching poetry at Cornell, a failed romance with American writer Eleanor Clark, and a serious illness kept MacNeice in America until December of 1940 despite his conviction that he "was missing History" (*Letters* 417). When he did return, he applied to serve in the Navy but was disqualified due to poor eyesight. He thus began "flirting with radio," as he puts it in a letter to Clark in January of 1941. He found himself "[h]aving to do something to live & it's not as if anyone else wanted me—being neither a technician nor particularly (as yet) able-bodied" (*Letters* 418). Thus partly by inclination, partly by accident, and partly

by a sense of duty, MacNeice found himself among the many writers drawn to the BBC during the war.

The Stones Cry Out: Towards an Architecture of the Nation

Upon joining the BBC in January of 1941, MacNeice gravitated towards the same intellectual concerns about form, architecture, and history that marked his poetic and critical output of the 1930s. Among his first features were contributions to a new series called *The Stones Cry Out*, which sought to dramatize, for an American audience, the significant architectural and historical losses suffered by London and other cities under German bombing raids.³⁰ Over the course of thirty-five programs each running fifteen minutes, broadcast between 5 May and 29 December 1941, *The Stones Cry Out* used dramatic sequences, voice-over narration, music, and excerpts from literary and historical sources to bring to life the legacy of buildings lost in the blitz. These buildings were to be metonyms for larger cultural structures; Assistant Director of Features Lawrence Gilliam defined the program's desired effect as "a clear and strong statement on the theme [of] traditions and values of this country under fire from the enemy" (Memo to Peter Watts, 9 September 1941; File R45/78). While most of the buildings eulogized in this programme were recognizable symbols of national history and identity, the producers also chose a few less likely edifices: a working class couple's new flat, for example, or the Café de

³⁰ The broadcasts were typically recorded live and transmitted on the Eastern Service (to Asia, including the subcontinent) at 14:15 Greenwich Mean Time on a Monday, and rebroadcast (from the recording) on the North American service at 02:30 GMT the next day. Rebroadcasts would take place the following Sunday (18:45 GMT) and Monday (06:45 GMT) on the African service and the Pacific service, respectively. Though these broadcasts were heard around the world, internal memoranda indicate that the primary intended audience was American. In a memo to the BBC's Controller (Programmes), Lawrence Gilliam described *Stones* as designed "to capture for propaganda reasons the almost pathological American interest in true bombing stories" (30 September 1941; File R45/78: Recorded Programmes: "The Stones Cry Out" 1941, BBC WAC; hereafter cited as File R45/78).

Paris in London. MacNeice's contributions were features on Dr. Samuel Johnson's house (the first *Stones* broadcast, 5 May 1941), Westminster Abbey (26 May), Madame Tussaud's wax museum (2 June), St. Paul's Cathedral (23 June), the House of Commons (7 July), the Temple Bar (1 September), the Royal College of Surgeons (29 September), "A Belfast Home" (27 October), and the Plymouth Barbican (24 November 1941).

As with much of MacNeice's radio work, *The Stones Cry Out* fell under the rubric not of drama but of "features," a category specific to the BBC. In theory, the distinction was simple: as Gilliam put it, "Features deal with fact, Drama with fiction" (qtd. in Drakakis 8). In the words of Dallas Bower, who produced MacNeice's *Alexander Nevsky* and *Christopher Columbus*, along with over 20 films: "[A] 'feature' in radio was the exact opposite of its counterpart in cinema: a radio 'feature' was the equivalent of a film 'documentary'... The factual radio feature programme—and the word applied equally to current and historical fact—and the documentary film are synonymous" ("Sound and Vision" 97). In practice, however, the line between drama and features could be very blurry indeed. Though features were supposed to draw from actual events and ideas, whether historical, political, scientific, or otherwise, their eventual production on the air could be in the form of highly fictionalized dramatizations. *Alexander Nevsky*, though a spectacularly rendered imagining of the Russian prince's victory over invading Teutonic knights, written in verse, based on a film, and complete with a dramatic score by Prokofiev and many narrative embellishments, fell under the category of "Feature" because of its origin in historical fact. Similarly, MacNeice's *Christopher Columbus* would be produced through the Features arm of the Department of Features and Drama, though in later writings MacNeice would refer to it as a radio play (*Plays* 3).

Given this conceptual blurriness, some radio artists distinguished features and drama by virtue of their technical origins. Douglas Cleverdon, who among other works produced David Jones' *In Parenthesis* (1948) and Dylan Thomas' *Under Milk Wood* (1954), describes radio plays as those broadcasts which inherit their structural principles—divisions between acts and scenes, use of dialogue, establishment of setting—from the traditions of the stage. A radio feature, on the other hand, is

any constructed programme [...] that derives from the technical apparatus of radio (microphone, control panel, recording gear, loud-speaker). It can combine any sound elements—words, music, sound effects—in any form or mixture of forms—documentary, actuality, dramatized, poetic, musico-dramatic. It has no rules determining what can or cannot be done. And though it may be in dramatic form, it has no need of a dramatic plot.

(Cleverdon 17)

For Cleverdon, then, features approach most closely what might be called “pure radio”: an art form born of the particular technological possibilities of the medium itself, free to borrow and abandon the generic and formal elements of other art forms at will. R.D. Smith offers a similar assessment of the creative potential of features, claiming that, by the late 1930s, all of the major devices of radio drama had been established, including internal monologue and sonic “flashbacks.” Features, on the other hand, were free to incorporate a greater diversity of techniques under a greater variety of guises (“Castles on the Air” 88-9). Anything that was not a formally conventional drama could be brought under the umbrella of Features; *Under Milk Wood*, a dramatized long poem without a strong narrative plot, offers just one example. MacNeice, in later plays, including *The*

Dark Tower, brought some of the flexibility of the radio feature to bear on drama. He used cross-fades and sound cues to signal subtle shifts in time and space not motivated by conventional plot demands.

Over the course of his career at the BBC, MacNeice produced programs representative of both the theatrical heritage and technological possibilities of radio art. His writings on radio, however, express a commitment to the dramatic potential of features. In his introduction to the printed version of *Christopher Columbus* in 1944, he writes: “The radio feature is a dramatised presentation of actuality but its author should be much more than a *rapporteur* or a cameraman; he must select his actuality material with great discrimination and then keep control of it so that it subserves a single dramatic effect” (“Some Comments” 393). As a leading member of the generation of artists who elevated documentary to a creative art form—a generation which included Christopher Isherwood, John Grierson, Humphrey Jennings, and W.H. Auden—and as a poet whose own *Autumn Journal* demonstrated the dramatic potential of historical *rapportage*, MacNeice writes from experience. Historical truth must at times be managed and massaged to fit the demands of a given form, whether lyric poetry or narrative drama. Radio scholar John Drakakis has noted that radio features of the 1930s and 1940s drew much of their affective power from this tension between the documentary and dramatic poles. Although a given feature was always supposed to begin as a representation of an external or anterior reality, “emphasis was placed upon its full use of the technical resources of radio to accomplish its aim,” technical resources including actors, music, and sound effects, and the technology required to balance these resources (Drakakis 8).

Embedded in the world outside the studio and able to combine the documentary

and dramatic modes to greatest effect, features often served British political and military interests more directly than radio drama could. In seeking to attune American audiences to the material and cultural damage caused by the blitz, *The Stones Cry Out* did not, indeed could not, report directly from the raids in journalistic style; aside from obvious questions of safety, field recording equipment was too cumbersome to take out during actual bombing raids. Furthermore, British authorities often sought to delay the release of specific information about damaged buildings so as to impede German assessments of the accuracy of their attacks.³¹ *Stones* therefore worked retrospectively, at a remove of weeks or months from the bombings themselves, selecting the most culturally and politically significant buildings for commemoration once censorship concerns had abated. More than simply historical dramatizations, however, the *Stones* broadcasts attempted to link architectural and socio-cultural history in a narrative extending from early modern England (“London’s Oldest House,” 15 December 1941) to contemporary wartime society. Buildings become vessels of national identity, housing the political, intellectual, religious, and linguistic elements of British culture; their importance resides in the living link they form to the past, rather than their status as historical relics annexed to a dead past.

As Peter McDonald and Jon Stallworthy have pointed out, MacNeice had a longstanding interest in architecture as a means of inscribing personal or collective histories (McDonald, *Contexts* 27 and *Serious Poetry* 167; Stallworthy, *Louis MacNeice* 63, 132). In his lyrical autobiography *The Strings Are False*, MacNeice recounts the

³¹ For example, an unsigned carbon copy of a letter from the Features Department (possibly though not certainly from Gilliam) to Sir John Forsdyke of the British Museum, asked whether the latter’s refusal to cooperate in producing a *Stones* broadcast about damage to the Museum was due to “the reluctance of the Ministry of Home Security to release the news that the Museum has been damaged” (Letter dated 9 July 1941; File R45/78, BBC WAC).

death of his mother, ill and absent from the MacNeice home for some years. He recalls his father telling the children that she had passed away, and remembers that he did not cry: “I felt very guilty at being so little moved but decided that when I grew up I would build my mother a monument. And everyone would know that I had built it” (*SAF* 53). That the monument ended up being a literary one only reinforces the parallels between material and poetic memorialization. The young MacNeice turned to architecture as a means of staving off loss, but also as a means of registering it; monuments allow us to transfer the pain of death and mutability into a permanent language of stone. Much later, documenting the effects of Falangist bombing in Barcelona in *The Strings Are False*, MacNeice would relate the “stinking, berubbled desolation” of the city to the human cost of war: “The houses were like skulls without eyes, without jaws, there was no more flesh in the world” (184). As buildings crumble, they take on the form of the fragile human bodies they are designed to house and protect.

If bombed buildings stand in for the human lives lost to war, the memorialization of those buildings might offer a way of redeeming their loss in the interest of a greater national and cultural narrative. The opening episode in *The Stones Cry Out*, about the bombing of Samuel Johnson’s home (“17 Gough Square,” also titled “Dr. Johnson Takes It”), offers an example. The broadcast purports to document the damage done to a site of literary history, but MacNeice extends his assessment to include the metaphorical assault of German bombs against a culture, a language, and a national ideology that he identifies as peculiarly English. The program opens with two voices—one identified only as “Male,” the other “Female”—leading the listener towards Johnson’s bomb-damaged home. As the Male/Female voices fade out, another pair of voices begins to recite as if

from a dictionary:

Two Voices:	(1 st Voice)	(2 nd Voice)
(<u>second echoing first</u>)	A for Art	A for Arson
	B for Book-case	B for Bomb
	C for Courage	C for Corpse
	D for Dictionary	D for Death
	E for English	E for Evil
	F for the Future	F for Fire

(*SCO* 1: “17 Gough Square,” 1)

While the script gives no directions as to tone or characterization for either of these voices, the device of Johnson’s Dictionary enables a clear polarization in terms of cultural production versus material destruction, moral integrity versus moral corruption, and possibility versus its negation. The use of “English” for the letter “E” speaks, of course, to Johnson’s importance to the history of the language, but the opposition between “English” and “Evil” establishes a moral position that is quickly elaborated. As the unnamed “dictionary” voices fade out, the Female Voice relates the story of the night of the bombing to her fellow narrator. Struck by the odd behaviour of the present-day caretaker of the Johnson house—a woman who repeatedly refers to Dr. Johnson as “my old man” despite the centuries since his death—the Male Voice exclaims:

Male Voice: ‘My old man?’ The English are an odd race, aren’t they?

Female Voice: The old man was.

Male Voice: And typical at that. That extraordinary blend of common

sense and eccentricity. Both alarmingly sane and tragically neurotic. (*SCO* 1: “17 Gough Square” 3)

Having connected Dr. Johnson’s “typical” oddity to that of his present-day caretaker, and indeed of the entire English “race,” MacNeice moves to explore more contentious forms of eccentricity. Johnson was, as the Female Voice explains, a figure of contradiction; though a staunch believer in the monarchy and in hereditary rank and an opponent of 18th-century radicalism in such thinkers as Rousseau and Voltaire, Johnson nonetheless strongly opposed slavery and advocated for the liberty of at least one runaway Jamaican slave (3-4). The narrators compare this with his avowed hatred of the Scottish, a bias belied by his repeated hiring of Scots as his amanuenses. As the Male Voice says, “it was very English of Johnson to act like that. Prejudiced on principle and tolerant in practice” (4).

The frankness of such an admission is jarring today; few listeners would openly countenance a policy of “prejudiced on principle” no matter how “tolerant in practice.” But for MacNeice’s intended American audience, this brand of honesty may well have been refreshing. Questions of British hypocrisy in fighting fascism while retaining a vast empire of subject peoples were a persistent irritant for those attempting to rally American opinion in support of the war (see Weigold, 9-40 and *passim*). By corralling Johnson’s prejudice within the realm of anecdote—he hates the Scots but hires them anyway; he hates French radicalism but takes concrete actions against injustice—MacNeice domesticates an otherwise unwieldy and problematic national tendency. An empire of colonies strung around the equator seems built on a “prejudiced principle” of racial superiority; better to shift the focus to the “tolerant practice” of benign authoritarian rule.

Put in the vocabulary of Dr. Johnson's dictionary, imperialism isn't Evil; it's English. Furthermore, linking the "acceptably" prejudiced Samuel Johnson to the struggle to abolish slavery simultaneously reminds American listeners of their own belated (indeed, unfinished) attempts to rectify the founding injustice of human bondage.³²

This softening of perceived anti-democratic practice by Britain recurs throughout MacNeice's *Stones Cry Out* broadcasts. On a tour of Madame Tussaud's wax museum (*SCO* episode 5), for example, the wax figures of William Gladstone, Winston Churchill, and William Pitt come to life and repeat famous phrases of moral and military perseverance alongside Abraham Lincoln, Voltaire, and Joan of Arc, while a gallery of Nazi statues provide suitably anti-democratic contrast. More pointedly, in episode 10 ("The House of Commons"), MacNeice takes up the familiar view of the British legislature as the mother of all parliaments, rather than as one half of a semi-hereditary institution completed by the House of Lords. Drawing from the speeches of British parliamentarians, MacNeice assembles quotations that speak directly to allegations of a British democratic deficit. He includes Edmund Burke's speech advocating on behalf of American wishes for autonomy in 1775:

The people of the colonies are descendants of Englishmen. England, sir, is a nation which still I hope respects, and formerly adored her freedom. The colonists emigrated from you, when this part of your character was most predominant; and they took this bias and direction the moment they parted from your hands. They are therefore not only devoted to liberty but to liberty

³² MacNeice's frank assessment of Samuel Johnson's contributions to English-language culture proved appealing to more than just American and British listeners; the Bodleian library preserves a letter from the London representative of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, inquiring whether MacNeice had received the "previous letters" requesting permission for the ABC to rebroadcast "Dr. Johnson Takes It" (15 October 1941; Uncatalogued Papers, Box 9, Bodleian Manuscripts collection).

according to English ideas, and on English principles. (*SCO* 10: “House of Commons,” 7)

Though MacNeice borrows Burke’s speech to appeal to the shared history of British and American democratic traditions, the words gain a measure of strength by their willingness to admit imperfection. The contrast between British “respect” for freedom in 1775, as against a previous “adoration,” acknowledges that democratization is not teleological. Similarly, while the reference to “people of the colonies” (by which Burke means Americans) risks drawing attention to the lack of rights of colonial subjects within the present-day British Empire, it opens up the possibility that, like the Americans of the 18th century, British colonial subjects might find their own freedom.

Similar undercurrents of underrepresentation haunt MacNeice’s use of Lord John Russell’s 1831 speech introducing the Reform Bill (1832), in which Russell demands of the House:

You must show that you are determined not to be the representatives of a small class, or of a particular interest; but to form a body, who, representing the people, can fairly call on the people to support the future burthens of the country, and to struggle with the future difficulties which it may have to encounter. (*SCO* 10: “House of Commons” 7)

In reaching out to an American audience, MacNeice is at pains to emphasize the slow evolution of Britain towards full democracy. He downplays democratic shortcomings both abroad and at home—including, for example, the fact that full suffrage for women over 21 was only attained with the Representation of the People Act of 1928 (Rose, *Which People’s War?* 84). Such overtures to the ongoing process of democratization

were vital to furthering the propaganda agenda of *The Stones Cry Out* in the United States, and complemented a strategic selectivity of commissions on the part of the producers; in a letter from October of 1941, producer John Glyn-Jones dissuades an eager would-be contributor to the series from writing a program about bomb damage to Eton College on account of what Glyn-Jones calls the “rather... tickling problem” that “there is at present a certain amount of feeling that the rich in Britain are making the poor fight their war.” Glyn-Jones notes that this problematic view is compounded by the fact that “our education system is an object of considerable criticism, on the grounds of class privilege, particularly in the United States” (13 October 1941; File R45/78).

Given American skepticism about the British political system, parliamentary endorsements of democracy may seem unreliable testimony in the effort to mobilize sympathy for the plight of bombed British cities. These endorsements, however, fit into a larger argument that returns frequently in MacNeice’s narratives of architectural and intellectual resistance to the blitz: the notion that rhetoric need not be empty, and that words exert a powerful, indeed constitutive, influence on the world. The instrumental power of language is woven throughout *The Stones Cry Out*, as though MacNeice were attempting to reassure himself and his listeners that all this speech could have concrete effects on the war around them. In the first episode, for example, Johnson’s dictionary offers a positive lexicon to counter the German lexicon of destruction, including “Art” against “Arson,” “Life” against “Lies,” “Meaning” against “Murder” (*SCO* 1: “17 Gough Square” 1, 6). In each of these lexical pairs, generative nouns heal the damage done to material and semantic stabilities by the Nazis through fire, deceit, and death. In a later episode on the bombing of “The Temple,” site of two of the four Inns of Court in

London, a voice identified as “Lawyer” becomes so incensed by the inflammatory words of a “German Voice” that he levels a symbolic charge against Adolf Hitler:

Lawyer: You, Adolf Hitler, are indicted for murder.

German Voice: Murder is only a word. It makes no difference.

Lawyer: It will make a difference. (*SCO* 12: “The Temple,” 11-12)

If the lawyer’s protests ring somewhat with desperation—what can words hope to achieve against bombs?—it is worth remembering that the point of *The Stones Cry Out* was to insist not on the military supremacy of the British, but on the value of cultural institutions shared by the intended American audience. Overstating the certainty of victory by Britain alone might have generated an attitude of complacency at a time when the nation needed allies more than admirers. Instead, *The Stones Cry Out* sent a message to America that the British could name injustice, but without help they may not be able to defeat it. The struggle for global opinion taking place through broadcasting was, after all, a struggle over whose version of reality would be accepted as true; by applying both Johnson’s dictionary and the British legal system to the struggle against material destruction, MacNeice claims for language a denotative agency to name and describe the world with accuracy.

MacNeice’s sense of the possibilities of radio as sound art grew quickly as he moved towards producing his own scripts, which he did by September of 1941. With MacNeice, however, a breadth of intellectual training complemented his technical skills; as a working poet and translator, a former academic, and the son of a clergyman, he could work quickly to integrate a wide range of literary and scholarly discourses in his broadcasts. Furthermore, personal experiences allowed MacNeice to draw on

observations and impressions from different raids, even different wars, into a single broadcast. In “Westminster Abbey,” for example, MacNeice evokes the image of people “Dwelling in darkness in broken houses, / With empty windows like the sockets of skulls” (7), a metaphor that appears first, in slightly modified form, in both *The Strings Are False* (184) and *Autumn Journal* (XXIII.15-16) as a description of bombed buildings in Barcelona. Depending on the direction he wanted to take a script about a given bombing raid, MacNeice would borrow and re-use his own impressions of another event, provided it served the greater dramatic and propagandistic truth at which the program was aiming.

One gets a sense of his working methods from journals preserved at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center in Austin. On a few soot-smudged pages of a small green school notebook, MacNeice documented what appear to be first-hand impressions of the bombing of St. Paul’s Cathedral (damaged 10 October 1940 and 17 April 1941, though MacNeice was only in Britain for the later attack). The journal begins abruptly:

lights on in chancel!

Incendiaries—blue effulgence—burning high outside window above stone
gallery—dome shudders—fgments fall. Fires!

[...]

reflected fire in Thames

flair of sparks (of snow) above N. transept

(HRC; MacNeice, Louis. Works [location B16], page 5)

Both the physical traces of ash on the pages and the linguistic signs of haste (“fgments” for “fragments,” “flare” misspelled as “flair”) testify to MacNeice’s physical presence

during the raid. As with his experiences from the Spanish Civil War, he borrows imagery from the April 17 bombing of St. Paul's for his account of Westminster Abbey broadcast just a few weeks later; the "flair of sparks (of snow)" over St. Paul's becomes "The sparks are whirling and falling like a fall of snow" ("SCO 4: Westminster Abbey" 9).

These raid excursions, though vital for procuring material for the *Stones* broadcasts, were often dangerous and could be disturbing. MacNeice relates this process of firsthand documentation in *Autumn Sequel* (1954):

The skies were rent
And I took notes; delicate whippets of fire
Hurdled the streets, the cockney firmament

Ran with flamingoes' blood and Dido's pyre
Burnt high and wide and randy over the Thames
While a mixed metaphor of high tension wire

Capsized, still clutching heaven by the hems
And ripping off a star. Devlin and I
Fished in this troubled air...
[...]

We changed our tack
And jinked through gutted shop and staring church
Prospecting for more relevant bric-à-brac,

Copy and yet more copy. (*AS* IV:79-87, 103-6)

Though concerned that their “big slick words” might be inadequate testimony to the traumas that London was experiencing during the blitz, MacNeice (along with Jack Dillon, his BBC co-worker who appears in *Autumn Sequel* as Devlin) pressed on with his documentary observations (*AS* IV:112). “Thus humbled and exalted day by day,” he writes, “We scratched among the debris” (*AS* IV: 121-2). Their discoveries could be grisly: while combing the ruins of the Royal College of Surgeons (which became Episode 22 of *Stones* on 29 September), they came across floating specimens from the College’s collections, including a giant panda, “His stomach stripped for the scalpel” (*AS* IV, l. 92). More distressingly, they found, “with grave / Eyes neatly closed and small wrists neatly crossed ... an unborn / But eighteenth century baby, groomed and glossed / Like a small soapstone Buddha” (*AS* IV, l.93-9). The dispersal of centuries of scientific collection into the streets of London was a stark reminder of the tendency of the blitz to lay bare personal and collective histories as it tore down the stone walls that housed them.

As might be expected, the *Stones* broadcasts themselves tended towards the triumphant rather than the unsettling. Perhaps the most successful features in the series are MacNeice’s twin homages to London’s most famous churches. Director of European Services R.A. Rendall singled out both “Westminster Abbey” (*SCO* episode 4) and “St. Paul’s” (*SCO* episode 8) as the best of a series that “goes from strength to strength”; “St. Paul’s,” in particular, Rendall cited as “quite first rate” (qtd. in memorandum from Lawrence Gilliam to producers D.G. Bridson, Jack Dillon, and John Glyn-Jones, 15 July 1941; File R45/78). “Westminster Abbey” was so successful that MacNeice expanded the

15-minute *Stones* script to a 45-minute broadcast on the Home Service, which aired on 7 September 1941, the anniversary of the first major blitz of London. In turn, this extended broadcast generated so much interest within England that the BBC commissioned novelist Antonia White to write a companion piece, praising MacNeice's script and the Abbey itself equally, for the benefit of listeners outside Britain through *London Calling*, the Corporation's overseas weekly magazine ("A Great Stone Ship" 16-7).³³ The strength and popularity of these broadcasts lies in their balance of the familiar and the unexpected, as they interweave citations and familiar historical imagery with unexpected comparisons, temporal and spatial shifts, and documentary-style sound effects to generate a sonic space unconstrained by the fixity imposed on visual dramatic forms.

The tone of "Westminster Abbey" strikes the listener (or, in this case, the reader) as much less conversational than the earlier broadcast on Dr. Johnson's house. Indeed, the program begins with a consideration of sound and silence that will inform its increasingly dense soundscape as the story develops. Following the announcer's introduction, the listener is greeted by a sound not heard for almost two years:

Peal of bells

1st Speaker: The bells that you hear are the bells of Westminster Abbey.

2nd Speaker: But they are not ringing today.

1st Speaker: You are listening to the bells of peace-time.

³³ During the war years, *London Calling* provided overseas BBC listeners with program listings, transcripts of selected broadcasts, and original articles. Starting in August of 1940, the Overseas Service produced two editions, one directed at North American listeners and another at listeners in a vast area including Asia, Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. The publication played an important role in conditioning (and reporting) listeners' responses to broadcasts and to the events of the war. At the height of his popularity over the summer of 1940, for example, J.B. Priestley featured in photographs in 4 out of 5 consecutive issues, indicating that the BBC wished to capitalize on his sudden fame. As British victories accumulated after 1941, emphasis shifted from the civilian experience of the war, characterized by preparedness and perseverance, to military successes and issues of postwar planning.

2nd Speaker: For in Britain today the pealing of bells is forbidden.

1st Speaker: And the Westminster bells are silent today[.]

The peal of bells ceases

2nd Speaker: And Westminster Abbey today is the victim of war.

Slight Pause.

1st Speaker: Listen to the silence in the aisles –

Like a great stone ship becalmed in the night...

(SCO 4: “Westminster Abbey” 1-2)

The hint of a pause is richly suggestive; while dead air is normally considered anathema to any broadcast, its use here opens an auditory space of reflection. A tiny metonym for the greater silence that haunts the bell towers of Britain, this pause offers listeners the chance to meditate on the sonic absences that characterize the war. This gap in broadcast sound becomes more powerful still when we consider that urban silence is rarely if ever total; even the experience of domestic listening may fill a radio silence with the ambient noise of home, street, or bombers overhead. Like a small foreshadowing of John Cage’s famous 4’33”, the consideration of mute bells allows the listening environment to become the performance, however briefly.

As the broadcast continues, MacNeice follows the meditative solemnity of this tiny silence with verse in a similarly solemn vein. Two narrators begin to set the scene of the Westminster bombing in dialogue that unfolds like an incantation:

1st Speaker: On the night of the tenth of May –

The German Air Force flew over London.

2nd speaker: Fire on the City of London and fire on the City of

Westminster.

1st speaker: Fire on the House of Commons and fire on the Abbey.

2nd speaker: And the H.E. bombs –

1st Speaker: A noise to waken the dead.

2nd Speaker: The dead?

1st Speaker: The dead who sleep in the Abbey.

Knights and statesmen, poets and peers.

The famous dead of seven English centuries.

(“Westminster Abbey” 2)

In “Westminster Abbey,” as in later dramas, MacNeice uses a kind of flexible verse whose strength derives from a balance between metrical poise and metrical breakdown.³⁴ Though not strictly regular, the initial lines of this passage place three- and two-syllable feet in productive tension (“|On the níght | of the ténth | of Máy / The | Gэрman | Aír Force | fléw over | Lónon |”). Without a regular syllabic count to structure the line as a whole, the rhythmic centre of these lines emerges from the heavily accented syllables themselves. Further tension arises between balanced, anaphoric lines like “Fire on the City of London and fire on the City of Westminster,” which emphasize the historic places under threat, and grammatically incomplete lines (“And the H.E. bombs –,” “The dead?”) whose terseness signals the destructive potential of the threat itself. But the mnemonic nationalism of the Abbey returns to stabilize the verse. Listeners are reminded of “Knights and statesmen, poets and peers. / The famous dead of seven English centuries.” These lines, though varied in stress, impart a sense of completeness and dignity to the

³⁴ MacNeice used a similarly elastic iambic verse form in *Autumn Journal*, expanding and contracting the length of lines and altering the rhyme scheme to prevent the roughly 2,000-line poem from descending into the monotony of metrical regularity.

memory of British nation-builders.

Much of the broadcast relies not on MacNeice's own verse but on excerpts from scripture. As MacNeice himself admitted in a letter written to E.R. Dodds on 26 May 1941, he composed "Westminster Abbey" by "plugging the Bible" (*Letters* 436). MacNeice's self-deprecation aside, the quotations provide an evocative structure around which he can build his account of the Abbey. As the sound of fire-bells rises up behind them, the narrators invite the audience to listen not only to "the silence of the aisles," but also to "the Echoes of English history," of "great men's funerals," and of "everyday people praying and singing" (*SCO* 4: "Westminster Abbey" 3). At this point, the voice of a preacher fades up, reading from Ecclesiasticus 44:

Organ Music.

Preacher: Let us now praise famous men and our fathers that begot us...

1st Speaker: Who lie under the nave and the transepts and the chapels behind
the sanctuary.

Preacher: Such as did bear rule in their kingdoms –

1st Speaker: Edward the Confessor, Henry the Third, Edward the First,
Edward the Third, Richard the Second, Henry the Fifth, Henry the
Sixth and Henry the Seventh;

2nd Speaker: Edward the Sixth and Mary Tudor, Queen Elizabeth and Mary
Queen of Scots.

Preacher: Men renowned for their power, giving counsel by their
understanding–

1st Speaker: William Pitt, Earl of Chatham; Pitt the Younger and Charles

James Fox –

Preacher: ...leaders of the people by their counsels –

2nd Speaker: William Ewart Gladstone and Benjamin Disraeli –

Preacher: ...and by their knowledge of learning meat [*sic*] for the people,
wise and eloquent in their instructions.

1st Speaker: William Wilberforce and Richard Cobden, Sir Isaac Newton and

Charles Darwin – (“Westminster Abbey” 3-4)

The insertion of recognizable scripture plays a threefold structural role: most simply, the Biblical citations offer a counterpoint to the words of the two other speakers, thus alleviating the potential boredom of a back-and-forth dialogue. At the same time, the blend of scripture and epic cataloguing of famous personages facilitates the overlay of the audience’s historical knowledge onto present catastrophe by providing a rhetorical framework into which the knowledgeable American listener can insert figures from English history. Thus, between the preacher’s readings from scripture, two more voices enter, naming various “famous men”—politicians, poets, scientists, and thinkers—buried in the Abbey. Finally, the cadence of the King James version lends an unironic and familiar solemnity to the history enshrined in the stones of Abbey.

The feature deepens its allusions, quoting from Isaiah 37:11 (“Behold, thou hast heard what the Kings of Assyria have done to all lands by destroying them utterly”) to draw connections between Biblical tyrants and their twentieth-century counterparts. As the feature builds to its climax, MacNeice layers scriptural quotations of increasingly direct relevance to the plight of besieged Londoners, while the two Speakers connect Biblical disaster with war on the Home Front:

- Preacher: And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof. [2 Chronicles 36:19]
- 1st Speaker: They burnt and shattered the monuments of London, the Guildhall, the Temple and the City churches.
- Preacher: Why should my countenance not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire? [Nehemiah 2:3]
- 2nd Speaker: Ludgate and Cheapside; Bloomsbury and Soho; St. Paul's Churchyard and Parliament Square.
- Preacher: For the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty. [Psalm 74:20] ("Westminster Abbey" 6-7)

The interweaving of scripture and documentary accounts of bomb damage continues for a further two pages, during which time the frequency and intensity of blitz-related sound effects increases. Air raid sirens, anti-aircraft artillery, and High Explosive bombs appear successively in the background, as the voices of fire-fighters and dispatchers join the Preacher and the two Speakers in framing the attack verbally. The cumulative effect of this barrage of sound is to immerse the listener in a multi-temporal, multi-spatial environment that breaks dramatic rules in order to portray historical depth acoustically. Presented as a modern tragedy in a line of tragedies extending back to the Old Testament, the destruction of Westminster Abbey is made at once immediately contemporary and part of a history which consoles by its patterns of suffering and perseverance. This

transhistorical sonic environment emulates, for American listeners, the dense soundscape of wartime London, and captures the dislocation of a city in which material history is literally thrown into the streets with each new bombing raid.³⁵ Speaking of the 45-minute Home Service adaptation of “Westminster Abbey,” which aired in September of 1941, *Listener* drama critic Grace Wyndham Goldie praised the program for its layering of “the shriek of falling bombs,” “the crash of explosions,” and voices that respond “like a peal of Westminster’s own bells.” “In its setting,” she writes, “this produced the vision-seeing, spine-shivering stir of the imagination which is as real as fear. It was one of those moments which broadcasting and drama exist to create” (“Broadcast Drama: War, MacNeice and Such,” 416).

Episode 8 (on St. Paul’s Cathedral) builds on the dense soundscape of the Westminster episode. “St. Paul’s” opens with the sound of traffic on a modern street and a quotation from Tennyson: “Here, in streaming London’s central roar” (“St. Paul’s” 1). As this line, from the “Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington,” fades away, the sound of traffic is replaced, via cross-fade, by the sound of a funeral march recreating Wellington’s funeral almost ninety years previous to the broadcast, in 1852. As cannons salute the dead and the march continues softly in the background, MacNeice interweaves Tennyson’s poem with the words of two 1941 narrators—a “Light Voice” (“LV”) and a “Dark Voice” (“DV”)—and a third narrator, the Cockney Voice (“CV”), who emerges

³⁵ As the blitz waned in the summer of 1941, the Features department thought it wise to reduce the use of such sound effects. In a memo to *Stones* producers Glyn-Jones, Dillon, and Bridson, Assistant Director (Features) Lawrence Gilliam asked that they alter or remove any “references which give the impression that we are suffering from air raids at the moment. In general, play down the use of sirens and air raid effects and if used suggest that they are reflections of experience in the past, possibly of the future, but not of the present” (17 August 1941; File R45/78, BBC WAC). Other sounds were forbidden on the Home Service: the 45-minute adaptation of *Westminster Abbey* did not feature the sound of church bells, as bells were silenced on all fronts of the wartime soundscape, radio and otherwise.

from leading the 1852 funeral march to accompany the twentieth-century voices in a tour of the cathedral. This blurring of time is easily missed, as the Cockney Voice does little to remind listeners of his anachronistic apparition; indeed, the broadcast very quickly normalizes the intermingling of past and present, limiting his characterization to the regional and class associations of the “Cockney” as a dramatic type, as in such lines as “Old Sir Christopher Wren he knew his stuff” (2). It is difficult to speculate as to whether the presence of the Cockney Voice was ultimately jarring, smooth, or even noticeable for the audience, as there are no sound recordings or specific listener reports about this broadcast; evidence from the script indicates that the strangeness of his temporal leap is implied, rather than insisted upon.

The subtle handling of this shift in time is characteristic of the broadcast as a whole, which even more than MacNeice’s previous *Stones* broadcasts works to layer historical periods as a means of extrapolating larger political and cultural messages. For MacNeice, the church embodies the transhistorical value of cultural production by its material endurance. Against the bombs of the Luftwaffe, the walls of the building speak up to offer a counter-narrative of cultural survival. Touring the cathedral following its damage by bombs, the three narrators arrive at the Whispering Gallery, the circular base of the cupola above the nave, where whispered words can travel from one side of the cupola to the other in the form of an echo:

CV: (whispering) St. Paul’s Cathedral

(pause)

ECHO: St Paul’s Cathedral

LV: is still standing

ECHO: is still standing

DV: The walls have mouths

ECHO: The walls have mouths.

LV: You see? The walls have mouths.

DV: The stones cry out. ("St. Paul's" 7)

The narrators continue to tour the building, ascending to the top of the dome to compare the blitzed landscape with the destruction suffered by the original cathedral during the Great Fire of 1666, and pausing to remember the sermons John Donne held in the original church. As they return to the Whispering Gallery, the broadcast steps further from anything resembling a realistic or documentary feature, as the script notes that "the 3 voices are no longer to be in character, as they all represent the walls" (8).³⁶ This succession of overlapping dialogue promises that the living voices echoing off the walls of the cathedral are a form of resistance:

LV: We are the walls of the Whispering Gallery.

DV: We are the walls of Europe. The Words we repeat are the words of
Freedom.

[...]

CV: Words against bombs,

LV: mind against matter,

DV: truth against lies.

LV: The words run round and around, a whisper under the dome,

³⁶ As with the time-travelling Cockney, it is unclear from the typescript how this shift was to be conveyed to the audience, aside from clues in the dialogue itself. Given the often difficult listening conditions created by transatlantic shortwave broadcasting, some of the subtleties of this Aristotelian violation may have fallen prey to atmospheric interference.

DV: A whisper under the dome of the sky... (“St. Paul’s” 9)

MacNeice’s move from realism to the surreal indicates the freedom from dramatic conventions afforded by the radio feature. Human individuals and settings are fluid: characters can become other characters; a guided tour of bomb damage can become a symbolic set-piece in the larger debate against fascism; one cathedral can stand in for all of Europe. This fluidity of structure reinforces the message that Nazism poses a generalized threat to the world; the boundaries between characters dissolve as distinct voices become the collective voice of “the walls” via shared sentences and ideas, indicating a shared struggle against German aggression.

At a remove of many decades, such statements of universal humanity in the face of Nazi aggression seem symptoms of their age: earnest if somewhat clunky propaganda manoeuvres designed to mobilize American outrage. If “St. Paul’s” escapes the rubbish-bin of history, it does so by transcending its political catalysts and emerging as an example of how to balance formal elements in the construction of emotionally effective radio art. Continuing on from the passage quoted in the previous paragraph, “St. Paul’s” links verbal and musical cues from earlier in the broadcast to heighten the effect of its political rhetoric:

LV: A Whisper that becomes a declaration

CV: To be cried from the house-tops

DV: Of the rights of Man;

LV: To be cried from the golden cross

CV: That stands on the top of the ball

LV: That stands on the top of the lantern

CV: That stands on the top of St. Paul's.

(Osanna passage from Bach, repeat but very distant)

LV: Here, in streaming London's central roar.

DV: Here, in darkened London's battered heart,

CV: We assert the Rights of Man

DV: and defy the tyranny of man,

LV: and we say that Freedom must survive,

CV: and must not perish from the earth,

and we say that Freedom shall survive,

and shall not perish from the earth.

(Osanna pull up, and fade-out)

("St. Paul's" 9-10)

In this closing section, MacNeice reintroduces the Tennyson quotation from the beginning of the play, along with the Bach passage which had appeared mid-way through the program. In doing so, he connects the message of perseverance in wartime to a broader European cultural endeavour, making the struggle less about England against Germany than Tennyson, Wren, and Bach against Hitler. Furthermore, these elements from earlier in the broadcast remind listeners of where they have been in the 15 minutes since the program started: from outside the Cathedral to the top of the dome, via the Whispering Gallery whose voices now channel the political message of the broadcast. While the rhetorical sweep of the closing statements gives the end of the broadcast a feeling of crescendo, the overlay of familiar elements recast in subtly different forms gives a hint of symmetry to the piece—a sense that the listener has returned to the place

from which he started, only to hear it with new ears, and with a new sense of political determination.

The irony of this emphasis on close listening, as with so much broadcasting from the Second World War, is that no archival recording of the *Stones* broadcasts exists. Though recorded for re-transmission on the various Overseas services, the recordings appear to have been lost. Given MacNeice's repeated emphasis on the endurance of linguistic traditions—legal, political, lexicographical, oratorical—the absence of an acoustic trace deprives the present-day listeners of a full understanding of the impact these broadcasts had on their wartime audience. The loss of such a broadcast, its recording and subsequent erasure, stings because it represents a betrayal of the archival promise. Products of the best technologies of recording and transmission then available in Britain, the *Stones* broadcasts were made to be recorded; indeed, they were made *because* they could be recorded. As Jacques Derrida notes in *Archive Fever*,

The technology of archivization does not just change the way in which we interact with the archive; it fundamentally alters the archivable event itself. The technical structure of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the *archivable* content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event. (16)

Filmic and musical intertexts, multi-studio recording, the dramatic control panel, and magnetic tape all collaborated to produce a record of the event of this broadcast; and yet contingency would have it that the recordings were wiped at some point after the broadcast. In a sense, the exigencies of warfare could be said to have left their print on

the story of *The Stones Cry Out* by removing it from the record; absence is the sign of war's material and cultural cost, its destructive impulse.

Sound scholar Jonathan Sterne has noted the impossibility of returning to the imagined original moment of audition: instead, we must “move beyond recovering experience to interrogating the conditions under which that experience became possible in the first place” (Sterne 28). Although there is no road back to the wartime experience of listening by British audiences—although there is in fact no singular experience of listening at all—the archive nonetheless haunts us by what it makes possible. The textual excavation of a program like *The Stones Cry Out* can help us to sound the media environment of a recent but alien past, even as it tenders a promise of understanding through attentive listening that must remain unfulfilled.

Towards a Blind Poetics: *Alexander Nevsky*

Following his apprenticeship with *The Stones Cry Out* and other propaganda programs including *Cook's Tour of the London Subways* (a mock-travelogue of the Underground shelters) and an episode of the series *Freedom's Ferry* (about Atlantic convoys), MacNeice began crafting a more ambitious project. On the 22nd of June, 1941, Germany broke its pact of non-aggression with the Soviet Union by launching Operation Barbarossa, an all-out assault on Soviet territory that involved over 3 million troops attacking along a 2,900 kilometre front. With the USSR now part of the Allied forces, it fell to the BBC to produce suitably enthusiastic programming to welcome this new ally in the war against Fascism, a task to which they quickly applied every effort. The minutes from a meeting of the Overseas Board of the BBC on 17 July 1941 reported that

“projection of Russia by cultural programmes was in hand” (Briggs, 3:393 n.4). In a display of their developing public relations *savoir-faire*, the BBC enlisted their Listener Research department to determine what role British citizens thought the BBC should play in popularizing the USSR among listeners. 850 “local correspondents”—regular contributors to Listener Research surveys—were asked to gauge the sensitivities and concerns of their own contacts in the broader listening community.

Though commissioned after *Alexander Nevsky* aired, this survey reinforces some of the challenges the BBC faced as the unofficial mouthpiece of the British government charged with “projecting” the USSR. Since the Russian revolution, British public opinion of the USSR had always been divided at any given time; opinion was also subject to rapid change, as Soviet economic and political policies offered reason for various sentiments of hope, envy, disillusion, or dismay. Rightly or wrongly, the public blamed the press for these wild swings in opinion. “Public memory may be short,” reads the Listener Research report, “but it is not so short that these rapid changes in an incredibly short time have been forgotten.” The report goes on:

The fact remains that the recollection of eulogy and anathema succeeding one another in rapid succession, often in the same quarters, has produced a considerable measure of cynicism and has undoubtedly caused an appreciable devaluation of the organs of opinion in the public mind. (LR 1175 [11 September 1942] 2)

Fortunately for the BBC, public opinion of the USSR was surging as a result of Soviet resistance to Nazi invasion—an entirely understandable increase in enthusiasm, as this resistance drew fire away from Britain at a time when the blitz had stretched the

endurance of many citizens to the limit (Rose, *Which People's War?* 44-56).

Nonetheless, questions lingered about Soviet plans after the war, their attitudes towards political dissent and religious worship, and their military record in Poland and Finland. When asked what kinds of programming would help listeners understand their new ally, 79% of respondents wanted more information on the ordinary lives of Soviet citizens, 63% sought to understand better the political and social system of the USSR, and 56% wanted clarification on the nature and extent of British and American aid to the USSR (LR 1175, 1). Only 31% of respondents requested more programmes about “Russian history, literature and culture.” “Those who discovered little interest in this subject,” states the report, “said it would be felt to be of academic interest only and irrelevant to the issues at stake, concern being for the present and future, not the past, with the fundamentals, not the ‘frills’ (sic) of civilisation” (3). As the disdainful and ironic “‘frills’ (sic)” of the unattributed Listener Research report suggests, the interest in (and presumed value of) established forms of cultural production remained higher within the BBC than in the general population as represented by respondents to the survey.

Despite the lukewarm public interest in Russian and Soviet culture, the BBC pressed on with a program of cultural diplomacy. Broadcasts included dramas (Pushkin’s *Eugene Onyegin*, Anton Chekhov’s *The Three Sisters*, and Valentin Kataev’s *Squaring the Circle*), political broadcasts by Soviet ambassador Ivan Maisky and others, and performances of the music of Russian and Soviet composers including Shostakovich, Rachmaninov, and Khachaturian (Briggs, 3:393). Such cultural overtures were helpful at a time when Soviet sensitivities about information control precluded direct BBC broadcasts in Russian and other languages of the USSR; in an internal memorandum

from Director of European Services J.A.S. Salt to Director General Basil Nicolls dated 29 July 1941, Salt remarks that Soviet authorities “are particularly susceptible to the flattery of our performing their plays, music, etc.” (qtd. in Briggs, 3:397-8).

This surge in cultural propaganda also led to the commissioning of new works and adaptations. MacNeice produced a brief portrait of Anton Chekhov (called simply *Dr. Chekhov*), which he would later expand into a play called *Sunbeams in his Hat* in 1944. He also scripted overt propaganda features with such titles as *Salute to the USSR* (1942) and *The Spirit of Russia* (1942). MacNeice’s first major pro-Soviet script was an adaptation of Sergei Eisenstein’s 1938 film *Alexander Nevsky*. The film had considerable political currency: created as an anti-Nazi propaganda piece, the story follows the title character, a 13th-century Russian prince who defeated an invading army of Teutonic knights in 1242. Only months after its release in November of 1938, Germany and the USSR signed the non-aggression pact, and the film was withdrawn from distribution. A copy had made its way to the BBC, however, and was being used to train cameramen in the art of cinematography during the BBC’s short-lived pre-war foray into television.

The BBC jumped at the chance to adapt *Nevsky*, recognizing the historical parallels to the situation in the USSR, where German forces were advancing steadily towards Moscow. The Corporation was apparently untroubled by the problems inherent in adapting for radio a film of such epic scale, especially one whose most compelling element is arguably its cinematography. In Eisenstein’s *Nevsky*, dialogue is stripped to its essentials, characters are reduced to types, and landscapes take on thematic and symbolic weight. In minimizing psychological depth and verbal narration, the film relies upon Sergei Prokofiev’s score and Eisenstein’s strikingly geometric cinematography to convey

everything from mood and motifs to power relations between characters.

When commissioned to write the script, MacNeice chose to treat it as a verse drama. He substituted the measured cadences of a long dramatic poem for the evocative visual language of the film. In addition to keeping the bulk of Prokofiev's score, MacNeice's *Nevsky* follows the general narrative arc of Eisenstein's film. Hearing news of the impending Teutonic invasion, Prince Alexander Nevsky of Novgorod abandons a hard-earned life of pastoral relaxation in order to defend his land and subjects against foreign aggressors. Like the Prince, Russia is slow to anger, but difficult to defeat; as Nevsky says in his closing oration,

We in Russia are children of peace,
 We do not envy any man's goods or country,
 And we do not close our doors to any peaceful visitor. [...]
 And I say this to the rest of the world:
 If you will come to us in peace you are welcome,
 But if you come with the sword or the threat of the sword
 Then remember the old saying— [...]
 'Those who take the sword
 By the sword shall they perish'. (*Nevsky* 42)

While emphasizing the measured strength of Russian militarism, MacNeice fleshes out the parallels between Nazis and Teutons by depicting the invaders as excessive in their violence and brutal in their repression. Rumours circulate about the approaching horde: "They kill the man who talks for his talking," warns Domash, the governor of Novgorod; "They kill the silent man for his silence" (*Alexander Nevsky* 2). In a retroactive

effacement of the Nazi-Soviet pact, Alexander berates collaborationist merchants in the city of Novgorod, insisting that “Peace with the Germans means submission... / It means taking a vampire to our bosom” (*Nevsky* 15). Throughout the play, MacNeice emphasizes the inhuman characteristics of the Teutonic forces: “I’ve never seen such riding,” says the Russian soldier Piotr as the enemy advances, “You’d think / The men were part of their horses” (26). His compatriot Dimitry responds by describing the Germans as “Men on iron horses. Well, / It takes more than an iron horse / Or an iron man to conquer Russia” (26). The overwhelming material superiority of the invading forces renders them machinelike without, in the end, granting them victory; as in Eisenstein’s film, the final defeat of the Germans is sealed as their heavy armour causes the ice to give way beneath them during the climactic battle on the frozen Lake Peipus (36).

As a means of avoiding potentially difficult comparisons with the filmic source text, MacNeice turned for inspiration not to new technologies of storytelling, but old ones. The verse in question, like many of MacNeice’s long poems, is of a flexible and varied rhythm. At times the lines flow casually, with startlingly colloquial language, especially in sequences of dialogue; but at moments of heightened drama the verse bristles with the heavy rhythms of alliterative, four-stress poetry.³⁷ As Nevsky’s forces appear to crumble during the climactic battle scene, the Prokofiev score swells and drops back (“orchestra up & to bkgd” reads MacNeice’s handwritten note from a 1944 repeat broadcast) to highlight patterns of verbal stress and repetition as an observer narrates the collapse with dismay:

³⁷ The use of modern dialogue jarred some listeners. The Listener Research report for the April 1942 rebroadcast of *Nevsky* records several complaints about this perceived anachronism. “No student,” wrote one listener, “could fail to be shocked to some degree to hear these mediaeval Russians thinking and talking like twentieth century Englishmen” (LR 882). The repetition of *Nevsky* in April 1942 and June 1944 indicates that such concerns did not seriously detract from the popularity of the program.

IGOR: This is the end—rout of the Russians,
 Good men all but the weight too great,
 Steel against leather, lance against bill-hook,
 Hoof of their horses over our dead... (*Alexander Nevsky* 30)

As the tides of battle turn in favour of Russia, the verse approaches incantation.

Repetition and enjambment elicit a grandiose and hypnotic simplicity, which links old forms of storytelling with the new atrocities of a global war:

IGOR: Still going on, they're still going on, they're
 Knocking the knights from their horses, they're
 Grappling the iron men with their naked hands,
 Tugging them out of the saddle, pulling their
 Helmets off with a wrench, stamping their feet
 On the German faces—spears in their guts, they're
 Still going on, it's a massacre— (32)

Repetition reinforces the overwhelming totality of military violence, not only through the refrain of “still going on,” but also through the abundance of present progressive verbs ending in “-ing,” which conveys a dizzying array of violent actions occurring simultaneously. Furthermore, the homophony of “they’re/their” (and the shifting of the possessive “their” between German and Russian referent) hinders quick comprehension. When heard aloud, the effect of the battle sequence is disorienting: similar in pacing to a rapidly-edited cinematic scene but rooted entirely in the tumble of words from an actor’s mouth.

MacNeice’s ear for gruesome and dramatic storytelling had been sharpened

through his study of older forms. A classicist and a student of Norse Sagas, he had internalized both the principles of stylized Greek drama and the shape and sound of an oral literature born within an environment of competing acoustics. As he states in his introduction to the 1944 print edition of his radio play *Christopher Columbus*, “this is how literature began—the Homeric or Icelandic bard shouting over the clamour of the banquet, the ‘tale told in a chimney corner’ while tankards clatter and infants squawl and somebody makes up the fire and old men snore and cough.” Likewise, he says, “[t]he radio listener listens in a terribly everyday setting; there is no auditorium to beglamour him and predispose him to accept you; if you want him to accept you, you will have to seduce him by sound and sound alone” (*Plays* 395). Such an environment demands a different kind of storytelling from the dramatist: one founded not only on propulsive plot and clear characterization, but also on seductive-because-unobtrusive patterns of repetition, from single consonantal and vowel sounds to entire snippets of dialogue. This awareness of past acoustic literary practice shapes *Nevsky* as a vessel for a new aurality, adapted from campfire traditions of oral storytelling to new communities of listening. Indeed, *Nevsky* differs from the most successful of the *Stones* broadcasts in that the most clamorous soundscapes in the Russian feature are built around vocal delivery rather than layers of effects and voices.

In tackling the problem of sensory translation inherent in adapting a film—how one might listen to a landscape, or hear the progress of a battle—MacNeice provides the listener with an analogue and a model in his version of *Nevsky*. The climax of both the film and the radio feature involves the battle between Russian and Teutonic forces on the frozen Lake Peipus. In MacNeice’s version, Iuri, an elderly blind man who cannot take

up arms against the Germans, takes in the battle from a distance, at the side of Marya, daughter of one of the commanders. Little action is portrayed from the battlefield itself; rather, Marya and other characters relate events to Iuri, and consequently to the radio listener, from their vantage point above the fray. The blind Iuri is not present in the film; MacNeice added the character as a means of moulding the narrative to the radio form. In his symbolic disability, Iuri both requires and enables the narration of the climactic battle scene in *Nevsky*, and thereby the audience's vicarious experience of that battle. Blindness justifies the translation of event into art: not only the historic event of Nevsky's military triumph over the Teutonic knights, but the filmic event of *Nevsky*'s cinematographic triumph over prospective Nazi invasion. Like the listener, Iuri submits to and enables the translation of the world into acoustic experience.

The price of radio art may be blindness, but the reward of blindness is a new kind of perception. When things initially seem to be going badly for the Russians, Iuri claims, against Marya's incredulous protests, that they will ultimately triumph: "That isn't the way I see it / ... I know I'm blind. That is just why / I see the way things go" (27). Iuri's second sight is compounded by the fact that, as Marya herself admits, "I can't see more than you can hear" (27). Though ostensibly speaking to Iuri, she simultaneously reassures the radio listener that to attempt to watch this battle would be superfluous; listening is enough. When a soldier who had just been speaking to those on the sidelines returns to the distant battlefield where he appears to suffer a fatal blow, Iuri remarks that "When he was here just now / I heard the death in his voice" (30). Iuri's auditory acuity straddles the interpretive and the predictive. He not only hears more, and better, than we do; he hears into the future.

Through Iuri, MacNeice implies that listening is a skill to be learned and honed. Passive listening is insufficient; rather, listeners must actively remain open to the sounds the world makes if we wish to extract meaning, whether of victory or death, from a work of acoustic art. It takes only a little imagination to hear the repercussions of this metaphor during the pervasively audible Second World War. As audiences were pummelled by propaganda broadcasts night and day, from all sides of the conflict, it took every ounce of discrimination to separate the useful and relatively truthful from the spurious and false. Bombers, sirens, and artillery shots further jammed the soundscape. British listeners could not simply close their ears to the barrage of sound; if anything, hearing became more important than ever in the dimly-lit wartime environment. Shut in shelters or straggling through blacked-out streets, British citizens had to open their ears the better to navigate their newly dangerous environments. Radio enables listeners to tune their ears to provide a keener perception of the war despite visual deprivation: “I can see nothing with the outward eye,” as Iuri says, “But with the eye of the mind I can see only too much” (8).

MacNeice was not particularly original in filtering the world of *Alexander Nevsky* through the listener-surrogate Iuri. Critic John Drakakis points out that representations of blindness form a repeated motif in the radio drama of this period (21)³⁸. One of the first plays written for British radio, Richard Hughes’ 1924 *A Comedy of Danger*, takes place entirely in a darkened coal mine; MacNeice’s *The Dark Tower* (1946) features “Blind Peter,” a prophet whose clear understanding of the hero’s quest implies that the unseeing listener might also grasp the parabolic value of both quest and play; even Dylan

³⁸ Blindness plays a symbolic role in major non-radio texts of the period, too; Tiresias in *The Waste Land* and Hamm in *Endgame* are two prominent examples. The use of blindness as a device in radio, however, seems to carry additional resonances for the listener.

Thomas's *Under Milk Wood* is partly narrated by the blind Captain Cat, who perceives the world around him largely through his ears. MacNeice himself died after contracting pneumonia in a Welsh cave while gathering sound effects for a radio play (*Persons from Porlock*, 1963) that ends with an artist's retreat underground. This persistent trope of visual deprivation is at once a wink at early attitudes to radio listening (that one should "listen with the lights off," the better to imagine the scene presented through the wireless, as though a technology without visual referent required the simulation of blindness) and a validation of the listening position of the audience. Every dramatic persona who cannot see the world that comes to them through their ears becomes, at least in part, a stand-in for the listener. The aural acuity of Captain Cat, Blind Peter, or Iuri models an acoustic ideal.

MacNeice's emphasis on the skill of listening in *Nevsky* and elsewhere implies a veneration of what Jonathan Sterne calls *audile technique*. As acoustic technologies proliferated over the course of the 19th and early 20th century, audile technique became the mark of specialist listeners, those possessed of discerning ears. It was initially mobilized in professional situations—medical examination by stethoscope, or the transcription of wireless telegraphy, for example—but became a broader social practice with the popularization of sound-reproduction technologies like the phonograph and the radio (Sterne 137 and *passim*). Through the privatization and commodification of acoustic space—the appearance of radios in private homes and the development of individual listening practices—listeners acquire audile technique as a form of technological currency, a *savoir-écouter* that can then be translated into collective listening practices (Sterne 159-167). In *Alexander Nevsky*, audile technique, represented as a

marker of prophetic skill on the battlefield, incites the listener to astute aesthetic participation as a form of Home Front participation. Ultimately, the insistence on attentive listening in *Alexander Nevsky* is a directive to the radio audience: listen closely, or not at all. Or, as MacNeice admonished in his introduction to the play *Christopher Columbus*, “If you cannot enjoy the spoken word with your eyes shut, don’t try to criticize radio” (9).

It seems this emphasis on listening over seeing worked for many listeners. Post-transmission reports indicate that *Alexander Nevsky* was hailed as a great success upon broadcast. “Here in fact is radio conquered at last and used at last for living purposes by a living poet,” wrote Grace Wyndham Goldie in the pages of *The Listener* (Goldie, “The Rise of the Feature” 832). Even listeners not on the BBC payroll agreed; according to the BBC Listener Research Report for the play, 15.2% of the adult public of the UK tuned in to hear *Nevsky*, and the play earned a very high “Appreciation Index” of 83%. One listener cited in the report, identified only as “Housewife,” called the play “A great triumph for Louis MacNeice... Personally I didn’t keep calm enough to be highly critical, which is the greatest test of its perfection” (“Listener Research Report 493”).

In large part, MacNeice’s use of Blind Iuri to justify the narration of the battle seems to have eased the transition from screen to speaker. A Listener Research report produced following the rebroadcast of *Nevsky* in April of 1942 noted that “[s]everal listeners said they thought the description of the battle on the ice by the blind singer was the outstanding feature of the broadcast, praising it particularly for its realism and dramatic qualities” (“Listener Research Report 882). In fact, Iuri does not describe the battle, but he does enable the description. As the drama critic for the *Listener*, Grace

Wyndham Goldie waxed enthusiastic about the translation from screen to speaker:

Here we have Louis MacNeice taking a Russian film and turning it into magnificent radio; here we have the physical excitement which sight gives in the cinema translated into the physical excitement of the rhythm of spoken verse; here we have the sweep of a cavalry charge put over the air ...until the beat of the words turned into the beat of the hoofs of horses galloping over frozen ground. (Goldie, "The Rise of the Feature" 832)

Even producer Dallas Bower was impressed with the final product; in an untitled typed note in the *Nevsky* programme file, Bower writes that Alan Wheatley, who played the narrator-figure Igor, "rose magnificently in the description of the battle, he made one actually see it & the way the scene swayed one way & the other was so vivid he lifted you out of your seat with excitement" (note dated December 8th [1941], File R19/22, BBC WAC). One listening panel organized by the BBC itself attributed the success of descriptive passages to the filmic source text (Memo, 11 December 1941, File R19/22, BBC WAC); although it sounds counterintuitive to "hear the film in the broadcast," it is plausible that the visual immediacy of the film might have spurred MacNeice and Bower to an aural immediacy.

Over and above its success for listeners, Bower noted that *Alexander Nevsky* was "something of an advance technically. It was the first time such a programme had been done in an 'open' studio (in distinction to the multi-studio technique then common to features and drama) and a new film recording system had been put into action to record the work" ("Sound and Vision" 99). Staged at the Bedford School Hall, home of the BBC Music Department, the play demanded the seamless integration of dozens of cues for

sound effects, crowds, choruses, the BBC Symphony Orchestra, and, of course, the actors. The integration of these cues was made possible by what was then known as the dramatic control panel, an early mixing board that facilitated the use of multiple studios and therefore multiple live sources of sound, including actors, sound effects artists, choirs, and orchestra. In simplifying transitions among sonic elements, the control panel allowed *Nevsky* to move between acoustic indicators of space and time through the barest of sonic cues, creating an auditory montage of battle scenes, dialogue, and music. In many cases, Bower uses the control panel to bridge scenes using music and other sound effects; at other times, Prokofiev's score rises in the background to provide a musical counterpoint to the dialogue. Rendering seamless the transitions between radio spaces distinguished by their acoustic elements, the control panel "enabled radio drama to dissolve both temporal and implied spatial boundaries, thus extending its powers of aural suggestion" (Drakakis 5).

At the time, *Alexander Nevsky* represented a high water mark in the development of the radio feature. Propagandistic in intent and effect, it nonetheless transcends its historical imperatives by virtue of its powerful verse, evocative score, and blending of traditional and new forms of oral storytelling. As a collaboration of major modernist artists—Eisenstein, Prokofiev, MacNeice, and, arguably, Dallas Bower—*Alexander Nevsky* indicates the instrumental value of experimental artistic forms in the struggle against fascism. Far from antithetical, the intellectual and emotional valences of a radio play like *Alexander Nevsky* work together to propagate a pro-Soviet message.

MacNeice's gritty battle scenes, Eisenstein's epic characterization, and Prokofiev's often jarring score coexist as distinct elements united into a persuasive narrative whole. The

feature depends on a balance of these components; while aesthetically difficult elements may be brought together, they cannot be unyielding in their challenges to the audience, as MacNeice would write in 1946:

What the radio writer must do, if he hopes to win the freedom of the air, is to appeal *on one plane*—whatever he may be doing on the others—to the more primitive listener and to the more primitive elements in anyone; i.e. he must give them (what Shakespeare gave them) entertainment. (*Plays* 403)

With an eye to integrating artistic innovation and popular entertainment, MacNeice and Bower would build on the success of *Alexander Nevsky* in their next major collaboration, *Christopher Columbus*. Similarly motivated and similarly collaborative, *Columbus* would push at the boundary between propaganda and modernist radio art, ultimately yielding a verse play greater than the sum of its historically contingent catalysts.

Christopher Columbus: Modernism, Propaganda, and the Spectacle of History

Transmitted at 9:20 in the evening on the 8th of December, 1941, *Alexander Nevsky* was the culmination of a heady evening of broadcasting. The Japanese Air Force had bombed Pearl Harbor on the morning of December 7th, bringing the United States into the war. As a result, listeners heard statements on the nine o'clock news by both Roosevelt and Churchill confirming this expansion of the Allied forces, followed by a previously scheduled introduction to *Nevsky* by Soviet Ambassador Ivan Maisky (Holme 39). The political impact of MacNeice's feature was thus driven home by the appearance, at the microphone, of three voices representing the nations who would unite against Nazi Germany. Given the success of MacNeice's pro-Soviet propaganda epic that night, BBC

producers wasted little time in planning a similar welcome for their newest ally. On the 26th of January, 1942, Dallas Bower sent a letter to composer William Walton, asking if he would be willing to score “a large-scale programme on Christopher Columbus.” “In a sense,” Bower explained, the broadcast would be “an extension of the ‘Alexander Nevsky’ programme, i.e., the full resources of [the] Music Department will be available including, of course, the Chorus and Orchestra A” (*Christopher Columbus* Programme File R19/174, BBC WAC). The goal was to repeat the effect of *rapprochement* between Allies that *Nevsky* had achieved, giving dramatic shape to the mingled relief and enthusiasm British listeners felt at the arrival of America into the war.

From the outset, Bower envisaged *Christopher Columbus* as larger than life. He wrote to the BBC Director of Music, Sir Adrian Boult, to secure his approval and to set aside the Bedford School Music Hall for the performance, a space whose acoustic properties had served Bower well for *Alexander Nevsky*. Bower again stressed the material needs of the production, saying that *Christopher Columbus* “will depend very largely on its music,” and noting that he was “anxious that the Orchestra in full shall be available with both Choruses” (28 January 1942, R19/174). As Walton was at the time busy scoring three films, Bower suggested a performance in late April, to which Boult acceded. Attached to Bower’s letter was MacNeice’s detailed, six-page synopsis of the play, including scene breakdowns and notes on characters. MacNeice clearly envisioned an epic production:

Music throughout will be used, not only for the purpose of linking sequences, but to reinforce and illuminate the dominant themes. This programme will require at least 1½ hours, possibly 2 hours. It is, however, essential that it

should be broadcast in one solid block, and not, for example, divided by the news; it cannot be thus divided without ruining its all-important unity. (28 January 1942, R19/174, BBC WAC)

Against MacNeice's wishes, *Columbus* would ultimately be broadcast in two sections, from 8 until 9 pm and from 9:40 to 10:40 pm, due to concerns over a potential "drop-off" in listeners for uninterrupted broadcasts over an hour. MacNeice's feature was nonetheless cast on a grand scale, and its contours delineated from an early stage.³⁹ Most remarkable in this synopsis is the degree to which MacNeice had already foreseen the integration of musical components: Choruses representing Columbus's "Doubt" and "Faith," scene-establishing music such as hymns and "exotic" New World drumming, even the sea shanties of Columbus's jailbird crew of sailors were mapped out by late January.

MacNeice's script comprises two sections: the first hour documents Columbus's protracted attempts to secure funding and support for his projected voyage across the Atlantic. In addition to the obstruction Columbus encounters from more conservative members of the church and nobility, his plan is frustrated by the Spanish focus on the liberation of Granada from Moorish control. Ultimately, Columbus not only secures the support of Queen Isabella, but also claims the title "Admiral of the Ocean Sea" and negotiates favourable economic terms regarding the distribution of any profits issuing

³⁹ *Christopher Columbus* typifies the categorical blurriness between radio drama and radio feature; to present-day listeners, the progression from scene to scene in a unified narrative seems unproblematically *dramatic*. Accordingly, critic Ian Rodger refers to *Columbus* as a drama or play, though one strongly marked by MacNeice's experience in writing radio features (Rodger 62). Indeed, by his 1963 introduction to a new edition of *Columbus*, MacNeice was himself calling it a "radio play" (*Plays* 3). During its genesis, however, MacNeice and his colleagues at the BBC tended to talk about *Columbus* as a feature due to both its genesis as a "dramatic documentary" with informational and propagandistic intent (MacNeice, *Plays* 393) and its full use of studio technology and musical effects to trouble the straightforward realism of a stage play. I therefore refer to *Columbus* as a radio feature to foreground the conceptual and technical frameworks of its wartime origins.

from his voyage (*Plays* 37-9). The second hour concerns the assembly of a crew, the doubt-ridden voyage itself, the arrival in the Caribbean, and Columbus's triumphant return to the Spanish court at Barcelona. Throughout the play, the twin Choruses of Doubt and Faith highlight Columbus's inner struggles as he seeks to convince his patrons, his crew, and himself of the validity of his voyage.

Bower was pleased with MacNeice's script when presented with a partially complete draft in mid-March. He wrote to Gilliam that "the script is first rate radio and, as writing, of a very high order indeed. In fact, I think it 'hits a new high'" (Memo to ADF, 16 March 1942, R19/174). Gilliam agreed, and the memo and script were forwarded to Val Gielgud, the Director of Features and Drama, on 20 March 1942. While not unprecedented, Bower's willingness to share a script only two-thirds complete speaks to his confidence in both MacNeice and the Columbus concept itself. Widespread enthusiasm notwithstanding, commitments by Walton and others led to delays; eventually, October 12th was settled as the broadcast date, falling as it did on the 450th anniversary of Columbus' arrival in the Americas. A letter from Walton to Bower date-stamped 8 June 1942 remarks that "obviously it should be a transatlantic broadcast, as by sheer luck the B.B.C. will be the only station that will have a production of this scale for C.C.'s 450th anniversary" (R19/174). The live broadcast, in the end, was only transmitted on the Home Service, but the Overseas Service made repeat broadcasts from recordings in the days immediately following.

The Drama and Features Department made certain that *Columbus* would receive its full share of attention on both sides of the Atlantic. Gilliam insisted that "the maximum amount of publicity, both in the press and at the microphone, should be given

to the ‘Columbus’ programme” (23 September 1942, R19/174). By that time, Bower had already submitted an article to the *Radio Times*, emphasizing Columbus’ near-maniacal dedication to his quest and his self-image as a proselytizing “Bearer of Christ.” In his article, Bower elides the most obviously propagandistic elements of the broadcast—its celebration of the voyage that led to the founding of the new British ally, for example, or the need for perseverance and dedication in the face of obstacles—in favour of formal analysis. “The writing,” he notes, “is in a form of free verse which MacNeice has used with repeated success for the radio, the continuity being linked by purely formal sequences which have been set to music by William Walton. Thus the programme marks the first collaboration by two of Britain’s most important poets and composers respectively” (R19/174).

Columbus in fact amounted to a much broader coalition of cultural producers: much as Walton and MacNeice were prominent artists in their fields, Laurence Olivier (who played Columbus) was arguably the biggest star of film and radio working at the time, while Bower was a prominent radio and film producer who would go on to work with Walton and Olivier on *Henry V* (1944), one of the most successful films of the war. *Columbus* thus represents a significant milestone in modernist collaboration across media. As with *Alexander Nevsky*, *Christopher Columbus* capitalizes on the ability of the radio feature to weave together music, verse, and effects in a seamless whole. The success of this creative synthesis informs MacNeice’s 1946 enthusiasm, cited earlier, for the “group life” of creative collaboration radio affords writers (*Plays* 406).

Walton’s role in the feature is particularly central. Whereas *Nevsky* inserted Prokofiev’s existing score into a later script, the music in *Columbus* arose much more

organically during the process of creation. Walton's musical passages, developed from MacNeice's guidelines, provide much of the structure of *Christopher Columbus*, serving, as Michael Tierney has written, as "a vitalizing force that grows compulsively out of the drama and is an integral part of it" (248). Going further, Stephen Lloyd claims that Walton's score "ensured the success of the production by capturing perfectly in musical terms the mood of the play and by both tightening the dramatic elements and raising the emotional level several notches higher" (192). *Christopher Columbus* incorporates music on multiple levels, most notably to establish mood and environment within scenes and to signal transitions between scenes. Early in the feature, for example, three middle-aged men discuss the recent arrival of the then-unknown Columbus in Lisbon. Referring to the explorer's talk of "land in the West," one of the men, Alfredo, exclaims, "You'd have thought / you were listening to a drunken sailor; / That's the kind of talk you hear in the taverns on the quay" (*Plays* 8), at which point a gently plucked guitar rises up from the background to lead listeners to the tavern. Following an exchange among sailors about such rumoured lands as "Antilia and Zipangu... / Aye, and Vineland and Hy Brasil" (9), the guitar stops and the voices of the sailors fade out, repeating the names of places that were to them only fables, but which today resonate with their modern cognates and equivalents (the Antilles, Japan, Newfoundland and Brazil). The listener is brought back to the earlier Lisbon room with its three men as Alfredo echoes his own line: "The kind of talk you hear from drunken sailors!" (9).

This form of listener guidance through the repetition of phrases and musical motifs serves as a kind of echolocation throughout *Christopher Columbus*, a technique that would be picked up later in MacNeice's *The Dark Tower* (1946). The audience, deprived

of visual referents, relies on auditory cues to signal scene changes and establish the spatial and sonic environment of each setting. In the example cited above, the guitar music serves to identify the tavern as a place of leisure and entertainment, while the near-repetition of Alfredo's phrase about "drunken sailors" brackets the tavern scene as a kind of temporary spatial cut; it is not a "flashback" so much as a flash elsewhere. *Columbus* similarly incorporates plainsong to identify the scenes taking place at the monastery at La Rabida, where Columbus gains support from sympathetic clergymen; likewise, a mournful valedictory song often accompanies the appearances of Béatriz, Columbus' part-time lover.

MacNeice and Walton's most effective use of music to generate a sense of spatial—and social—location occurs as the vessels are being prepared for departure. As the Prior approaches the ships to bless them, the crowd begins to chant the Litany of the Saints (45). Columbus gives the order to weigh anchor, and as the ship pulls away, the litany recedes into the background without disappearing entirely, while the sailors begin to sing an ersatz Iberian shanty:

SOLO: We're bound upon a wild goose chase—

CHORUS: pero yo ya no soy yo

SOLO: To find an empire in the West—

CHORUS: ni mi casa es ya mi casa. (45)

After several verses, the audience's attention is shifted back to shore by the return of the litany to the sonic foreground and the corresponding fading-down of the shanty. Two quayside observers comfort a tearful woman who has just bidden farewell to her lover. Columbus's lover Béatriz has also gathered to see off the ships, and predicts that they

will never return, “Not in a year of palsied months, / Not in an age of haunted years... And all they can do is sing!” (47). At this point, the sound of the sailors, having faded completely from earshot, returns with a new melody joyously out of step with the fatalism of Béatriz’s prediction and of their own lyrics:

SOLO: Out upon the ocean we’re flotsam and jetsam,

CHORUS: Gone away for ever, for ever and a day,

SOLO: We’re ragtag and bobtail, we’re lost and we’re lonely,

CHORUS: Gone away for ever, for ever and a day. (47)

The fluid movement among musical registers—land and sea, sacred and secular, refined and coarse, establishment and underclass—at once clearly establishes the social and spiritual conditions of each setting, and emphasizes their mutual implication in a common endeavour. Her audition split between a stable world on land and a much less certain, but much more exciting world at sea, the listener hovers in a privileged space of aural surveillance, with the advantage of hearing more than any one character in the feature.

This space of aural surveillance depends, nonetheless, on a notion of “earshot,” that is, of the listening-subject position remaining within plausible hearing range of either ship or shore. In *Columbus*, repeated and fluid shifts from one environment to another tend to occur when these environments are to some degree proximate; there are, for example, no repeated transitions between Spain and the Americas. Another example from later in the broadcast, during the scene in which land is sighted, illustrates how MacNeice builds this notion of “earshot” into the feature. Bending historical truth slightly, MacNeice has Columbus spot a shore-based light before any of his sailors can see it (*Plays* 54); furthering the persistent dialectic between Doubt and Faith, the sailors at first

do not agree that land has in fact been sighted. As his crew members are slowly convinced, the Choruses of Doubt and Faith enter for a final exchange in which the voice of Doubt (“You see a mirage like many before; / A misty shape that is merely mist”) is ultimately drowned out by the voice of Faith (“You see what you have sailed to find. / You see what none has found before”) (*Plays* 55-6).

This acoustic dichotomy finally resolved, a new one emerges between the ship-borne Europeans and their island counterparts as Columbus and crew head for shore. MacNeice stages the encounter through ritual music: the crew of Columbus’s ships begin to chant the *Te Deum*, which soon mingles with the drumming and chanting of the “Indian Chorus” on the shore (56). For over a minute, the shipboard music and the music from the shore coexist in the background, competing for the attention of the listener, and emphasizing in musical terms the enormous collision between civilizations that is underway. The listener is, for a moment, in both places at once, experiencing the tension of unresolved cultural traditions in suspension. Eventually, however, MacNeice directs our attention to the original inhabitants of the island with the help of a narrator-figure. “Here they come now, down to the frills of the surf,” notes the sailor Gutiérrez:

They’re gathering there in their ranks, they’re lifting their arms to the sky
And bowing themselves to the sand; I cannot hear a sound
But it looks as if they’re singing or praying,
I think they’re singing or praying ... (56)

At this point, the Indian Chorus takes over, and our auditory attention becomes focused on their interpretation of the encounter. As with *Alexander Nevsky*, narration by a character is essential to the audience’s experience of invisible events. Crucially,

Gutiérrez's comment that he "cannot hear a sound" was cut from the original broadcast; removing this line allows the listener to imagine that the indigenous songs she hears are somehow transmitted through the aural experience of Gutiérrez and the other sailors ("Christopher Columbus," National Sound Archives).

Perhaps predictably, the music and chanting ascribed to the indigenous inhabitants of Guanahani (the original name for the Bahamian island of San Salvador where Columbus landed) is stylized and primitivist. The music itself does not entirely descend into offensive parody; rather, it sounds like a necessarily invented non-European musical tradition as imagined by a modern European composer.⁴⁰ Scored for tympani, xylophones, maracas, rhumba sticks, and violin, the songs of the Indian Chorus and their Leader are restricted to a handful of intervals, unlike the more wide-ranging orchestral sections associated with Columbus. The islanders' diction is likewise limited:

INDIAN CHORUS: Guanahani! Guanahani!

LEADER: Who come now to Guanahani?

CHORUS: Over sea. Over sea.

LEADER: The gods are come from over sea. [...]

INDIAN CHORUS: Guanahani! Guanahani!

LEADER: Stepping through the silver foam

CHORUS: On the sands of Guanahani

⁴⁰ In her analysis of the score for *Christopher Columbus*, Zelda Lawrence-Curran argues that Walton's "Indian Chorus" must have been based on existing indigenous music because Walton had taken pains to make the plainsong sections of *Columbus* authentic, and because he had visited America in 1939 "and it is not inconceivable that he would have heard examples of native music at that time. It was not in Walton's character merely to invent 'native' music" (169). Similarly, she cites as evidence Walton's inclusion of African melodies in a piece composed for a South African audience (169). Absent a specific piece with which to compare the "Indian Chorus," Lawrence-Curran's assertion of its "authenticity" appears too thinly defended. Otherwise, her chapter on *Christopher Columbus* remains the most thorough and detailed analysis, musical or otherwise, of the feature.

LEADER: Come the shining sons of Heaven

CHORUS: To our land of Guanahani. (56-7)

As Columbus and his crew step ashore, they quickly claim the island for Christianity and for Spain. Throughout the encounter, from the first sighting of people onshore to the eventual departure of Columbus for Spain (an expanse of time contracted into a few minutes of airtime), the singers of Guanahani weave in and out of the soundscape, indicating their continued presence behind Columbus's proclamations of ownership of the islands.

Script and score alone do not bring a radio production to fruition; juggling two choruses, an orchestra, and over three dozen actors requires a competent producer. The scale of this project was not lost on Bower, whose views as producer are more amply represented in the correspondence record than are MacNeice's. As if to display his own radio fortitude, Bower continually insists on the difficulties the broadcast posed to the musicians and to him as a producer. He calls the script "a pretty tough proposition from my point of view" in a letter to Sir Adrian Boult, who would conduct the Orchestra and Choruses (19 September 1942; R19/174). Similarly, in a letter to William Walton following the broadcast, Bower called *Columbus* "as tricky for a producer as, say, *La Mer* or the *Sacre* is for a conductor," with reference to works by Debussy and Stravinsky (14 October 1942, R19/174). Bower had reason to be anxious: BBC orchestras were stretched to the limit by the public demand for entertainment and diversion during the war. In an interview with Carol Rosen, aired between acts of the 1992 re-staging of *Christopher Columbus* by BBC Radio 3, Bower recounted the remarkable conditions under which the orchestra operated: following an evening performance of Elgar's Second Symphony and

a brand new piece by Alan Rawsthorne on the Home Service, which the Orchestra had to repeat live at 8 AM for the Overseas Service, the musicians encountered Walton's score for the first time. They rehearsed once in the morning, once in the afternoon, and performed that evening. Walton's comment, upon hearing a recording of the rather epic performance, was "Not too bad, really" ("Not too bad really/Bower").

Under such working conditions, distractions had to be kept to a minimum. When asked if a small audience could attend the live performance for promotional reasons, Bower claimed that the "technically complicated" nature of *Columbus* made the presence of guests unfeasible. The actors alone, he claims, find the presence of an audience visually distracting (2 October 1942, R19/174). Having secured Laurence Olivier for the title role, a producer might be excused for not wanting to aggravate his actors. Even without irritants, Olivier's performance—preserved in a recording at the National Sound Archive at the British Library in London—is excessive in all of the right ways.⁴¹ His Columbus, captivating and charismatic, is fixated on the goal of finding land in the west, to the detriment of all personal relationships. Olivier exploits the dynamic range of the studio and microphone to great effect; he spends much of the play ranting at the monarchs and clergymen who initially refuse to finance his quest, shouting down their conservative beliefs and, once his voyage has been assured, demanding for himself a series of hyperbolic titles including Admiral of the Western Ocean and Governor-General over all the islands he would discover (*Plays* 37).

⁴¹ Unfortunately, the NSA does not permit researchers to copy their recordings, nor have they released any of MacNeice's plays commercially. A recording of the 1992 re-staging of *Christopher Columbus* has been known to circulate on internet torrent sites. This later performance gives a good sense of the scale of the original production and its integration of music and dialogue. Unfortunately, the lead performance, by Alan Howard, does not live up to Olivier's over-the-top 1942 version; it sacrifices intensity in favour of a steadier, more realist approach.

At other times, Olivier capitalizes on the ability of the microphone to generate a sense of intimacy: in his final, stirring oration to the crowds gathered to welcome him back to the Court at Barcelona, Olivier slowly builds the intensity of his address without ever shouting. While all other noises fall away, he lists the spiritual and economic resources of the western hemisphere that now lie in the hands of Spain, until dropping the volume of his voice while slowing his delivery to intone, “*I have brought you a new world*” (*Plays* 65). Though it is difficult to diagnose an actor’s blocking in retrospect, the sudden increase in audible detail at this point of the recording seems to indicate that he approached the microphone while reducing his voice to a whisper. Every word of Olivier’s final sentence is rasped out in a finely pebbled timbre that expresses the personal and spiritual ecstasy of a fulfilled quest.

Olivier’s mastery of voice and microphone combines with MacNeice’s script to make Columbus an emblematic radio hero; he ranges over the acoustic space of the broadcast without settling. As a thematic figure, Olivier’s Columbus is movable and dynamic, simultaneously the historical Columbus and an agent of timeless dedication and vision. Olivier’s Columbus is pompous and grandiose, but also a figure without a fixed place in the world of the play or of the broadcast. Early in the play, as Columbus roams Spain and Portugal seeking support for his quest, characters quiz him about his origins, to which he offers vague answers: “I am a man from nowhere,” he says (*Plays* 11); “I am a native of the Kingdom of God” (11); “My country, my Lord, is the future” (26). These remarks characterize Columbus as a messianic figure, possessed of a single unshakeable goal; but they also uproot him from his particular historical moment and make his ambitions applicable to other epochs. As much as *Columbus* is a re-enactment of past

exploits, it offers a model of future-oriented dedication and discipline.

The mobility of Columbus's singular vision enables the elaboration of a more discreet form of political persuasion. Though occasioned by the coincidence of the U.S. entry into the war and the 450th anniversary of the arrival of Columbus to the western hemisphere, *Christopher Columbus* lacks the most overt indicators of political propaganda.⁴² The script does not translate Columbus's 15th-century enemies into representations of Axis figures; nor does MacNeice insert allegorical markers that offer a clear transposition of events from Columbus's life to the wartime experience of Britons. Its propaganda value was more general and indirect; Columbus himself offers a model of dedication on which Britain might base its own process of national defense and planning for the post-war world. A notice in *The Listener* of 8 October 1942 lays out this subtext:

Columbus had faith—faith when he was pleading before the grandees, faith when he succeeded eventually in persuading the Spanish queen to grant him a ship, faith when he set out with his gaol-bird crews, faith when he faced their incipient mutiny. All the way through, his faith never faltered, and in the end it triumphed. ('On! Sail On!' 456)

Though the unnamed author of the article disclaims didacticism ("To dot the i's and cross the t's of the allegory as it applies to our struggle today is an exercise we may leave to others"), the article ends with a direct statement of what may not be the most obvious moral of the *Columbus* broadcast:

⁴² While overt propagandizing is kept to a minimum, other elements reflect the war in a more imagistic way: the sobbing of women at the departure of Columbus's ships implicitly relates their grief to all who have lost sons and husbands to war (*Plays* 46). Elsewhere, a voice like a newsreel announcer describes the pageantry of Columbus's return to Barcelona, evoking a media ecology particular to the twentieth century (82).

It is in some quarters the fashion to deride those who think and plan ahead: and certain it is that until victory has been won all our plans for a better world will remain but aspirations. But to know, even in the most general terms, the kind of world we are fighting for, is the first step towards that feeling of determination which is necessary to achieve it. And determination is the right arm of faith. (456)

For *The Listener*, *Columbus* meant more than determination in the face of a long and costly battle. Its protagonist is a model of visionary foresight, an individual capable of seeing beyond the immediate challenge to the promise of riches and new life in undiscovered new worlds beyond. The role of the BBC in debates about the post-war future has already been taken up in the chapter on J.B. Priestley; it is here worth noting only that by 1942 the organization felt itself independent enough of official government reticence about the post-war future to venture a statement in defense of planning. Furthermore, the generally progressive tone of *The Listener*'s call for a clear vision of "the kind of world we are fighting for" implies that currents of social change given fuller voice by the Beveridge Report in December of 1942 were already in popular circulation.

MacNeice had noted this atmosphere as early as the spring of 1941 in his periodic "London Letters" to *Common Sense*, a leftist American monthly. J.B. Priestley's *Postscripts* had driven the question of post-war planning to the fore in the summer and fall of 1940, and even with Priestley off the air, questions remained about the British government's commitment to social change following the war:

It has dawned on some people... that a clearer consciousness of aims and ends will promote the solution of some practical problems which have been

falsely divorced from ideology. Aims and ends are not just a hobby of the intelligentsia; the man-in-the-street is not content merely to add unit to unit, and, while he has a genuine conviction that this war must be gone through with, he wants to know where he is going through with it *to*. A clear statement of intended social changes—if they were the right changes (i.e. in the direction of an intelligently planned economy and the levelling out of the social castes)—would enhance the national war effort and heighten, high though it is, the popular morale. (*Selected Prose* 112-113)

If MacNeice's *Columbus* articulates a vision of perseverance guided by a desire for a new and better world, it builds on a larger cultural conversation to which the writer was already attuned. The "New World" of *Columbus* is not just the land of plenty and promise opened up to Europeans in 1492, nor is it only a metaphor for the new opportunities and optimism made possible by the entry of the US into the war. MacNeice's new world represents the promise of a better collective life realized through shared endeavour.

The visionary foresight of Columbus is echoed in a poem whose wartime composition has long been occluded by the fact that it remained unpublished for the duration of MacNeice's life. Discovered among his papers at his death, "Thalassa" was first printed in *London Magazine* in February 1964 and took on the role of swan song in posthumously collected editions of MacNeice's poems due to its Ulyssean command to "Run out the boat, my broken comrades" (l.1). Though critics tend to read the poem as the reflections of an aging man, the tone of the poem is more collective than personal:

Put out to sea, ignoble comrades,
Whose record shall be noble yet;

Butting through scarps of moving marble
 The narwhal dares us to be free;
 By a high star our course is set,
 Our end is life. Put out to sea. (ll.13-18)

The call to joint effort in the pursuit of a “noble” record resonates with wartime attempts to mobilize the citizenry in the service of the “People’s War.” Furthermore, the speaker describes his comrades’ past life as “a ruined church” before advising them to “let your poison be your cure” (ll.11-12). The call to inoculate oneself with the very means of one’s destruction echoes the argument made in MacNeice’s article “The Morning after the Blitz” and in his blitz poem “Brother Fire.” In the latter, material destruction offers the potential for rebirth: “O delicate walker, babbler, dialectician Fire ...Did we not on those mornings after the All Clear, / When you were looting shops in elemental joy / Echo your thoughts in ours? “Destroy! Destroy!” (“Brother Fire,” ll.13-8). MacNeice’s notes, preserved at the Harry Ransom Center, list a poem alternately titled “Run out the Boats” and “Thalassa” in the draft table of contents for the 1945 collection *Springboard* (Ms (MacNeice, L.) Works 3: Hanley II). Given the thematic parallels between “Thalassa” and other poems from *Springboard*, and archival evidence that the poem was initially drafted in 1944, “Thalassa” merits inclusion among MacNeice’s wartime output.⁴³

⁴³ While both Robin Marsack and Peter McDonald note this archival trace of the poem in the HRC holdings, they are reluctant to date “Thalassa” to the war years, owing to a lack of verifiable manuscript evidence. Instead, they conjecture that “Thalassa” may have been started around 1944 and reworked decades later; hence McDonald’s tentative dating of the poem as “(?1963)” (MacDonald, in MacNeice, *CP* 783, 818; Marsack 158). In addition to the wartime themes noted above, an important piece of evidence argues against this rather cautious assessment: the line “Butting through scarps of moving marble” is used to describe a whale in both “Thalassa” (l.15) and “Explorations” (l. 1), the poem which ultimately took the place formerly occupied by “Thalassa” in the draft table of contents for *Springboard* (Louis MacNeice Collection: Works: Box 3, HRC). Rather than revising an earlier poem in 1963 without removing a

Christopher Columbus, like “Thalassa” and “Brother Fire,” implies that the sufferings and trials of conflict might yield a better future; from the ashes of war might emerge a civilizational renewal. This notion of a new world made possible through long struggle is echoed, in subtle ways, throughout the broadcast. Faith in the expedition parallels faith in a British war effort, which in October of 1942 had only begun to achieve major victories; as one of Columbus’s supporters asks an opponent early in the feature, “Why take failure for granted?” (25). Similarly, though Queen Isabella is willing to underwrite the journey to America, she insists that it cannot take place until Spanish forces have defeated the Moors at Granada. When this moment comes, the Chorus greets the event with chants that echo the promise of a new England post-war:

The Old Age was iron; the New Age is golden;
 The Gold Age is coming—oh see where it comes!
 Granada has fallen. The long days of torment
 And bloodshed are over; the battle is done
 And we are the victors. Granada has fallen
 And Spain’s resurrection today has begun. (*Plays* 34).

That Spain itself was, in 1942, under fascist rule lent further significance to this passage. For the British listener in 1942, Granada was at once the city liberated from the Moors in 1491, a city currently under fascist control, and a promise of a more general liberation from war in the unwritten future.

Even less directly that this, however, *Christopher Columbus* offers a model of

previously used line, it seems more likely that MacNeice wrote both poems around the same time, and opted to include one over the other. While later revision cannot be ruled out, this textual overlap in a poem about collective heroism whose title and first line are inscribed in wartime documents points towards composition in 1944.

collective labour that serves as a corollary to the effort of millions of British citizens and soldiers serving in factories, in the military, in the civil service, and in volunteer positions across the country. By its very grandeur and spectacularity, *Christopher Columbus* lends aesthetic labour a material shape, simultaneously vindicating cultural production as a legitimate contribution to the war effort and rewarding tired listeners for their daytime work by offering them entertainment on a scale not previously enjoyed. Olivier's excessive performance embodies the physical work of acting and the psychological intensity of a man gripped by a single idea. The sheer number of instrumentalists and singers entailed a massive mobilization of artistic talent. Anthony Craxton, an employee of the BBC Presentation Department who described himself as "a very critical and conscientious listener," claimed that in eight years of employment at the BBC he had not heard a program "which reached the standard of this production." For Craxton, it was the synthesis of artistic elements that was most important: "The music I thought superb—the script very fine—but first and foremost, I felt that one was an integral part of the other—a perfect piece of co-operation in fact" (Memo to Dallas Bower, 13 October 1942, R19/174). Leonard Cottrell of the Features and Drama Department added that it was "a great subject nobly handled" (Memo to Louis MacNeice, 13 October 1942, R19/174), and "one of the most moving examples of radio drama which I have heard in ten years of listening" (Memo to Dallas Bower, 13 October 1942, R19/174).

In setting an example of the spectacular heights to which a radio production could reach, *Christopher Columbus* both brought entertainment and a sense of promise to its listeners worldwide. Against all of the odds and most of the precedents, it communicates its propaganda message (welcoming a new ally and urging perseverance under duress)

without unduly sacrificing the aesthetic value of its components. Indeed, brought together by the goal of a grandiose statement of Allied unity, these components reinforce each other: the epic scope and dramatic vision of MacNeice's script, the triumphalism and variety of Walton's score, the obsessive contortions of Olivier's Columbus, and the seamless production by Dallas Bower.

Conclusion

Louis MacNeice continued to produce works of literary art for the imagined poles of his audience, the narrowest of poetry publics and the broadest of radio publics. As his poetry, in *Autumn Sequel* (1954), *Visitations* (1957), *Solstices* (1961), and *The Burning Perch* (1963), moved towards ever denser experiments in rhetoric and oblique observation, his radio features and plays focused increasingly on the relationship of the individual to society. Post-war radio works including *The Dark Tower* (1946), a translation of Goethe's *Faust* (1949), *One Eye Wild* (1952, broadcast on the South African Broadcasting Corporation), and *Persons from Porlock* (1963) interrogate, in different ways, the manner in which a visionary individual is to find his way in a society that tends to constrain human potential. "Visionary" is in fact a misnomer; in many of these plays, as in *Alexander Nevsky* and his other wartime works, hearing is more important than vision. Blind Peter guides young Roland on his quest for the Dark Tower, a quest that must culminate in Roland playing a musical passage for which he has been in training his entire life; in *Persons from Porlock* an artist retreats into the comforting darkness of a cave to escape the pressures of the world around him; in *One Eye Wild* a radio sports commentator, half-blinded earlier in life, is struck by a car and enters a

dream-state in which he must account for a life half-lived. The central figure of *One Eye Wild* is, like so many MacNeice protagonists, “a half-Homer with but one eye blind—but also with one eye wild” (*One Eye Wild* 1). Vision may be important in MacNeice’s plays, but it is always a limited faculty; sharp audition can complement imperfect sight.

As MacNeice moved from reluctant propagandist in early 1941 to become the most celebrated features and drama writer of the war, he sought to bring the listening public—British and overseas—into a keener state of auditory awareness. MacNeice’s parables of close listening in a time of war are more than hollow pieces of political rhetoric; they form a guide to surviving cacophonous times. They asked a neutral audience to listen to the silence of Britain’s bell towers and to imagine the physical and cultural toll of destroyed buildings. They invite British listeners to lose themselves in the history and suffering sedimented beneath their Russian ally’s stand against German invasion, and like Blind Iuri to hear, proleptically, a victory not yet materialized. Most importantly, MacNeice’s broadcasts ask that listeners endure the hardship and privation of total war so that they might glimpse a New World at the other side of their long collective journey.

The radio feature, as developed and transmitted through the BBC, enabled MacNeice to build the flexible audio structures necessary to the communication of this collective goal. By allowing subtle elisions of time and space, MacNeice’s incorporation of studio techniques into his radio works permits the auditory perception of other worlds, whether of a deep historical past for British buildings or of the multiple worlds in collision on the Russian steppes or the Caribbean Sea. The vast networks of the BBC allowed this multispatial, multitemporal rendering of the world to be diffused globally.

Tailored to an audience he hoped would listen, MacNeice's radio works simultaneously imagine and service a radio public curious about, if not hungry for, the "community creed" MacNeice had lamented as lacking in British culture (*SLC* 93). Throughout, he managed for the most part to avoid writing either up or down to his audience; rather than pandering to the presumed interests of an imagined community of listeners, he sought to balance intellectual rigour and verbal prowess with dramatic narratives and immersive soundscapes. Having started the war with a commitment to "build the falling castle" (*AJ* II, 1.48), MacNeice ended it acknowledging that for many of his compatriots, "your past life [is] a ruined church." But a broken past need not hamper the future: "By a high star our course is set, / Our end is Life. Put out to sea" ("Thalassa," *CP* 483).

Chapter 4: Radio Free Empire: George Orwell, E.M. Forster, and Imperial Diffusion

While Louis MacNeice, J.B. Priestley, and others sought to guide British listeners into a political future defined primarily in terms of domestic relations of culture and capital, other broadcasters turned their attention to problems of empire. During the war, E.M. Forster and George Orwell addressed Indian listeners through the BBC in a complex and contradictory act of cultural *rapprochement*. To a great extent, India defined the radio careers of both men: Forster had first broadcast to a domestic audience in 1928, and had continued to do so periodically throughout the 1930s. His most sustained radio contribution was the series of monthly talks called “Some Books” that he gave between 1941 and 1947 as part of “We Speak to India,” a daily programme in English transmitted to the subcontinent by the Overseas Service. Orwell had a briefer but complete immersion in the world of radio; following a few occasional appearances, he was hired by the Overseas Service as a Talks Assistant in August of 1941, eventually becoming a Talks Producer, before resigning in November of 1943. For those two years he wrote weekly news summaries and played a key role in developing and delivering literary talks for “We Speak to India” and other English-language programmes at the India Section of the Overseas Service (W.J. West, *Broadcasts* 22-37). In terms of sheer output, the radio work of Orwell and Forster occupies an important place in their respective careers and in the story of British propaganda during the war: Forster made approximately 150 broadcasts, while Orwell was responsible for writing or delivering well over 200 (Kirkpatrick 330-341; Davison, *CW* 13:82).

Despite their considerable contribution to wartime broadcasting, Orwell and Forster were in many ways misfits at the Overseas Service. As an agency charged with projecting a positive image of Britain to its colonies and allies abroad, the Overseas Service had little time for dissenting views of the empire. Orwell and Forster thus occupied the broadcaster's chair uneasily, having each established their anti-imperial credentials with substantial novelistic critiques of the British presence in Asia—Forster in 1924 with *A Passage to India* and Orwell in 1934 with *Burmese Days*, both of which were banned in India. In addressing their audience through the BBC, the central issue for both writers was the impossibility of successfully squaring an anti-fascist stance (whose material realization as military victory over the Nazis depended on the full support of the British Empire) with an anti-imperial stance (a central tenet of which was the Indian right of self-determination). Orwell framed the problem with brutal lucidity in “Not Counting Niggers,” an essay published in the *Adelphi* in July of 1939. He argues that an Allied war against Nazi Germany would depend on, and therefore strengthen, British claims to material and human resources provided by the empire: “For how can we make a ‘firm stand’ against Hitler if we are simultaneously weakening ourselves at home? In other words, how can we ‘fight Fascism’ except by bolstering up a far vaster injustice?” (*CW* 11:360).

The Nazi threat hobbled Orwell's and Forster's public efforts to secure a political settlement with India so long as the war against fascism continued. But while forced to compromise on the immediate question of Indian independence, Orwell and Forster found in broadcasting a productive forum for the exploration of late-imperial conceptions of the nation. The two writers found themselves conjuring and responding to a listening

public whose exact ideological positions they could imagine but not pin down. Anxious about the political resistance of their audience, but bound by censorship constraints, both writers adopted postures of covert anti-imperialism in their broadcasts. The potential hostility of an audience which encompassed nationalist Indian listeners encouraged Orwell and Forster to contrast the excesses of the British Empire with an image of the English nation as democratic, empathetic, rich in the literature and culture of debate and dissent, and therefore capable of the kind of social and cultural progress that could yield support for overseas decolonization. Broadcasting became the space in which late-imperial identity took shape through the defensive projection of “little England,” as anxieties of audience echoed anxieties of empire.

The trend away from the expansionism of British imperial culture, and towards a more insular vision of English national culture, correlates with what Jed Esty has called the “anthropological turn” of late modernism. Esty describes the anthropological turn as “the discursive process by which English intellectuals translated the end of empire into a resurgent concept of national culture—one whose insular integrity seemed to mitigate some of modernism’s characteristic social agonies while rendering obsolete some of modernism’s defining aesthetic techniques” (2). While Esty attends to various formal manifestations of this “vitiating imperial humanism” (3), including the turn by writers like Forster and Virginia Woolf to consider pastoral notions of Englishness, his study does not encompass the international projection of British and English identities undertaken by the BBC before and during the Second World War. And yet Orwell’s and Forster’s broadcasts on the BBC Overseas Service offer an unparalleled example of both the contradictions inherent in the imperial project and the compensatory turn from a broadly

imperial culture to a smaller national one. Already skeptical of the justness and sustainability of British domination over other peoples, Forster and Orwell implicitly acquiesced in the maintenance of colonial power relations through their participation in the imperial radio project, even as they used that project to seek to undermine the worst tendencies of imperialism at the moment of its greatest vulnerability.

Their radio utterances effected, in a double sense, a diffusion of empire, rendering it at once widely spread and thinly stretched. The ethics of this diffusion were complicated and, at times, conflicting: both Orwell and Forster saw the need to broadcast a vision of recuperative nationalism to counter the aggressive nationalism of Nazi Germany, but were wary of perpetuating the destructive effects British imperial policy had inflicted upon India. Their solution—provisional, and geared to the demands of a semi-official medium in wartime—was to promote a vision of pastoral English exceptionalism that explicitly worked against Nazi ideology while implicitly working against the legacy of the British Empire. As Esty points out, there was not necessarily a conflict between patriotism, anti-fascism, and anti-imperialism in the late modernist period:

Fascism's rise in Europe not only isolated England politically and culturally but signaled the power of *völkisch* national thinking in an era of mass politics—a double-whammy that galvanized intellectual interest in the language of cultural solidarity on the shrinking island. In the culture of retrenchment, then, the political challenge of the time—the need to generate a counterfascist version of national solidarity without sacrificing the institutions of English tradition and liberal politics—intersected with

an intellectual quest for revitalized sources of local authenticity, of folk consciousness, of chthonic identity. (40)

Patriotic obligations and intellectual aspirations could thus merge under the double pressure of external threat and imperial contraction. Radio provided an intangible forum, suspended between London and India and between speaker and auditor, in which to consider the place of England in a world of nascent and crumbling empires. In the instant between speaking and being heard, both writers tested their allegiances to national and international ideals, and imperfectly spoke of the possibilities of a new set of relations between England and the rest of the world.

Forster had anticipated the need—and the opportunity—to craft a new, minor notion of national identity in the face of geopolitical shifts. In a letter to Malcolm Darling dated 3 January 1935, he wrote, “Like you, I feel gloomy about the world’s future... Perhaps we shall have a great break up and smallness will be established—the hamlet instead of the empire, the family-factory instead of the Standard Oil Company. With smallness, gentleness and unselfishness may become operative in outward affairs” (HRC Forster Ms: Series II, Box 6, Folder 1). Building on their longstanding interests in England and Englishness, as demonstrated by Orwell in *The Road to Wigan Pier* and *The Lion and the Unicorn* and by Forster in *Howards End* and *A Room with a View*, the two writers sought to foreground the “smallness” of England, in the hope that gentleness and unselfishness might follow. Each writer took his own approach: Orwell emphasized the polyvocality of the imperial metropole itself, bringing dissident voices to the microphone in the company of more established writers, thereby levelling the cultural playing field of the empire. For Forster, diminutive nationalism meant stressing the localism of English

literature while simultaneously placing it in constellation with a broader, anti-hierarchical array of literature from Europe, the empire, and beyond. Though broadcast outward to India, this vision of Englishness enabled both authors to rehearse and refine agendas for national reform intended for a domestic audience. By speaking their England to India, Orwell and Forster could, as the empire contracted, forge a national identity based on cultural production rather than colonial domination.

Talking to India: British Broadcasting and the Projection of England

Over the course of the 1930s, major European nations matched their increasing belligerence with an expansion of international broadcast networks designed to further their political and ideological interests. Despite reports of increasingly effective German and Italian broadcasts to British territories, the British government was slow to expand the overseas role of the BBC. An Empire Service had been provisionally operational since 1932, but it had only limited funding and no guarantee of long-term operation. Finally, the Ullswater Committee—established in 1935 to consider the renewal of the BBC charter in 1936—recommended that the Empire Service be officially enshrined in a new charter, with a commensurate rise in operational funds. “In the interests of British prestige and influence in world affairs,” the Committee added, “the appropriate use of languages other than English should be encouraged” (qtd. in Briggs 2:395). Arabic was the first language added, in January of 1938, with Spanish (to Latin America), French, Italian, and German broadcasts beginning later that year.⁴⁴ Having begun its international

⁴⁴ The massive international broadcasting project embarked upon by the BBC forced a complicated organizational structure into being. In November of 1939, the Empire Service was subsumed within the new Overseas Service, which also included the Foreign Service (which handled broadcasts to continental Europe in English and other languages) and the Overseas Forces Programme (which offered lighter fare for

radio propagandizing relatively late, the BBC lagged behind the German *Reichsrundfunkgesellschaft* (RRG) throughout the war: in September of 1939, the RRG was already broadcasting around the world in 36 languages, compared to 10 foreign language services transmitted by the BBC. By the end of the war, however, the gap had nearly closed, with the BBC Overseas Service broadcasting in 45 foreign languages while the RRG transmitted in 52 (Briggs 3:18).

In May of 1940, the India Section of the Overseas Service was launched to counter German propaganda broadcasts to the subcontinent. With programming tailored specifically for an Indian audience, the goal of this Section was to promote British war aims while luring listeners away from German-sponsored broadcasts by prominent Indian nationalists like Subhas Chandra Bose.⁴⁵ Bose's Axis-supported broadcasts had succeeded in capturing the attention of many Indian listeners by capitalizing on anti-British sentiment. Officials in Delhi and London feared that, unless the BBC could provide a convincing response to German propaganda, a successful independence movement might take hold and cut off the vital supply of materials and soldiers from India (Briggs, 3:504-512). Thus, though their creative efforts were largely conceived and presented in English, the target for Orwell's and Forster's transmissions was Indian,

members of the armed forces stationed in Asia and Africa). Within the Overseas Service, the Eastern Service was responsible for broadcasts to an area including India, Southeast Asia, and China. The India Section, as part of the Eastern Service, handled both English and Hindustani broadcasts, as well as news commentaries in Tamil, Gujarati, Bengali, and Marathi. Sir Malcolm Darling, a British-born Indian civil servant (who happened also to be a close friend of E.M. Forster), was in charge of the Hindustani broadcasts, while Z.A. Bokhari, an Indian-born broadcaster with extensive experience at All-India Radio in Delhi, coordinated English-language programming to India. The India Section broadcast for 45 minutes a day for the majority of the war.

⁴⁵ German broadcasts sometimes featured readings of English-language novels critical of the British Empire, including Forster's *A Passage to India*. "So far as I know," Orwell later wrote, "they didn't even have to resort to dishonest quotation" (CE 4:54). Bose, a prominent nationalist formerly affiliated with the Indian National Congress, broadcast anti-British talks from Berlin for approximately two years, before travelling by submarine to Japan. He eventually assembled an Indian National Army to fight, unsuccessfully, against the British in Burma (Davison, *CW* 13:260 n.1, 13:286 n.5).

namely the educated elite and students, “the people likeliest to have access to short-wave radio sets” (Orwell, *CEJL* 2:307; *Talking* 7). While some members of the influential English-speaking minority might be sympathetic to British rule, many were not; the India Section therefore had to tread carefully, promoting British interests without appearing overly jingoistic.

This balance between promoting British interests without stoking anti-British sentiment had to be achieved in an almost total information vacuum: very little was known about the intended Indian audience (Orwell, *CEJL* 2:489-90; MacKenzie 41). What feedback the Service received was almost exclusively derived from research conducted on white audience members, whether temporary residents or colonial settlers of British holdings (MacKenzie 41-42).⁴⁶ In an attempt to survey listening habits in India in late 1942, BBC Intelligence Officer Laurence Brander sent out an audience questionnaire; while 60 percent of the British Army listeners thus contacted returned completed surveys, only four percent of European civilians resident on the subcontinent did so. Of the Indian listeners contacted, none returned completed surveys, a failure Brander ascribed to lack of publicity. Some correspondents told him that if “we knew what your programmes are, we could reply to the questionnaire” (Briggs, 3:508; Brander’s report is reproduced in Orwell, *CW* 15:343-56). In the introduction to a collection of India Section broadcasts published in 1943, *Talking to India*, Orwell sketched the Indian portion of the audience demographically. He noted that only three

⁴⁶ While colonial residents of British extraction had been the intended audience of the Empire Service when it launched in 1932, the India Section, where Orwell worked, catered to the non-British population of the subcontinent. After 1941, portions of the white settler population of India had begun to tune in to the Overseas Forces Programme that was launched in the wake of the reorganization of the Overseas Service (Hill 3); while a certain number of British-descended listeners likely tuned in to the India Section broadcasts, the Indian audience mattered a great deal more in terms of BBC propaganda goals and were therefore the target audience.

percent of the non-settler population could understand English, though this small group consisted of educated and politically engaged individuals who were also the most likely to own short-wave radio sets (*Talking* 7). Projections of this audience, however, were not grounded in any hard data; “[i]n broadcasting your audience is conjectural,” as Orwell notes in his 1943 essay “Poetry and the Microphone” (*CEJL* 2:377).

Because of the absence of clear information about the audience to whom they were broadcasting, both Orwell and Forster displayed a compensatory anxiety in their transmissions as they attempted to define an absent auditor. To a certain extent, as Michael Warner points out, all utterances of public discourse require the act of imagining an intended recipient. Whether on the radio or in print, in a national or international setting, this act of discursive imagining creates the public to which it addresses itself: “A public might be real and efficacious, but its reality lies in just this reflexivity by which an addressable object is conjured into being in order to enable the very discourse that gives it existence” (Warner 67). For Orwell and Forster, however, conjuring an Indian audience was fraught with the danger of repeating the very impositions of imperial culture that the two writers had so long resisted. In a review of the life and works of Stefan Zweig broadcast in 1942, Forster was wary of bluntly assuming Indian interest in European affairs, even during the war: “I don’t expect Europe means very much to you; I don’t see that it can or indeed that it should. When I went out East myself, many years ago, it was extraordinary how Europe, including my own particular island, receded, until I could recall it by an effort of the imagination” (Forster, *BBC* 174). Forster goes on to speculate about his absent auditor:

Today it’s just my voice that goes East and reaches India: the rest of me

stays sitting in a London studio... and it's only by an effort of the imagination that I can guess where *you're* sitting and what thoughts are in *your* minds. I often wish you could answer me back: and so perhaps do you! But since you can't, I try to make remarks which, though they are coloured by my surroundings, may perhaps be applicable to yours. (174)

This anxiety about audience reflects the confluence of imperial guilt with technological limitations. The feat of radio diffusion is undercut by its deferral of the promise of true communication: in place of an actual two-way exchange, Forster imagines his audience. The distance effortlessly transcended by the voice does not abolish cultural and bodily distance; rather, the abolition of acoustic distance necessitates an intercultural imagining that, inevitably, fixes power within the broadcaster's voice.

The anxiety of audience demonstrated by Orwell and Forster can thus be read as the combined effect of the intimate acoustics of radio and the persistent power dynamics of an imperialism of which they were ashamed but which they felt they had to uphold, if temporarily. Both writers, bringing a critical self-awareness to late imperial broadcasting, engaged frankly with the crises of over-extension that characterized British imperialism. As many critics have pointed out, the colonial project produced a destabilization of identity at the imperial centre; "the trouble with the English," to paraphrase Salman Rushdie, "is that their history happened overseas, so they don't know what it means" (*Satanic Verses* 343).⁴⁷ British expansion had dislocated Englishness: imperialism had at once destabilized the geographical centre of national self-identification—moving it to the

⁴⁷ The direct quotation is stuttered rather than directly stated: "The trouble with the Engenglish is that their hiss hiss history happened overseas, so they dodo don't know what it means" (343). Ian Baucom takes this passage as the point of departure for his consideration of Englishness and the British Empire in *Out of Place*.

colonial periphery—and supplanted the regional identities of the British Isles with an overarching Britishness. As Linda Colley argues, contact with colonized cultures effected an elision between Welsh, Scottish, and English identities: “The sense of a common identity here did not come into being... because of an integration and homogenisation of disparate cultures. Instead, Britishness was superimposed over an array of internal differences in response to contact with the Other, and in response to the conflict with the Other” (Colley 6). Although the expansion of empire had provided Britain with enormous material wealth and a grand historical narrative, it had supplanted local forms of cultural identity. “Englishness” became difficult to disentangle from the imperial project (Kalliney, *Cities* 5; Gikandi, *Maps* 31). The result was a vexed situation in which Englishness, as a local, place-based formation, became the cultural emblem of Britishness as exported abroad, while the empire became a point of identification for the English at home (Baucom, *Out of Place* 3-4). The problem, as Esty frames it, was that “[i]f empire hallowed Englishness by virtue of its projection to (and invention for) the colonies, it also hollowed Englishness by splitting its being into core and periphery” (26).

The empire—far-flung and racially “other”—had thus always been a problematic source of British/English identity, one that pointedly exacerbated the friction between these two related terms. Gayatri Spivak’s claim that “empire messes with identity” is, as Simon Gikandi and Ian Baucom have noted separately, as true for the colonizer as for the colonized (Spivak 226; Gikandi, *Maps* 31; Baucom, *Out of Place* 14). Overseas broadcasting compounded this contradiction between a local “English” identity and a globally diffuse “British” identity by staging English culture and traditions as part of the common heritage of all British subjects despite massive inequalities in citizenship rights

and economic wealth. In the context of maintaining wartime alliances, the Overseas Service had to bridge the considerable gap between the reality of imperial domination and the ideals of liberalism and democracy that supposedly defined England. The urgency of the anti-fascist struggle made Orwell and Forster's assertion of "little" England over "great" Britain that much more tenuous an endeavour.

Even though the distinction between England and Britain was important for both Orwell and Forster, the terms often became blurred in the process of disentangling empire from nation. As was the case with J.B. Priestley, Britain most often represented a state affiliation, a governmental structure whose existence was bound up with imperialism. England, on the other hand, was the prime site of affective national identification for both Orwell and Forster, a cultural and geographical entity without imperial ambitions. As Esty has claimed, Forster's fiction repeatedly stages the conflict between the bustling imperial metropolis and the insular but rapidly obsolescing rural core, the former providing intercultural contact and the latter offering a stable national horizon at once comforting and lulling (24-5). Despite this apparently easy distinction—Britain as governmental and imperial, England as cultural and insular—Forster's broadcasts often elide the difference. In one of three "Anti-Nazi Broadcasts" aired in 1940, Forster chose to contrast Nazi Germany not with Britain, but with England, indicating that it is not Britain that will solve the problem of aggressive nationalism, but Little England:

In England our culture is not governmental. It is national; it springs naturally out of our way of looking at things, and at the way we have looked at things in the past. It has developed slowly, easily, lazily; the English love of freedom, the English countryside, English prudishness and

hypocrisy, English freakishness, our mild idealism and good-humoured reasonableness have all combined to make something which is certainly not perfect, but which may claim to be unusual. (*Two Cheers* 41)

The naturalizing language of this passage renders Englishness as an autochthonous identity that has evolved effortlessly. The admission of imperfection and hypocrisy may be a nod to his Indian audience: this broadcast having gone out on the Eastern Service, Forster had to balance his encomium to England with an admission of its links to British imperialism.

Orwell, too, saw English culture as antithetical to imperial aggression and expansion. Two of his most extended considerations of English identity were written during the war years: *The Lion and the Unicorn* (1941) and *The English People* (written in 1943, though not published until 1947). In the former, he notes privateness, gentleness, and a resistance to “power-worship” as key characteristics of the English (*CEJL* 2:77-79). Still, he adds, the English “have a certain power of acting without taking thought. Their world-famed hypocrisy—their double-faced attitude towards the Empire, for instance—is bound up with this” (2:77). In this evocation of English identity, the empire becomes the manifestation not of malice but of a quirk of national character, a peculiar double standard that the English would abandon were it ever explained to them. This distinction notwithstanding, Orwell’s use of the terms England and Britain could be vague; the two names seem at times to have been synonymous for him. In *The Lion and the Unicorn*, Orwell insists that cultural distinctions within Britain reveal themselves to be minor when viewed from national perspectives outside the British Isles, indicating that the binding affinities of English-speaking British citizens override divisive differences (*CEJL* 2:83-

4). In many ways, this mentality lines up with Colley's argument cited above: Britishness is formed not by the elision of actual differences, but by the encounter of English-speaking whites with colonial Others. In Orwell's vocabulary, "England" emerges as the dominant cultural foundation of Britishness as projected overseas by virtue of the fact that it was the most demographically dominant component of the British nation.

Orwell's overwriting of regional diversity might itself seem an imperial act which indiscriminately blurs his own local identity and those of other Britons. Yet, in the context of the Second World War, the slippage between Englishness and Britishness demonstrated in *The Lion and the Unicorn* results from having to address a British audience with a message spoken against the British Empire. Arguing for the abolition of the empire in favour of a smaller, more local form of democratic socialism involved jettisoning the language of colonialism—hence the subtitle of the essay, *Socialism and the English Genius*. Though at pains to stress the shared values and experiences of Scottish, Welsh, and English citizens of the British Isles, Orwell is interested in returning to a pre-imperial form of national identification.

The problem of projecting England via a British medium, as in *The Lion and the Unicorn*, is exacerbated in radio broadcasting. The historical development of the BBC meant that broadcasts emerged from London and were therefore embedded in an environment of what Raymond Williams has called "metropolitan perception": more than simply an urban consciousness, this perception developed, Williams argues, out of the "magnetic concentration of wealth and power in imperial capitals and the simultaneous cosmopolitan access to a wide variety of subordinate cultures" (*Politics of Modernism* 44). Lodged at the centre of the metropolis and reaching out wirelessly towards its British

subjects around the world, Broadcasting House was one of the most important nodes in the vast network of imperial communication. Orwell's and Forster's solution was to work against this model of imperial domination by combining the peripheral reach of international communications with a non-dogmatic, non-authoritarian exploration of what defines English culture. Turning away from the "lost totality" of imperial life, these two writer-broadcasters, like many other artists, focused instead on a recuperation of national culture as just one tradition among many (Esty 7). Orwell and Forster could not overcome the contradiction of preaching the virtue of a system they thought unjust; nor could they be sure of the audience to whom they were speaking. But the very inaudibility of the Indian audience gave the two writers a medium through which to project their own views of the shortcomings of imperialism, the problem of censorship, and the need for balance between wartime restrictions and ideal freedoms.

"The Frontiers of Art and Propaganda": Orwell and the Imperial Radio Public

Orwell and Forster could trace only the vaguest outlines of their audience: while they could not predict who might tune in, the BBC had decided to aim their broadcasts at a minority population of Indian university students and elites with a knowledge of English. Given this educated audience, the broadcasts faced high expectations at the level of ideas, and an audience averse to excessive British patriotism (Orwell, *CEJL* 2:374; West, *WB* 13). Both *Through Eastern Eyes* and *We Speak to India* were therefore deliberately intellectual in scope and content, far more so than most programmes on the

BBC Home Service.⁴⁸ In a letter to George Woodcock mid-way through his BBC career, Orwell described “Voice,” one of the literary programmes he produced, as

a bit of private lunacy we indulge in once a month... I would be surprised if it is listened-in to by 500 people. In any case there is no question of getting to the Indian *masses* with any sort of b’cast, because they don’t possess radios, certainly not shortwave sets. In our outfit we are really only b’casting for the students, who, however, won’t listen to anything except news & perhaps music while the political situation is what it is. (*CEJL* 2:307 [2 December 1942])

For Orwell, the difficulties of convincing this audience of the relatively good intentions of the BBC and of Britain generally were outweighed by the potential gains of such overtures. He saw this influential minority as key to steeling India against the nationalist broadcasts of Bose and others; in his writings on his experiences at the BBC, Orwell consequently framed Indian listeners as understandably skeptical of British propaganda, but conscious of the greater lie of Nazi ideology (*Talking* 7-9; “Pacifism and the War”, *CEJL* 2:264). This abstract notion of the Indian listener—based on plausible, but ultimately unverifiable, conjectures—altered the form and content of Orwell’s radio programming. In “Poetry and the Microphone,” an essay written around the time of his departure from the BBC in the fall of 1943 but not published until 1945, Orwell confessed that this “small and hostile audience,” as he called it, “dictated our technique to some extent” (*CEJL* 2:374). By imagining his audience, Orwell provided himself with a model against which his broadcasts could react; they took shape in response to a

⁴⁸ West and Davison, among others, have argued that the restricted, elite audience of the Overseas Service enabled a “trial run” for some of the more “highbrow” programming that would fill the BBC Third Programme upon its inception in 1946 (Davison 15:xxiii, West, *WB* 37).

conjectured listener.

The inversion of the audience-orator dynamic of authority—the shaping of the supposedly powerful speaker by the supposedly powerless listener—echoes the themes of colonial posture and imposture in “Shooting an Elephant” (1936), one of Orwell’s first essays to receive substantial acclaim. The essay recounts an episode in Orwell’s career as a policeman in Burma where, as the sub-divisional officer in a small town, he deals with a rogue elephant that rampages through an adjacent village. Uncertain whether he will shoot the animal, he arms himself and approaches the elephant. An audience of over two thousand Burmese spectators gathers around and effectively makes the decision for him: “The people expected it of me and I had got to do it” (*CEJL* 1:269). The assumption of imperial authority entails, for Orwell, a necessary but disempowering response to the expectations of the subjugated population: “Here was I, the white man with his gun standing in front of an unarmed native crowd—seemingly the leading actor of the piece: but in reality I was only an absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of those yellow faces behind” (1:269). This particular incident reveals to Orwell that the moral and philosophical convolutions needed to sustain the British Empire are brutalizing to both sides: “I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom he destroys” (1:269).

Orwell’s observation—that the colonized dictate the role of the colonizer—risks being merely an unjust reversal of the actual dynamics of power, in which victims of colonialism are posited as its most powerful agents. Yet, when taken in the context of his greater output on the topic of the British Empire, “Shooting an Elephant” appears as a necessary complication to the dynamics of imperial injustice he often criticized.

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Orwell denounced the British Empire as “an unjustifiable tyranny” (*RWP* 126); as “nothing but [a] mechanism for exploiting cheap coloured labour” (*CE* 1:436); as “sheer hypocrisy” (*CEJL* 2:80); as arguably “worse than Nazism” (*CEJL* 3:232). Far from self-indulgent imperial introspection, Orwell’s position in “Shooting an Elephant” derives from a matter-of-fact realization that no empire can at once celebrate the rights of individuals and yet keep hundreds of millions of people in subjugation without catalyzing a crisis in the minds of those charged with imperial administration. “Empire,” to reiterate Spivak, “messes with identity” (226).

To stress the brutalizing effect of colonialism for all involved, Orwell appeals to the full spectrum of doubts in British society: if not for ethical or political reasons, Britons need to abandon overseas imperialism because it represents a distortion of some mythical, monolithic British identity. “Shooting an Elephant” is full of the language of fakery, bordering on ventriloquism: the imperialist “becomes a sort of hollow, posing dummy... He wears a mask, and his face grows to fit it” (*CEJL* 1:269). This mask of ethical and national distortion is, ironically, sustained by the fear of losing face, for the price of breaking the audience’s expectations of the imperial performance is humiliation: “The crowd would laugh at me. And my whole life, every white man’s life in the East, was one long struggle not to be laughed at” (270). The double bind of imperialism placed Orwell between two kinds of disgrace: an embarrassing contravention of his own beliefs about English national character, and public ridicule in the colonial sphere. He echoes the strong ties between shame, English national identity, and British imperial identity later in the war, in one of his regular letters to the *Partisan Review* in the winter of 1944. Reflecting on his earlier hopes that the Second World War might have achieved

substantial changes in British political culture, Orwell writes, “I hate to see England humiliated or humiliating anybody else. I wanted to think that we would not be defeated, and I wanted to think that the... imperialist exploitation of which I am ashamed would not return” (*CEJL* 3:339).

Orwell therefore had to find a way of perpetrating the radio war against fascism without risking either colonial ridicule or the distortions of national character inherent in blindly sustaining the ideological and material conditions of the British Empire. His solution was to strike an ideological balance by pushing a firm anti-fascist line in his newsletters while seeking in his other broadcasts to appeal to the affinity for British—or more specifically, English—culture held by some members of his audience. This latter goal was achieved through a variety of cultural programming. Over his two years at the BBC, Orwell wrote, produced, and presented programmes including literary broadcasts, adaptations of stories, talks relating to wartime life in London and elsewhere, and a few programmes that did not fit easily into any of these categories. Regardless of their genre, the purpose of these broadcasts was to ensure that a positive image of the cultural life of England was being promoted in India. For Orwell, being a Talks Producer also afforded opportunities for exerting a definitive emphasis on what, exactly, constituted English cultural life. Against authoritarian and tradition-bound notions of culture, Orwell advocated a more flexible, forward-thinking, and deliberative model of English culture.

As it happens, Orwell very nearly had no broadcasting career whatsoever: shot through the throat during the Spanish Civil War, he was told by doctors that he would never again speak above a whisper (*Homage to Catalonia* 137-146, 153). He eventually recovered, though his voice had changed, and was now characterized by “a lasting, flat

tonelessness of expression” (Crick 224).⁴⁹ Orwell’s brush with muteness is ironic, given that his experience of the Spanish Civil War taught him that the sounds of persuasion carry far, and carry much weight. “The real weapon was not the rifle but the megaphone,” he claims in *Homage to Catalonia* (42). Both at the front lines and in newspapers across Europe, the control of political truth was as important, if not more so, than actual military victories. Throughout his account of the war in Spain, the acoustics of propaganda ring out not only through megaphones but also radios and “gangster-gramophones” (*HC* 42, 122, 151, 242). Even the propagandistic shouting between Fascist and Republican trenches had real effects, Orwell believed, prompting many cases of desertion from Franco’s side (42).

Orwell’s documentation of the acoustic war in Spain would contribute to his extremely lucid analysis of his participation in Second World War broadcasting, a career he saw as part of a “small and remote outflanking movement in the radio war” (*CEJL* 2:374). Embedded as a combatant and journalist, he had spent the Spanish Civil War decrying propagandists who thought they could relate the conflict from the safety of London (*HC* 130). Though serving with the Partido Obrero Unificación Marxista, an anarchist party within the Republican front, Orwell questions his own biases throughout *Homage to Catalonia*. While all political writing reveals biases, he asserts, “I am not writing a book of propaganda” (10). Such relentless self-positioning was the result of bitter experience: egregious distortions of fact by both left-wing and conservative newspapers in Spain and abroad had led to a brutal crackdown by Soviet-backed Communists on the more egalitarian and revolutionary factions of the Republican forces.

⁴⁹ No twenty-first century listener can appreciate the properties of Orwell’s voice, either before or after the shooting, as no acoustic record of it exists anywhere. See West, *WB* 266, n.100, and *George Orwell: A Life in Pictures*.

This act of betrayal and infighting sharpened Orwell's sense of the potential for abuse inherent in any propagandistic medium.

By the outbreak of the Second World War, Orwell's attitude towards propaganda had shifted. He was extremely eager to participate on the Allied side in whatever capacity he could, settling for the BBC when the military refused him on medical grounds. He joined the BBC towards the end of the summer of 1941, conscious that he would likely face censorship and some pressure to propagandize. Writing in his diary on 14 March 1942, he justified his role in the deliberate shaping of Indian understanding of the war by invoking an ends-based logic of *realpolitik*: "All propaganda is lies, even when one is telling the truth. I don't think this matters so long as one knows what one is doing, and why..." (*CEJL* 2:465-6). As against his attitude in Spain, he now believed that the ethical evaluation of propaganda was based not on a question of objective truth but of degrees of veracity. "In the last analysis," he wrote in a February 1944 *As I Please* column for the *Tribune*, "our only claim to victory is that if we win the war we shall tell less lies about it than our adversaries" (*CEJL* 3:110). Swapping idealism for victory had, since his experiences in the Spanish Civil War, come to seem an acceptable compromise; as he argued in a 1943 poem defending the radio work he and others performed, "there are truths that smaller lies can serve" (*CEJL* 2:345).

Orwell's broadcasts fell for the most part into three general categories: *Through Eastern Eyes*, a series for which Orwell mostly assisted in the production of talks presented by Asian speakers; *We Speak to India*, a series aimed at presenting British (and, to some extent, European) culture to Indian listeners; and weekly "newsletters" (sometimes called commentaries) summarizing recent events in the war for various Asian

audiences. Many of these newsletters were broadcast as part of the series *Through Eastern Eyes*; those sent to Asian countries and colonies other than India were sent out through other Eastern Service sections.⁵⁰ These three types of broadcasts reflect varying degrees of propaganda, the newsletters falling most squarely into the category of overt political persuasion. R.A. Rendall, then Assistant Controller of Overseas Programmes for the BBC, outlined their function in a memorandum circulated on 9 February 1942: “The primary purpose of news commentaries is propaganda. They make it possible to ‘put across’ the British view of the news, without sacrificing the reputation that has been carefully built up for veracity and objectivity in news presentation” (qtd. in Davison 13:88).

Given such clear directives, Orwell could not deny that he was involved in the dissemination of news propaganda; instead, he chose to emphasize his commitment to maintaining a degree of truth in his broadcasts. He notes in a 1942 letter to George Woodcock that “by working inside an institution like the B.B.C. one can perhaps deodorize it to some small extent. I doubt whether I shall stay in this job very much longer,” Orwell writes, “but while here I consider I have kept our propaganda slightly less disgusting than it might otherwise have been” (*CEJL* 2:307). Indeed, the limited efficacy of BBC propaganda, rather than its ethical dubiousness, may have led to Orwell’s resignation in 1943 (Fleay and Sanders 510; Kerr, “Rhetoric” 473). Though Orwell stayed on for almost a year after Laurence Brander’s 1942 report, which documented the low level of interest in BBC broadcasts among Indian listeners, he was dispirited by the news. He wrote in his wartime diary that “the situation is retrievable but

⁵⁰ None of the books and articles published to date on Orwell at the BBC fully disentangles the web of programmes with which Orwell was involved. This description is based on an analysis of the extensive documentation and commentary provided by Peter Davison in volumes 13-15 of Orwell’s *Complete Works*.

won't be retrieved because the Government is determined to make no real concessions...our broadcasts are utterly useless because nobody listens to them" (*CEJL* 2:507). He added, however, that Brander's report indicated "that the Indians listen to the B.B.C. *news*, because they regard it as more truthful than that given out by Tokyo or Berlin" (*CEJL* 2:507).

Since the mid-1980s, Orwell's involvement in news propaganda work has attracted the bulk of the scholarly attention focused on his radio career. W.J. West first brought Orwell's broadcasts to a wider readership in 1985 with *The War Broadcasts* and *The War Commentaries*, though these volumes have since endured some backlash from other critics. While not wholly incorrect, West's main contention—that Orwell's evocation of the totalitarian nightmare of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was the direct result of his experience of censorship and propaganda at the BBC (*Broadcasts* 21)—is vulnerable to critique in that it neglects the full range of influences that helped to shape Orwell's complicated political fiction. Peter Davison, among others, has also attacked West's two volumes for being incomplete and inaccurate in their presentation of Orwell's BBC output (Orwell, *CW* 13:16, n.20). Nonetheless, West's edition of the broadcasts was crucial to the early development of scholarship on Orwell's BBC tenure.

Other critics have resisted the characterization of Orwell as a saint among propagandists. In response to a proliferation of glowing biographical accounts of Orwell's radio work, C. Fleay and M.L. Sanders published articles in 1984 and 1989 arguing against the writer's reputation as a broadcaster untainted by political manipulations. They point out that his broadcast newsletters deviate strikingly in their political orientation from contemporaneous diary entries, especially as regards the Soviet

Union (“Looking Into the Abyss,” 510-12); they argue that this divergence indicates Orwell’s conscious participation in political distortion. Fleay and Sanders go as far as to say that *Animal Farm*, the indictment of Soviet totalitarianism begun immediately following his departure from the BBC, represents a “work of atonement” (514) for the softly pro-Soviet broadcasts he was encouraged to make. They also raise the important point that even Orwell’s more “literary” broadcasts should not be thought of as distinct from the overall political aims of the BBC, though they do not offer detailed analysis of these scripts (505-6).

In two essays, Douglas Kerr has placed Orwell’s broadcasts in the context both of his anti-imperial thought and of the Second World War, but has likewise focused on the newsletters as the prime site for the investigation of Orwell’s politics. The commentaries, he argues, are complicated documents that display a multitude of determining “voices,” including “the voice of the Empire at war (‘London calling!’), the state, the institution of the BBC, and the compromised yet determined author himself” (“Rhetoric” 474). As Kerr has shown, Orwell became adept at reconciling the need for pro-British broadcasting with his distaste for the British Empire itself, often by tactical omissions: by contrasting Japanese propaganda claims with verifiable facts about Japanese actions in China and Southeast Asia, Orwell could mount an argument against Japanese territorial ambitions without ever needing to invoke the problematic question of the British hold on India (“Rhetoric” 482).

While largely ignoring Orwell’s literary contributions to *Through Eastern Eyes* and *We Speak to India*, this scholarship provides a context and a lens through which to examine the other, more covertly propagandistic programmes Orwell broadcast. As

scholars including Daniel Morse and Michael Coyle have argued, cultural programming transmitted to India sought to build support for Britain by capitalizing on the fondness for British literature and culture held by many English-educated Indians. While cultural programming at the BBC was an inextricable part of the overall plan to persuade listeners of the integrity of British rule and British war aims, such programming also enabled other, less official articulations on the part of broadcasters like Forster and Orwell. For Orwell, his job as a Talks Producer allowed him to contribute to the shaping of English literary culture in the aftermath of high modernism. In this role, he could at once participate in the institutionalization of writers like Eliot and Joyce while also offering acoustic space to lesser-known and emerging writers. Furthermore, by bringing dissident voices to the microphone—socialist, feminist, pacifist, anti-imperialist—Orwell sought to demonstrate the flexibility and tolerance the medium of radio afforded. Even within the structures of imperial communication networks, voices could emerge that spoke, directly or indirectly, against the hypocrisy and injustice that sustained the British Empire. In rallying such voices to the microphone, Orwell gave a shape to his own nascent sense of a post-imperial England within Britain: literate, founded on debate and dissent, commonsensical and compassionate.

Though disseminated via imperial communication networks, and embedded in the British Empire's struggle to defeat the Axis powers, Orwell's broadcasts do not appear the product of establishment values. "When one looks at the kinds of programme Orwell organized," writes Peter Davison, "from talks on great books (including *The Social Contract*, *The Koran* and *Das Kapital*) to discussion of social problems (e.g. 'Moslem Minorities in Europe', and 'The Status of Women in Europe'), one can only conclude

that, as war propaganda, it was idiosyncratic, remarkably enlightened, and its nature almost certainly unrealized by those in high authority” (*George Orwell: A Literary Life* 117-8). Though Davison accurately captures Orwell’s unorthodox approach to political persuasion, his description betrays a wish to compartmentalize the broadcasts too easily. As with much of his written work, Orwell’s literary broadcasts bridged the political and the cultural by eliding the false distinction between art and ideology. By folding these supposedly disparate elements together, Orwell could indirectly give voice to political messages he could not utter directly.

Orwell’s first broadcast, transmitted on the BBC Home Service on 6 December 1940, was a discussion with Desmond Hawkins on “The Proletarian Writer.” Orwell, perhaps predictably, debunks the notion of a specific literature, for or by the proletariat, that is qualitatively different from existing forms of prose and poetry; at most, proletarian writing would be “bourgeois literature with a slightly different slant,” usually through an emphasis on the hardships of material existence for the working classes (*CEJL* 2:54). Though he discounts the notion of an insurgent form of literature, Orwell reveals the strong current of optimism that underwrote his early wartime engagements with literature and broadcasting. “I believe we are passing into a classless period, and what we call proletarian literature is one of the signs of the change” (58). Proletarian literature is in this view a transitional form, bridging the pre-war dominance of bourgeois culture with what Orwell hoped would be a socialist society forged by the upheavals of war.

This first broadcast also offers, as W.J. West points out, a useful lesson in the collaborative nature of radio programming during the war. On the page, “The Proletarian Writer” looks like the transcript of an interview between Hawkins and Orwell. But the

strictures of wartime information control demanded that every word be planned out beforehand, scripted, and read exactly as typed. Orwell submitted a draft essay on the topic, which Hawkins worked into the form of a dialogue and sent back to Orwell for amendments and corrections (West, *WB* 21). This document was then put through two levels of censorship: every word was screened once for policy and once for security. The resulting document, though initiated by Orwell, was at several points reworked, adjusted, and cut. To varying degrees, this process held true for every word transmitted through the Overseas Service; Orwell often had his words edited by others, and he often shaped the words that others spoke. Analysis of a given broadcast must take into account the effect of multiple hands at work on a text.⁵¹

“Voice” and the Diffusion of Authorship

This diffuse authorship is most evident in one of Orwell’s innovative contributions to radio broadcasting, the literary programme called “Voice.” “Voice” was an experiment in radio form, an audio “magazine” that presented poetry—mostly but not exclusively contemporary—through the framing device of an editorial board sitting around a table discussing works for inclusion in the broadcast-as-magazine. In all, six episodes of *Voice* were produced in 1942 between 11 August and 27 December: special “issues” included war poetry, American writers, the literature of childhood, and Christmas verse. In his introduction to the series, Orwell emphasizes the newness of the form and its suitability to the age of rationing and conservation measures: “[O]ur magazine... isn’t quite an ordinary magazine. To begin with it doesn’t use up any paper

⁵¹ Orwell used a similar “composite” interview process in a later broadcast in which Una Marson interviewed him for the program *Calling the West Indies*. This interview is discussed in the following chapter on Marson.

or the labour of any printers or booksellers. All it needs is a little electrical power and half a dozen voices. It doesn't have to be delivered at your door, and you don't have to pay for it" (Orwell, *CW* 13:459). This was literary culture for the radio age: instantaneous, economical, and ethereal.

Contrary to what Marshall McLuhan would later describe as the "hot" properties of media like radio and film—their ability to conjure deep involvement on the part of the consumer without demanding that the she or he participate actively in the creation of meaning (McLuhan 22-25)—"Voice" demanded that the listener engage creatively with the broadcast. "I hope as you sit there you are imagining the magazine in front of you," Orwell says in his introduction to the series on 11 August 1942. He elaborates: "One advantage of a magazine of this kind is that you can choose your own cover design. I should favour something in light blue or a nice light grey, but you can take your choice" (*CW* 13:460). Orwell emphasizes the advantages of radio as a purely sonic medium, while consciously invoking the tactility and cultural predominance of print; in so doing, he asks listeners to accord the radio magazine the same respect they would a tangible object.

Crucially, however, the acoustic medium commands a qualitatively different form of appreciation than print. The listener's auditory immersion simultaneously liberates the visual imagination and demands a focus not only on the words being read but on the sonic characteristics of each speaker. As often as possible, Orwell featured writers reading their own poems (*CW* 13:420); this enabled a feeling, however illusory, that the listener was approaching the source of the poetic utterance, hearing it as it was meant to be heard. But such advantages met with disadvantages: unlike the printed word, radio

affords the audience no opportunity to pause mid-poem, or to re-read a particularly enjoyable, difficult, or noteworthy passage. The one-way temporal flow of live readings therefore necessitated clear and measured delivery of the type identified by Arnheim and Matheson in the mid-1930s. Familiar and intimate, such delivery compensated for the transience of radio poetry by giving the semblance of unmediated access to the speaking voice.

While this vocal delivery style could conceivably consolidate power around the figure of a single, monologic speaker, Orwell's radio magazine deployed numerous tactics to defer this consolidation. In contrast to the single authoritative voice taken as standard practice for most radio transmissions, the "Voice" episodes operate as deliberative and dialogic venues. With several voices sitting around a table (Orwell, Herbert Read, Inez Holden, Vida Hope, Dylan Thomas, William Empson, John Atkins, and Mulk Raj Anand in the first episode), the conversation moves away from a single interpretation of a poem or a movement of poets. Debate and disagreement are crucial to the establishment of meaning in the programme. The episode on war poetry, for example, begins with Orwell raising the refrain—already familiar from newspaper editorials of the time—of "Where are the war poets?" Empson quickly rejects the notion of such a lack, noting that an anthology of war verse has just been published in London, edited by prominent Sri Lankan intellectual M.J. Tambimuttu. Anand, jumping into the debate, ventures that the key difference is that very little poetry being published in 1942 displayed the strident nationalism of the poetry of the First World War; "certainly," he adds, "we don't want anything jingoistic on 'Voice'" (*CW* 15). The contrarian spirit was in fact established early, in the first "issue" of "Voice," in which Orwell and Empson

discuss the poetry of Henry Treece:

ORWELL: The second poem is in quite a different category. It's more like a ballad.

EMPSON: Actually it's a savage attack on militaristic sentiment.

ORWELL: Possibly, but as I was saying... (*CW* 13:466)

The fact that such an exchange was scripted beforehand accentuates the intentional (and intentionally funny) dispute between Orwell and Empson. By modelling debates about the most basic claims a poem makes on our attention, such on-air disagreements present an ideal version of the ways in which literary meaning is collaboratively constructed. Orwell evidently believed that the play of disagreement, the public struggle for meaning, was vital to literature. As he comments in his introduction to the series, "there are some of us who feel that it is exactly at times like the present that literature ought not to be forgotten" (*CW* 13:459). By channelling literary debate through the radio, he and other presenters could harness what he saw as the essentially democratic tensions inherent in literature itself.

The range of voices Orwell brought together indicates his commitment to fostering what we would now call an environment of diversity and inclusion. As Kristin Bluemel has argued, Orwell's position within the BBC offered an important entry point to the institutions of national culture for writers like Mulk Raj Anand, Stevie Smith, and Inez Holden, writers whom Bluemel describes as the "radical eccentrics" of late modernism (12-13, 21-25). Though censorship prevented the contributors from voicing serious challenges to the political status quo in Britain, the very inclusion of emergent, dissident speakers posed a challenge to the official vehicles of culture. Anand, for

example, was a committed Indian nationalist with strong ties to the Indian Congress party; his books had been banned in India, but he was nonetheless allowed to contribute. Inez Holden and Stevie Smith, both feminists and, to varying degrees, leftists, contributed what Bluemel calls their “marginal vision” to literary discussions on the air (13). Smith’s poem “Infant,” featured in the edition of *Voice* dedicated to childhood, is a brief portrait of a baby and single mother that challenges the blame placed on the present parent by raising the question of the absent father: “Reader before you condemn, pause. / It was a cynical babe. Not without cause” (Smith 33). In the context of the episode as a whole, Smith’s poem serves as a jarring reminder that the experience of parenthood is always structured by gendered relations of power; simplistic judgements directed against single mothers avoid larger questions about the persistent demonization of female sexuality. Holden, in a similarly unsettling move, draws attention to the small humiliations of class difference in a monologue, “Poor Relation,” in which the speaker is forced to reply with pleasantries to the manipulations and indifference of her well-to-do Cousin Nina (Orwell, *CW* 13:462-3). Holden’s and Smith’s selections typify the stubbornly non-conformist content Orwell was willing to entertain within the framework of the programmes that he produced; by highlighting fractures within the experience of contemporary life in London, such subjugated perspectives hint at the instability and fragility beneath the surface of the “People’s War.”

Orwell brought other writers into the fold as well: Una Marson, already working as a West Indian Programme Organiser for the BBC Overseas Service, made two appearances on “Voice” (Orwell, *CW* 14:141-151, 211). In her first appearance, she reads her own poem “Banjo Boy” and mentions some prominent members of the Harlem

Renaissance; the script for her second appearance has not been traced. Further, as will be discussed in the next chapter, Marson invited Orwell to her own program, *Calling the West Indies*, as part of her construction of a progressive, anti-imperialist network of artists and intellectuals. Such exchanges between “peripheral” and “metropolitan” voices may be read as an attempt to demonstrate the ability of the British Empire to bring many cultures into a coherent, yet diverse whole. As with Holden, Anand, and Smith, however, the juxtaposition of Marson’s work with that of prominent writers—Marson’s work was read alongside that of T.S. Eliot and Herman Melville—effects a recalibration of the balance of authorial power. There is little sense of an implied literary hierarchy in the broadcast of work by Marson, Smith, and Holden. Like those of their more renowned colleagues, their words hang for a moment in the air and are followed by little analytical commentary, a tactic that allows the listener to formulate her own opinion about the work.

One can see in Orwell’s attempts at inclusion on “Voice” an urge to break the monotony of standard BBC programming. On the one hand, he was interested in contributing to the rapid canonization of high modernism and the Auden generation, a canonization already well underway in Britain by the time of the Second World War (West 16, 30). At the same time, Orwell worked to bring to the microphone later modernists, like Dylan Thomas, who stood “outside” the dominant streams of modernism. In a move that anticipates the emergence of dialogue between English and Commonwealth writers, Orwell applies some heterogeneity to BBC programming by bringing dissident voices into constellation with established poets.

“A Story by Five Authors:” Collaboration, Class, and New Horizons of English Identity

Orwell’s attempts at radio experimentation were not always as productive as they seem to have been with “Voice.” “A Story by Five Authors,” produced in the fall of 1942, is Orwell’s attempt at truly polyphonic writing. As its title implies, five writers develop a single narrative sequentially, Orwell being the first; L.A.G. Strong, Holden, Martin Armstrong, and Forster wrote sections 2-5, respectively. Because each section was written and aired before the next section was completed, Orwell knew about midway through the project that it would not turn out quite as he had hoped. Writing to Forster on 24 October 1942, he called the story an “unsuccessful experiment” but said he hoped Forster could still wrap up the tale in an interesting way (qtd. in West, *WB* 223). Despite the flaws of the narrative—it is choppy, uneven in tone and thematic focus, and moves far too slowly—“A Story by Five Authors” offers a fascinating glimpse at how writers like Orwell, Holden, and Forster used radio as a vehicle for personal and political expression. Furthermore, the story’s emphasis on class relations in wartime England represents a reorientation of “Englishness” away from the empire and towards more nationally specific cultural formations.

Orwell sets the tale in the middle of a blitz. With buildings falling all around him, protagonist Gilbert Moss ducks into a ruined townhouse for shelter. He quickly realizes that the figure lying prone among the ruins, which he had taken for a corpse, is actually the unconscious body of his old enemy, Charles Coburn. Obsessed by an unnamed but significant past injustice he suffered at the hand of Coburn, Moss prepares to kill him with a broken piece of timber. Orwell’s section ends with Moss hoisting the crude club

above his head. The first instalment is clumsy in terms of style: Moss repeatedly determines to kill Coburn before pausing to savour his rage at the still-unnamed slight he received from Coburn, and the class dynamics of their past relationship appear heavy-handed (*CW* 14:89-93).

Orwell's choice of backdrop is nonetheless important: by setting the tale during the fiercest period of bombing, which at the time of the broadcast was some seventeen months past, he participates in the rapid mythologization of the blitz which took place during the war. Orwell depicts wartime London as a world of fraught morality and changing social norms; the city frames a narrative caught between *film noir* conventions of violent revenge and the promise of revolutionary social change offered by the attacks on London. The bombs offer a cover for the murder Moss is determined to commit: "In the middle of this night-mare you could do what you liked and nobody would have time to notice... In the morning his enemy's body would only be one air-raid casualty among hundreds of others" (*CW* 14:92). Yet the sheltering bombardment heralds rebirth. So much has changed in England since the feud between Moss and Coburn that it is hard for Moss to conjure the massive class differences that enabled his humiliation: "To remember that he had to remember the England of the nineteen-twenties, the old, snobbish, money-ruled England which was fast disappearing before the bombers and the income-tax came to finish it off" (*CW* 14:92).

The focus on class relations is unsurprising for Orwell, but it also fits into a broader move in late-imperial literature to consider class relations as a symbolic site of English identity-formation. Peter Kalliney has argued that as the empire became increasingly untenable as a source of identity, English writers turned to the class system

as a cultural formation which manifested their unique culture. “Although class as a set of social practices was by no means insulated from the nation’s program of overseas conquest,” he writes, “it was ideologically transformed into an eccentric, highly localized system that differentiated England from both its European neighbours and the colonial periphery” (6). Returning to discussions of the class system—even if only to conjecture its demise in the upheavals of the blitz—was a means of grounding the wartime narrative in the familiar logic of cultural and social hierarchies. Class was the language through which Orwell and others could mediate the end of empire.

Furthermore, the glamorization of wartime London—revolutionary, seedy, and above all, dangerous—for an Indian audience has obvious propaganda benefits. It engenders sympathy for Britain by implying that British citizens, as well as military personnel, are bearing the weight of the war; it also emphasizes the possibility of domestic social change in the United Kingdom, which indicates that colonial policy might likewise shift in a progressive direction. While offering this glimpse of potential progress in colonial relations, however, the blitz setting reminds Indian listeners that the struggle against Nazi Germany is a total one, meaning that questions of colonial devolution might be secondary to questions of British national survival. While working to forestall immediate appeals for Indian independence, the mythologization of London as a city under siege also taps into older forms of identification. Linda Colley has described how a reflexive posture of self-defense, formed over centuries of national self-definition against external Others, enabled Britons to transform adversity into triumph; through such posturing, trials including the Dunkirk evacuation and the blitz become setpieces in a national narrative in which “civic exertion among miscellaneous and humble Britons

had, under Providence, won out against a powerful and malignant enemy” (29). Couching these political messages in the form of a story disarms the critical listener, allowing ideological messages to filter through. The structure of the tale, furthermore, is geared to as wide a public as possible, as the experimental form of the multi-author story appeals to the highbrow audience, while the thrilling content of Orwell’s first section has broader appeal.

Unfortunately, the story loses momentum. Neither L.A.G. Strong nor Inez Holden reveal the injury at the root of Moss’s hatred of Coburn, nor do they take the plot in a new direction. Holden, in fact, takes the opportunity to caricature Orwell. She describes Coburn, in terms that mimic Orwell’s biography, as an upper-class leftist who had spent time working in Parisian restaurant and as a Republican fighter in Spain (*CW* 122-3; Bluemel 13). Forster, faced with the task of wrapping up the story, declared, “This is scarcely my cup of beer, but I should like to have a try,” noting that “the theme has been badly messed about” (qtd. in Orwell *WB* 223). Forster quickly resolves the longstanding divide between Coburn and Moss—based on an accidental sabotage of the latter’s career by Coburn, for which Coburn has spent the intervening years repenting—leading the working-class Moss and the upper-class Coburn to a symbolic healing of social rifts. Together, they fend off a low-life criminal who, Forster informs us, is a former member of the British Union of Fascists. While showing community-level resistance to petty tyranny, Forster nonetheless hints at the reality of a home-grown fascist movement, however limited: “British Fascism had not come to a great lot, there hadn’t been enough money behind it, it had never gone full steam ahead as in Germany” (*CW* 14:165).

Forster’s vision of cross-class solidarity against fascism, like Orwell’s evocation

of eroding social divisions, unsubtly gestures to a future for England and for Britain: from within the networks of an imperial medium, both writers channel the idiosyncrasies of the class system as a symbolic site of social healing. While unjust, the class system offers a peculiarly English structure through which to interpret national transformations. As Forster concludes the final instalment, Coburn and Moss fully inhabit their shared role as a symbol of national progress: “They talked of their plans for the future, and of their hopes of helping to pull the world through; no doubt they would crash themselves, but they had seen what needed doing, and would help each other” (166). Like Forster’s famously utopian close to *Howards End*, in which class divisions are warped and reworked in the pursuit of a new vision of English society, the glance to a more hopeful future offered in “Story by Five Authors” may be more an act of wish-fulfilment than an accurate portrait. Regardless, it highlights the potential Forster saw in the medium of radio to articulate just such a hopeful future. Like the bulk of his broadcasts, “Story” explores the ability of radio to enact, in a globally accessible, democratic way, the healing and redemptive power he believed to be inherent in literature.

E.M. Forster Connects

Lionel Trilling’s 1943 study of E.M. Forster’s fiction begins succinctly: “A consideration of Forster’s work is, I think, useful in time of war,” he claims in the first paragraph (Trilling 7). This statement, as Ian Baucom has pointed out, depends on an understanding that there is something in Forster’s work that presents itself as an alternative to war (Baucom 116). Forster’s philosophy, as revealed in his novels, is steeped in an Edwardian liberal humanism informed by Victorian notions of culture but

skeptical of the economic and political underpinnings of late nineteenth and early twentieth century British prosperity. It is a philosophy of complication rather than moral absolutes: above all, Forster preaches the importance of interpersonal connection as the only possible means of sustaining truly charitable relations on every level, from the personal to the international. To “only connect,” as Margaret Schlegel preaches in *Howards End* (1910), means not only to bridge interpersonal differences which she characterizes as “prose” and “passion,” but to recognize that such oppositions exist as much within us as between us (194-95). True interpersonal understanding can only arise from “the building of the rainbow bridge that should connect the prose in us from the passion” in order that “both will be exalted” (194-95).

Forster’s philosophy found itself tested repeatedly in the years after the publication of *Howards End*, most pointedly with the outbreak of the First World War. His belief in the limited enlightenment afforded by interpersonal connection, when put under strain, revealed a pessimism beneath. “This war’s like the Bible,” he claims in a letter to Malcolm Darling dated 6 November 1914, “we’re all going to take out of it what we bring to it. I, who never saw much purpose in the Universe, now see less” (HRC Forster Ms: Series II, Box 5, Folder 5). Forster was determined not to enlist in the army during the Great War, not out of any sense of his exceptionalism as a writer, but out of an abhorrence of violent nationalism (Furbank 2:18-20). At the same time, he felt a need to perform some kind of a role in the unfolding conflict. He spent the majority of the war as a “searcher” for the Red Cross in Alexandria, interviewing wounded soldiers to obtain information about their missing comrades (2:22-23). Before leaving for Alexandria, however, he began lecturing at the Working Men’s College in London, where in late

1914 he delivered a lecture on “Literature and the War”. For Forster,

Literature does not teach us that War is either right or wrong, these are questions outside our competence—but she does teach us that hatred and revenge are wrong because they cloud the spirit. It is not easy to love one’s enemies—for my own part I find it impossible—but one needn’t be proud of not loving them, and she does exhort us to that much... Such seems to be her function in wartime. She helps us to abstain from fear and hatred, as far as our small minds will permit. (Qtd. in Furbank, 2:3)

Forster’s conviction that literature offers a palliative to the aggressive tendencies of war is grounded in the philosophy of connection that animates his novels. One cannot easily hate any person or group of people with whom one identifies; the attempt to bridge the gulf separating individuals, even supposed enemies, yields at best an understanding of shared humanity, and at the very least a mitigated vindictiveness. Following the war, Forster upheld this belief in the ethical reinforcement provided by reading. He argues in *Aspects of the Novel* (1927) that literature encourages empathy by overcoming the ultimate unknowability of other individuals. “We cannot understand each other, except in a rough and ready way,” he claims. “Perfect knowledge is an illusion. But in the novel we can know people perfectly” (70). Fiction models interpersonal understanding by laying bare the complex interior lives and hidden motivations of others.

Forster grasped early that, for better or for worse, radio was ushering in an era of increasing connection between individuals. Writing in his *Commonplace Book* in 1929, he contrasted the interpersonal links enabled by the wireless with the restraints imposed by passports, which he described as “the desperate attempt to raise new barriers” (qtd. in

Lago, *Forster and the BBC*, 151). Two years later, Forster argued for the importance of broadcasting as a vehicle for international understanding. In a 1931 article in the *New Statesman*, he praised the Arnoldian reverence for culture that the BBC had adopted under Sir John Reith, Director General from 1927 to 1938: “Their educational policy has been admirable. We were given facts, we were trained to interpret them, and thirdly—and this was the most important of all—we were asked to tolerate the interpretations of others. This last is not an easy task, but unless it is achieved all education remains dangerous” (“Freedom of the BBC,” n.p.). Forster singled out the radio “talk” in particular as a form highly suited to the dissemination of ideas and the promotion of tolerance: “talks, although they may not be listened to widely, and although they may not leave much that is definite behind, do promote tolerance, which is education’s crown; they do, by their very variety, remind listeners that the world is large and the opinions in it conflicting, and they make the differences vivid and real to him, because their medium is the human voice and not the printed page” (“Freedom,” n.p.). The stamp of individual identity afforded by the human voice reinforces the multiplicity of available points of view: the voice is the emblem of individual thought and agency, far more personalized (and in Forster’s view, more persuasive) than letters on the page.⁵²

E.M. Forster’s own voice was by most accounts not ideally suited to radio: John Arlott, a literary programmes producer at the BBC Eastern Service from 1946 onward, described it as “flat and lacking in character” (Arlott 90). Jean Rowntree, another producer, said that it was “rather high and easily became squeaky” (qtd. in Lago, *Literary Life* 96). What Forster may have lacked in timbre, however, he made up for in delivery.

⁵² Todd Avery has suggested that this ethical dimension to the “talk” mirrors the broader commitment among Bloomsbury Group members to the ideal of interpersonal conversation (36-8).

“To hear recordings of his broadcasts,” state Linda Hughes and Heather MacLeod Walls in their introduction to Forster’s selected broadcasts, “is to encounter a thorough professional with an instinctive sense of effective oral communication... Forster everywhere implies a love of spoken language in one who does not so much perform words as pay attention to them” (41). Slow, precise, and deliberate, Forster’s speaking style reveals a literary understanding of the English language moulded to the demands of the medium of radio. Though his transmissions were scripted and usually rehearsed, Forster excelled at delivering them in an informal style; even on the page, his talks have the air of a friendly dose of advice from a wise, chatty, and self-effacing relative. “You can ask yourself which you prefer in a community, discipline or art?” he declared in a December 1932 broadcast on “New Books”; “In practice, you get, and always will get, a mixture of the two, but which do you prefer? I prefer art” (Forster, *BBC* 113). Forster’s casual manner enacts a carefully cultivated intimacy; as in much of Forster’s radio output, such a delivery effectively masks the weight of the topic at hand. By shuttling between interrogative and declarative modes, and by couching political problems in conversational terms, Forster succeeds at drawing in listeners who might otherwise shy away from such imposing questions as the social relationship between rigid order and chaotic creation.

Depending on his subject matter, Forster could easily switch to more direct, though still familiar, language. When asked to produce a broadcast in celebration of the three-hundredth anniversary of John Milton’s anti-censorship pamphlet *Areopagitica*, Forster shaped his speech to the auditory imperative of clarity that both topic and medium require: “Censorship means— uniformity and monotony; and they mean spiritual death”

(*Two Cheers* 61). Using just ten words separated by two distinctly punctuated pauses, Forster conveys the full depth of loss he perceived in the spectre of wartime censorship—a loss he continually ties back to Milton’s own struggles against political repression. In his verbal economy, Forster enacts a principle of lucidity that allows widespread public understanding without sacrificing the profundity of his message.

The performance of familiarity was also partly a performance of artlessness. While he crafted his scripts carefully at home, Forster avoided running through them in the studio. He claimed in a letter dated 8 August 1938, “I speak with more spontaneity if I have not gone through the script at the studio before” (qtd. in Lago, *Literary Life* 134). By eschewing over-rehearsal, Forster avoided the kind of pedantic, wooden delivery that might cause listeners to tune out. He extended through the airwaves the easy teaching style he had developed over twenty years as a lecturer at the Working Men’s College in London (Furbank 1:173-176; Hughes and Walls, *BBC* 39-40). In both his college lectures and his broadcasts, Forster consciously aimed at a heterogeneous audience, shaping his ideas to accommodate both the ephemerality of the spoken word and the limited education of some listeners. He saw his radio role as at least superficially a practical one—to assist listeners in selecting books according to their tastes. He professed humility about his position at the confluence of literature and the popular medium, claiming not to offer serious criticism, but instead simple “recommendations.” “Criticism is a much subtler job, and hasn’t been attempted... Regard me as a parasite, savoury or unsavoury, who batters on higher forms of life,” he suggested in a December 1932 broadcast. “And turning my head slightly backward, as a parasite will, I now crane towards the immediate past, I recollect what has nourished me there, and then I turn again to my fellow parasite,

the microphone, and continue to address you through it” (Forster, *BBC* 118).

Despite, or perhaps because of, his posture of parasitism, Forster succeeds at crafting insightful criticism that neither stoops to some imagined common denominator, nor alienates by browbeating listeners. In a broadcast aired 24 February 1942, for example, he discussed Thomas Hardy’s *The Return of the Native* as part of a series on “Masterpieces of English Literature.” Forster begins by acknowledging the relative imperfection of Hardy’s novel as compared to other works in the series, but moves quickly to a discussion of the novel in the context of geography: both the greater geography of England, and Hardy’s particular, semi-fictional geography as found throughout his novels. “Hardy,” he writes, “is a little corner of England” (*BBC* 164). To acquaint the audience with Hardy’s landscapes, Forster leads them first through a reading of some of the writer’s poems, accentuating the connections between land and language, before approaching the novel itself. Forster advises that *Return of the Native* be read as a meditation on the relationship between “man and the soil of Wessex,” and as a poet’s uneven attempt at a novel that nonetheless presages some of the greatness of *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* (*BBC* 166). Forster’s approach to the text asserts a strong chthonic connection between the physical environment and literature of England. In turn, this connection privileges the rural particularities of the nation, dreadful and foreboding as they may be. At the same time, Forster’s eco-cultural reading gives the listener an approach to the text that is neither simplistic nor overly intricate, neither didactic nor radically open-ended.

The stakes of being understood were high. For Forster, the urge to connect with his audience derived from his personal belief that human understanding at all scales must

be modelled on the honest, free, two-way exchange glimpsed in the ideal manifestations of person-to-person communication. Speaking to an Indian audience on 29 April 1942, Forster made this plain:

I say to you that our job is to understand one another and to interpret to one another the communities in which we are mutually planted. People like ourselves are in the long run the only reliable interpreters. We don't issue statistics, we don't preach sermons, we don't even formulate creeds. Ours is ordinary human intercourse, but it is touched and heightened by our belief in the potential greatness of man, which includes aesthetic greatness and consequently we stumble upon truths, which are missed by the so-called practical observer. (*BBC* 187)

The bridging of communities he endorses in this passage are all the more important given the intercultural nature of many of his broadcasts. Over two-thirds of the broadcasts Forster made in his life were to an overseas audience, usually Indian (Kirkpatrick 330-341). Forster saw this reaching out as a way of repaying what he called in one broadcast “my debt to India,” a debt of friendship and cultural insight fostered through his visits to the subcontinent in 1912-3 and in 1921 (*BBC* 200); just as importantly, he thought it his responsibility to counter the image of anti-Indian bias that haunted most promulgators of English culture. Too many proponents of European civilization had concurred, implicitly or explicitly, with Thomas Babbington Macaulay's now-infamous statement to the British Parliament in 1825 that, in discussions with European scholars of “Oriental” culture, “I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia”

(Macaulay, n.p.).

Avoiding cultural imperialism was a fraught question for Forster. Too easily, the project of broadcasting literary talks could merge with the project of cultural assimilation and control inherent in the colonial project. Whether successfully or not, Forster sought to demonstrate to his Indian audience that there was the potential for earnest, two-way cultural exchange on equal terms between Britain and India. In his broadcasts, he mentions as often as possible events highlighting Indian culture which are taking place in London and elsewhere in Britain, and he conveys an impression of the average British citizen as probably ignorant of Indian culture, but open to learning more (*BBC* 157-8). As if redressing his own ignorance, his monthly book reviews to India frequently return to new books by Indian authors, or on topics related to India. These talks occasionally feature reviews of critical volumes by Indian authors about English writers, as on 2 December 1943, when he addressed Ahmed Ali's scholarly monograph on T.S. Eliot's poetry (*BBC* 258). While references to such a work assert, on the one hand, the cultural importance of a writer like Eliot on an international scale, they also assert the right to mutual commentary across cultures: an Indian scholar can and should comment on English culture, and vice versa. Cultural transmission of this kind depends only on a sincere expression of interest and a desire to understand. His wartime broadcasts, he says, have had two aims: "Firstly, they have tried to show you in India that there is such a thing as culture over here, even in wartime... My second aim has been to assure you that we are interested in your culture, in the culture of the Indian peoples... I've tried to bring this out in my monthly talks, and to be not just the Englishman advertising European civilisation, but the Englishman asking for knowledge" (*BBC* 232).

Forster is aware, of course, that he uses a strictly one-way medium to promote the classics of what could be a very self-centred imperial power; he strains against this technological determinant of authority. “These books are all products of Western European civilisation,” he says of a particular batch of volumes reviewed on 15 October 1941, “and Western Europe only occupies a very small part of the globe. We who live in it sometimes forget this” (*BBC* 153). Though he might claim to his radio audience that “ours is ordinary human intercourse” (*BBC* 187), he knew otherwise, and struggled with the fact that, for all its potential to unite individuals in a community of listening, the radio lacked the two-way exchange crucial to interpersonal connection. “I am in the position of a preacher who never hears his congregation cough,” as he puts it in a talk dated 19 December 1932 (*BBC* 117). No one to applaud or to storm out: but connection could and did happen. Forster mentions on several occasions that he has received books or letters from Indian listeners. Some of these books make it into his talks. As tokens of meaningful exchange between like-minded individuals, these books and messages pleased Forster. As he says, “They remind me that links between culture here and culture your end do exist, and that the microphone... is capable of evoking a human response” (258). As Daniel Morse has pointed out, intellectuals like Ahmed Ali and Mulk Raj Anand valued the implicit ethics of Forster’s principle of exchange, all the more so because Forster reciprocated by lending his support to projects being undertaken by Indian writers (93-4).

For Forster, the desire to connect with his Indian listeners was at once more urgent and more problematic than it would have been with a domestic audience. The majority of his broadcasts to India were made between 1941 and 1947, when wartime

constraints and British reluctance to relinquish control of the colony meant that all broadcasting was subjected to significant censorship and subtle propagandizing. Like Orwell, whose work as a Talks Producer put the two writers in frequent contact, Forster tried to balance his anti-imperial views with his anti-fascist views, ultimately deciding that the goal of Indian independence was less immediately pressing than the threat posed by the Nazis. Yet Forster could not shake the feeling that one ought not to abandon political allegiances completely on the grounds of immediate priorities. In July of 1943, Forster exchanged letters with Orwell about pushing the limits of censorship: “I had better get this talk about the political books through and revert to culture if it is turned down” (qtd in Lago, *Forster and the BBC* 148). Forster succeeded, turning “Some Books” for the month of July into a more overtly political forum than it had been in the past. The “political books” of which Forster speaks are all concerned with the “Indian question:” how to resolve the crisis of governance caused by rapidly increasing Indian disillusionment with British rule and the unstable relations between the two main pro-independence parties, the Indian National Congress and the All-India Muslim League. After consulting with Orwell, Forster decided to balance his discussion of more stridently anti-British volumes with more moderate voices so that he might get such a pressing issue to air. “They are controversial books,” he admits in the typescript of the broadcast; “[s]ome of them support British rule, others are violently critical of it” (*BBC* 223). This division, however, is not so much between books supporting or denouncing Britain’s control of India, as it is between exit strategies (*BBC* 233). The volume that most closely supports the British government’s position, by Reginald Coupland, a historian unofficially attached to the 1942 Cripps mission to India, admits that a transfer of power

to India is inevitable (233).⁵³ The only question remaining for Coupland, as Forster articulates it, is how Muslims, Hindus, and other communities on the subcontinent will arrange their coexistence. In comparison, the other volumes discussed (especially H.N. Brailsford's *Subject India*) reject the British occupation of India as immoral and incompetent, and foreground British culpability for the abuses of colonialism (234-35). Though his sympathies lie with Indian nationalists, Forster strikes a conciliatory tone in closing by reminding his listeners "that all our five writers, including Professor Coupland, know that there is an Indian question, and that Professor Coupland is quite as desirous as the others to solve it" (235).

Forster's strategy for circumventing the censor suited his interest in open debate, but it also served the interests of the BBC as an organization. By allowing a well-known imperial skeptic to balance opposed views of the crisis in India in a broadcast aimed at the most influential minority in the subcontinent—the English-speaking (often English-educated) elites—the BBC (and by extension, the British government) could burnish its reputation as an egalitarian, democratic, progressive entity free from the excesses of control and subjugation of which it was regularly accused. Forster seems to have been aware that he was contributing to a propaganda based on tolerated dissent and rhetorical sobriety: "frankness is used to lull suspicion and make us uncritical of the next lie," he wrote in his diary on 3 April 1941 (qtd. in Lago, *Forster and the BBC* 136). Forster's blunt assessment is a reasonable one. As Mark Wollaeger has pointed out, since the First

⁵³ Sir Stafford Cripps's mission to India in March 1942 was aimed at shoring up Indian support for the British effort in the Second World War through promises of self-governance following the war. Britain and the Indian National Congress disagreed about the process by which independence would be achieved, however, and the INC refused their support (J. Brown, n.p.). Though the mission was considered a failure, Cripps's *in camera* offers of Dominion status in exchange for cooperation effectively announced British willingness to relinquish control of India, and made independence all but inevitable.

World War the British government had pursued an indirect form of propaganda in which the excesses and overt distortions of truth by Germany and other nations were countered with relatively measured, objective accounts of wartime developments—although as Wollaeger himself notes, this was more often the ideal of British propaganda than its reality (Wollaeger 15-23). The Second World War continued this trend. The Ministry of Information, dormant during the interwar years, was re-launched in 1939 with a mandate to manage, as far as possible, the circulation of official news in wartime. As the dominant purveyor of public information, the BBC was expected to follow an unofficial line of support for the war effort, even if a measure of dissent was tolerated.

Certainly advocates of the BBC saw it as a beacon of free speech in a media environment of increasingly spurious persuasion. “The BBC was plainly anxious that its audience should think for themselves,” wrote broadcaster Edward Tangye Lean in his 1943 memoir of the radio war thus far, *Voice in the Darkness*. “Instead of the editorial creed of a newspaper they heard many-sided debates... And with this characteristically English policy, it evoked the anger of those with ready-made legends to sell” (20). Such descriptions of broadcast liberty were not in line with what many, Forster included, experienced as increased interference at the BBC. Though plans drawn up as early as 1935 had called for the Ministry of Information to take over all broadcasting in the event of a war, representatives from the Ministry of Information did not take up directorial positions at the BBC until 1940-41 (Briggs 3:31-38, 81-85). Even before then, however, the broadcasting agency understood its place within the matrix of official information: by 1939, it was BBC policy that the Ministry of Information “*shall have close and constant contact with the BBC, who will remain constitutionally independent, but will naturally*

act under Government instructions... so far as may be necessary, in matters that concern the national interest and the conduct of the war" (BBC letter to Lionel Fielden, qtd. in Lago, *Literary Life* 103).⁵⁴ Forster himself was not surprised at the spectre of censorship in wartime: "This cannot be helped; a war is on so it is no use whining," as he put it in "What Would Germany Do to Us?", the final of three anti-Nazi broadcasts aired in 1940 (*Two Cheers* 49). Even earlier, in a pre-war essay from 1939 entitled "Post-Munich," Forster had acknowledged the damning choice faced by "sensitive people": "Looking at the international scene, they see, with a clearness denied to politicians, that if Fascism wins we are done for, and that we must become Fascist to win. There seems no escape from this hideous dilemma" (*Two Cheers* 34).

Forster nevertheless understood the need to resist the quasi-fascistic demands of war against Germany. While there was "no use whining" about censorship, he insisted that "as soon as the war is won people who care about civilization in England will have to begin another war, for the restoration and extension of cultural freedom in England" (*Two Cheers* 49). When asked to broadcast for the tercentenary of Milton's *Areopagitica*, he stated that he would "use the broad-cast, so far as I could, as an opportunity against the censors and government propagandists of [to]day" (letter to Jean Rowntree, 8 June 1944, qtd. in Lago, *Forster and the BBC* 146). The resulting broadcast, reprinted in *Two Cheers for Democracy* in 1951, remains an intense and critical reflection on the meaning of freedom of speech in English democracy, and on the stifling effect of wartime censorship. "You can argue that the present supervision of broadcasters is necessary and reasonable," Forster declares; "But if you feel like that, you must modify your approval of the

⁵⁴ Lago notes that the "copious" italics appear in Fielden's transcription of the letter for his 1960 memoir *The Natural Bent*, and assumes they represent a typographic intervention on Fielden's part.

Areopagitica. You cannot have it both ways. And do not say, ‘Oh it’s different today—there’s a war on.’ There was equally a war on in 1644” (*Two Cheers* 63). Thinking of what Milton would have made of the wartime media environment, Forster conjectures:

Would he have liked the wireless? Yes and no. He would have been enthusiastic over the possibilities of broadcasting, and have endorsed much it does, but he would not approve of the “agreed script” from which broadcasters are obliged to read for security reasons. He believed in free expression and in punishment afterwards if the expression turned out to be illegal; but never, never supervision beforehand, and whether the supervision was called censorship or licensing or “agreed script” would have made no difference to him. (62-3)

That Forster is reading this under the watchful eye of a censor, according to an agreed script, implies a kind of bifurcated victory. Forster agrees to the terms of broadcasting, including the policing of free speech, only to undermine them. For the BBC, however, Forster’s censure of censorship serves as a moral and public relations victory. Nothing would have proven the elasticity, tolerance, and dynamic vitality of British democracy better than its ability to accommodate dissent even under conditions of war. In fact, the use of speakers well-known to Indian audiences as anti-imperialists was a part of their propaganda offensive. In a memorandum on Programmes to India, written in the early days of the formation of the India Section, R.W. Brock identified the value of the “authentic,” non-governmental perspective: “Valuable influence would be exerted by spokesmen of the Nazi-occupied countries, by anti-Japanese material, addresses by distinguished Indians in London and by outstanding exponents, especially from the Left,

of British thought and war effort . . .” (qtd. in Fleay and Sanders 504). Orwell had recognized that much of his own usefulness to the BBC resided in his “position as an independent and more or less ‘agin the government’ commentator,” as he put it (*CE* 281).

Forster was undoubtedly aware that vocal opposition to censorship could serve propagandistic aims just as well as censorship itself could: the more the BBC presented British culture as democratic, tolerant, and diverse, the better Britain looked compared to book-burning Germany. The British certainly approached neither the Nazis’ radical disregard for the principle of objectivity, nor their violent attempts to police citizens’ access to information, two key differences Forster was keen to uphold. As Hughes and Walls point out, “That Forster spoke as a propagandist during the war was never, for him, distinct from his intellectual persona” (24). For Forster, the country that allowed him periodically to denounce it was, paradoxically, a country all the more worth supporting. More than simply defending an empire that was less horrific than the fascist alternative, Forster was actively participating in the dynamic tensions between patriotism and dissent, nation and individual, and state power and human morality that had in his view characterized English intellectual culture for centuries.

This tension is at work in Milton’s *Areopagitica*, he claims; for though “[i]n places, the *Areopagitica* is a disturbance to our self-complacency . . . in other places it is an encouragement, for Milton exalts our national character in splendid words” (*Two Cheers* 63). This national character which Milton values so highly is philosophically and artistically democratic, tolerating a diversity of opinion in a way unparalleled on the continent, whether in 1644 or in 1944. Using the *Areopagitica* to advocate for his own vision of a pluralistic literary culture, Forster stresses that for Milton, diversity of opinion

shelters and nurtures national resilience: “Our enemies, he notes, mistake our variety for weakness—exactly the mistakes the Germans were to make of us both in 1914 and 1939” (63-4). Forster saw Milton as one of the first major figures in a tradition of debate and dissent crucial to the defense of civilization in a broader sense. In his landmark address to the Congrès International des Ecrivains in Paris in 1935, he declared that it was impossible to speak of England’s literary traditions and its belief in liberty of expression as if they were separate:

Freedom has been praised in my country for several hundred years. Duty and self-abnegation have been praised too, but freedom has won the larger chorus. And if we writers today could carry this tradition on, if we could assert, under modern conditions, what has been asserted by Milton in his century and by Shelley and Dickens in theirs, we should have no fear for our liberties. (“Liberty in England,” 63).

For Forster, this tradition of free speech was one of the key contributions England had made to European culture; radio, furthermore, offered an unparalleled opportunity to extend this culture of variety and debate into a new medium more accessible to the wider public. As early as 1931 he had noted the general tendency towards openness and liberality on the part of the BBC. Compared with other nations, “Great Britain alone kept her ether comparatively free and decent and encouraged the formation of opinion,” he claimed in an article for the *New Statesman* on 4 April 1931 (“The Freedom of the BBC,” n.p.). While this freedom was compromised in wartime, it was not to be extinguished completely. Forster openly declared, on-air, his intention to resist censorship at the end of the war, a struggle “for the restoration and extension of cultural freedom in England”

(*Two Cheers* 49).

In this sense, radio enabled the fulfilment of England's cultural promise by transforming the communications infrastructure of imperial domination into a vehicle for the promotion of freedom everywhere. This vision of England's national culture—the culture he contrasted with both Nazi Germany and Imperial Britain—was worthy of export insofar as it represented an organic outgrowth of one, small, particular nation. “When a culture is genuinely national,” he claims in a broadcast entitled “Culture and Freedom,” “it is capable, when the hour strikes, of becoming super-national, and contributing to the general good of humanity... It has generosity and modesty, it is not confined by political and geographic boundaries, it does not fidget about purity of race or worry about survival” (*Two Cheers* 43). The self-assuredness of a small nation, no longer over-extended geographically or ethically, would help to undo past excesses of imperialism by framing English culture as one amongst a plurality of valid traditions. Forster was not alone in these sentiments; as Michael Coyle points out, T.S. Eliot used wartime broadcasting to frame the national cultures of Europe as fundamentally international, united by common values (Coyle 182-4). Forster's vision is perhaps more diminutive than Eliot's sweeping, Arnoldian view of culture: “We did not want England to be England forever,” Forster claims in “Freedom and Culture; “it seemed to us a meagre destiny. We hoped for a world to which, when it had been made one by science, we could contribute” (*Two Cheers* 43-44).

The ability of any country—England, India, Germany—to contribute positively to the global circulation of ideas newly hastened and broadened by international radio transmissions depended, for Forster, on the ability of that country to foster strong and

independent traditions of cultural expression. Even as the war ended, and the crises of Europe shifted from the immediate catastrophe of conflict to the long-term problem of social and material reconstruction and renewal, Forster insisted that global cultural exchange remain a priority. Invited to present a message to India and Pakistan on the occasion of their independence from Britain on 15 August 1947, Forster focused on the imperative for Indian writers—indeed, artists in all media—to continue to produce new and challenging works of art. Speaking to an Indian audience via the Eastern Service, Forster addresses this subgroup of culture workers in the third person, asserting his position as an interested but culturally distinct Englishman: “May they interpret their ways to us, and may they interpret us to ourselves, thus increasing our sense of life” (*BBC* 394). Forster admits that economic and political questions may remain paramount for some time to come in post-independence India. “But culture counts too,” he asserts; “by culture in the long run is a community judged” (395).

Forster produced only one more “Some Books” broadcast following this address to India and Pakistan at partition, a talk on “Literature in India” for which the script has not been traced (Kirkpatrick 340). His broadcasting career slowed markedly, though he occasionally contributed literary talks to the Third Programme, which had been launched in 1946. While structural changes to the Eastern Service following decolonization undoubtedly played a part in this shift in Forster’s broadcasting patterns, it is tempting also to read the shift as Forster’s response to a new climate of Anglo-Indian relations. With energy on both sides newly directed towards the transfer of power, rather than the struggle over control of India itself, Forster may have felt that the precise socio-political moment that had instantiated his broadcasts had passed. As Britain was no longer

simultaneously a justified combatant in Europe and unjustified tyrant in India, the need to promote a pastoral, democratic English identity was diminished. Forster's partition broadcast, the last extant script of his long career of broadcasting to India serves, in this narrative, as a symbolic farewell to a specific geographical and cultural entity that would not return. Forster's message, a plea for continued creativity and continued exchange, is a familiar one: only connect.

Conclusion: The Subtle Network of Compromises

E.M. Forster's second broadcast, made 15 February 1929, is a meditation on ephemerality. Occasioned by the unusually cold winter that struck England that year, "The Great Frost" describes a world briefly frozen in a moment of stasis as complete as it is temporary. The fountain of Trinity College, Cambridge, bears a "transparent beard" of icicles, rivers are frozen over, and householders struggle to thaw "the gouty joints of a pipe with hot flannel" ("The Great Frost," *BBC* 51-52). These singular images are not only fleeting but, Forster fears, of fleeting interest. "For these great frosts are all to melt in the imagination as completely as they do in fact," he notes, "and to mention them is to bore listeners as completely as one does by recalling one's dreams" (53). But for now, he intimates, there is value in registering the transient event. "It is different to-day. You, like me, are involved in it, and you know it is a remarkable experience to have had" (53). One cannot underestimate, in other words, the importance of the present to the present, the need to capture the disappearing instant.

The impermanence of Forster's topic—the fleeting frost itself—creates a symmetry with the impermanence of his chosen medium. No acoustic record of "The

Great Frost” persists; indeed, of the 70 typescripts gathered in the recent *BBC Talks of E.M. Forster*, only five partial or complete recordings of the original broadcasts endure (Hughes and Walls 14). Even more strikingly, although George Orwell produced over 200 radio programmes and news updates, many of which he read on air himself, there exists no acoustic trace of his voice (see West, *WB* 266, n.100). The fullness of the documentary record of Orwell’s and Forster’s involvement in radio is tempered by this persistent inaudibility; like Forster’s Great Frost, the spoken words have receded both in fact and in imagination to the point that the memory of such utterances is threatened.

Yet, in the immediate moment of their transmission, the radio talks of Forster and Orwell were substantial; they linked the material world of communications and politics with the immaterial and transient word. For all the sense of transience and ephemerality imparted by the slightness of the acoustic record, these writers produced a body of work that sheds crucial light on the literary and political transformations of England, Britain, and the broader empire. Well before the war, both Forster and Orwell had begun to consider the particularities of the strange island nation to which they belonged. Orwell’s fiction and essays returned often to the question of what made England English, from his quasi-anthropological works of non-fiction (*Down and Out in Paris and London*, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, *The English People*) to the fiction he set in the rapidly changing border between urban, suburban, and rural England (*Coming up for Air*) and in the bombed-out landscape of a London scarred by decades of total war (*Nineteen Eighty-Four*).

Forster’s renewed interest in Englishness, on the other hand, coincided with his drift from the novel form to essays, pageant plays, and broadcasts. As Esty argues,

Forster shifted in his post-novelistic years from the ironic contemplation of English hypocrisy and subtle middle-class barbarism to a consideration of the redemptive features of pastoral English culture (77-79). He sought a means of transcending the class-bound and imperial inheritance that animated his novels from *Where Angels Fear to Tread* to *A Passage to India*, and he found it in a modified return to English intellectual traditions. “I belong to the fag-end of Victorian liberalism,” he said in a broadcast from April of 1946, “and can look back to an age whose challenges were moderate in their tone... The education I received in those far-off and fantastic days made me soft and I am very glad it did, for I have seen plenty of hardness since, and I know it does not even pay” (“The Challenge of our Time,” *Two Cheers* 65). Forster admits that the “softening” liberal humanist education he received was subtended by the moral callousness of its imperial entanglements, and arguably contributed to the conflicts of the twentieth century. He continues:

But though the education was human it was imperfect, inasmuch as none of us realized our economic position. In came the nice fat dividends, up rose the lofty thoughts, and we did not realize that all the time we were exploiting the poor of our own country and the backward races abroad, and getting bigger profits from our investments than we should... If we are to answer the Challenge of our Time successfully, we must manage to combine the new economy and the old morality. (65-66)

To combine “the new economy and the old morality” means, for Forster, pairing Victorian liberal humanism with an understanding and rejection of its economic shadow, the backbreaking and underpaid labour demanded of the poor of Forster’s own country as

well as its overseas colonies. To proceed otherwise, in the aftermath of war and facing the imminent collapse of the British Empire, would be both ethically corrupt and politically absurd. Crisis had necessitated contraction and national reassessment, but it afforded a new way forward, a political reality he hoped would be characterized by the “smallness, gentleness, and unselfishness” he had identified in his January 1935 letter to Malcolm Darling.

For Orwell, the way forward involved breaking what he saw as a persistent tendency on the part of British intellectuals to confuse patriotism with conservative nationalism. He argued most clearly for the distinction between the two in his 1945 essay “Notes on Nationalism”: “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 upon other people. Patriotism is of its nature defensive, both militarily and culturally. Nationalism, on the other hand, is inseparable from the desire for power” (*CEJL* 3:411). This site-specific notion of patriotism meshes with what Ian Baucom has identified as a persistent concern, in nineteenth- and twentieth-century discussions of Englishness, with “the identity-endowing properties of place” (4). Englishness is expressed in relation to England as a physical place, in which socio-cultural relations are housed and play out. Underlying Orwell’s site-specific logic of Englishness is the implication that the imperial expansion that brought Britain economic prosperity led to a worldwide diffusion of the geographic stabilizers of English identity; a nation can sustain a sense of itself only when it attends to its material grounding in space. This inward turn to an appreciation of the nation as spatially rather than racially defined, Orwell claims, has benefits: “It can be plausibly argued...it is even probably true... that patriotism is an

inoculation against nationalism” (*CEJL* 3:430). Whether or not patriotism can in fact counter nationalism—they often appear more like related symptoms of the same disease than like vaccine and virus—Orwell believed that a love of place could mitigate the expansionist aggression that defined imperialism and Nazism. As Forster himself commented, there was a nobility about Orwell’s unlikely transition: “All nations are odious, but some are less odious than others, and by this stony, unlovely path he reaches patriotism. To some of us, this seems the cleanest way to reach it” (*Two Cheers* 71, qtd. in MacKay 10). For both of these writers, it might be argued that their patriotism emerged despite strong internal resistance, and was all the more defensible because of it.

For all that Forster dreamt of the “smallness” of the hamlet, and Orwell of the “different air” of his home country (*CEJL* 2:75), they both chose to explore the possibilities of a newly minor England through the global medium of radio. On the surface, the one-way transmission of English culture via an imperial broadcasting network seems radically far from the ideal of egalitarian intercultural exchange. Indeed, it is important not to overstate the revolutionary potential, real or imagined, of radio during the war; strict controls existed, and Orwell and Forster abided by those controls to a large extent. By working within the medium, however, they attempted—and effected—subtle expressions of an England evolving away from its colonial past. This negotiation of the tensions inherent in the political-cultural endeavour of broadcasting is symptomatic of what Orwell saw as a particularly English kind of doublethink, “the strange mixture of reality and illusion, democracy and privilege, humbug and decency, the subtle network of compromises, by which the nation keeps itself in its familiar shape” (*CEJL* 2:83). Democratic pluralism could thus be praised while Indians were subjects (but not citizens)

of Britain; Indian independence could be hinted at, but Indian nationalism denounced; principles of polyvocality could be enacted at the level of the literary programme while an enforced silence hung over certain speakers and topics. Hypocritical though it may be, Orwell and Forster acceded to this arrangement out of moral pragmatism; the war necessitated concessions. “One must work to make people realise that long-term and short-term interests don’t necessarily coincide,” Orwell wrote in a review of Mulk Raj Anand’s *Letters on India*. “The Englishman must see that his domination in India is indefensible; the Indian must see that to side with the Fascists for the sake of revenge against Britain would do him no good. It is largely a question of letting each know that the other’s viewpoint exists” (*CW* 15:34). Only by communicating across political divisions can writers and intellectuals—indeed, all citizens—reach political consensus.

The very real conflict between what each writer espoused and what was politically possible in India at the time did not entirely neutralize the power of their notions of English liberal democracy. After all, Orwell argued, these notions were to some extent falsehoods even at home. “In England,” he notes in *The Lion and the Unicorn*, “such concepts as justice, liberty, and objective truth are still believed in. They may be illusions, but they are very powerful illusions. The belief in them influences conduct, national life is different because of them” (*CE* 2:82). England may be full of hypocrisies, and its political and economic life slanted in favour of the wealthy and powerful, but it avoids totalitarianism by virtue of its adherence to tradition and custom, even if that adherence is paired with an occasional double vision that allows democracy to coexist with imperialism and class hierarchies. The transmission to India of political ideals, flawed as they may be, could not long remain simply an empty gesture or a

propagandistic sleight of hand; internalized and adopted, these ideals formed part of the motivation and articulation of the independence movement that led to Indian independence two years after the war ended. The India Section of the BBC did not merely contribute to British projections of democratic virtue, as Hajkowski has argued (“BBC,” 135-39); rather, the “powerful illusions” of British political culture foregrounded the shortcomings of the Indian colonial government. Broadcasters like Orwell and Forster publicly proclaimed a standard of free speech and ideological tolerance against which the colonial regime in India could not possibly match up.

Neither Forster nor Orwell claimed that their broadcasts exerted substantial influence over the course of political affairs in India or elsewhere. “Between you and me and the ether,” Forster once confided, “I’ve no great faith in the educational future of broadcasting unalloyed” (*BBC* 118). Radio, like its fellow media upstart, cinema, should in Forster’s view be subsidiary to print culture, in order to foster the kind of critical attention that he found difficult to apply to the media of uninterrupted flow. “The extreme fluidity of broadcasting still puzzles me and sometimes paralyzes,” he would admit in a 1951 broadcast (*BBC* 411). Orwell, meanwhile, saw radio as one tool of social education among others, such as film and pamphlets (*English People* 47). When he resigned from the BBC in 1943, however, it was to devote more time to his writing, which he saw as considerably more effective than the broadcasts, for which there was still no reliable listener research. Rather than being too propagandistic, his radio work was in a sense not propagandistic enough: “for some time past I have been conscious that I have been wasting my own time and the public money on doing work that produces no result” (*CW* 15:251).

Though radio may have failed to effect widespread change, the extensive engagement with broadcasting and other media by Orwell, Forster, and others highlights the wartime imperative to participate publicly in intellectual and political matters. To broadcast one's nation overseas, rather than at home, might seem an illogical project, but Forster and Orwell's transmissions to India enabled them to articulate those characteristics of English liberal democracy they most valued, even as they resisted the compromises demanded by conflict. Talking to India was a way of talking about Englishness; by mobilizing cultural resources to reinforce shaky imperial allegiances, these writers could contribute both to a global anti-fascist resistance and to the formation of an emergent English identity free of the fetters of both war and empire.

Calling the West Indies: Una Marson's Wireless Black Atlantic

While working for the BBC Overseas Service demanded a certain pattern of ethical compromise from English anti-imperialists such as George Orwell and E.M. Forster, it posed a radically different challenge to those colonial subjects who broadcast in support of Britain during the war. Broadcasters of colonial extraction—including Una Marson from Jamaica, Mulk Raj Anand from India, and M.J. Tambimuttu from Ceylon—understood first-hand the experience of listening in to the metropole from its periphery. As nationalists of varying degrees of commitment, these writers had to contend with the fact that the BBC was, first and foremost, an agent of imperial reinforcement. The story of their participation in Second World War broadcasting, however, indicates that the need of the state to propagandize to its subjects could have unintended consequences. In handing the microphone to late imperial writers, the BBC opened the airwaves to coded articulations of political and cultural autonomy.

As BBC administrators struggled to represent more accurately the voices and cultures of the colonies, they invited writers and intellectuals from across the empire to participate in the war effort. Though these writers participated with reservations, many recognized that the war offered opportunities for shaping political and cultural debate both at the point of reception and at the point of transmission. Focusing on *Calling the West Indies* (1941-45), a program hosted by Jamaican activist and poet Una Marson, this chapter examines the ways in which the imperial networks of the BBC offered colonial writers a means of voicing previously unrepresented identities that ranged from the regional to the transnational. Marson offers a productive case study because of the

dedication with which she approached the task of representing West Indian⁵⁵ and diasporic black experiences at the BBC. Marson helped to forge a wireless black Atlantic through her promotion of black poetry, music, journalism, and activism from multiple continents. Like the diasporic writers on whom Paul Gilroy focuses in *The Black Atlantic*, Marson and her fellow broadcasters found in *Calling the West Indies* a means of “crossing borders in modern machines that were themselves micro-systems of linguistic and political hybridity” (Gilroy 12). The chronotope of the ship to which Gilroy’s quotation refers—an emblem of the transatlantic flow of bodies, goods, texts, and ideas—finds its mid-century echo in the shortwave radio beam. Like the ship, shortwave radio served as a vehicle of both domination and resistance.⁵⁶ In harnessing this ambivalent technology, Marson and the intellectuals she gathered together shaped wartime and postwar discussions about poetry, politics, and transnational solidarity.

Gilroy’s reorientation of black history and poetics away from strict national boundaries and towards more dynamic processes of oceanic migration offers important insights to the work of Marson and her collaborators. As late imperial subjects, West

⁵⁵ There is a great deal of overlap between terms for the region. “British West Indies” (usually shortened to “West Indies”) refers to the political formation of British colonies which dotted the Caribbean sea; this term technically excluded mainland territories near the Caribbean, notably British Guiana (Guyana) and British Honduras (Belize), but in common usage often included both. The adjective “Caribbean” is, in a strict sense, limited to those islands surrounded by the Caribbean sea, including those without ties to the British Empire (like Cuba). Discussions of British colonial history in the Caribbean sometimes include Guyana and Belize for reasons of cultural and political affinity with other Caribbean nations (Morley n.p.). In this chapter, I use both “Caribbean” and “West Indian” with reference to the Anglophone populations and politics of the region broadly construed, namely the Bahamas, British Guiana, British Honduras, Jamaica, the Leeward Antilles, the Lesser Antilles (including Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago), and other smaller dependencies. While some critics (including Alison Donnell and Sarah Lawson Welsh) avoid the term “West Indian” in order to free the literature from “the (re-)centring tendencies of a colonial and Commonwealth framework” (Donnell and Welsh 6), I use the terms more or less interchangeably in order to describe a region of layered historical and geographic identities and possessed of a shared experience of European colonization; during the war, this was a region in which residents participated simultaneously in multiple communities at the local, island, regional, and imperial levels. See Rush (14-15) for further discussion of this nomenclature.

⁵⁶ Peter Kalliney discusses the combined imperial and anti-imperial tendencies of programs including *Calling the West Indies* in the introduction to his forthcoming *Commonwealth of Letters: British Literary Culture and the Emergence of Postcolonial Aesthetics*, which cannot be quoted for copyright reasons.

Indians did not have recourse to a single stable national identity; rather, their identities were elaborated between their Caribbean origins and the diffuse and abstract empire to which they were expected to show fealty. The legacy of slavery, however, grants a different inheritance—a diasporic one rooted in the historical violence of the slave trade and sustained by subsequent migrations of black populations to and from major centres in the Americas, Europe, and Africa. As a West Indian intellectual living in London and connected to cultural and political circles on all of those continents, Marson was well positioned to use the wireless as a means of articulating a new identity for the West Indies, one that did not operate on a bilateral axis of metropole and colony, but instead opened up to include aspects of racialized experience drawn from North American and African culture and history.

For all her achievements at the wartime BBC, Marson has been marginalized in accounts of West Indian transmissions in favour of a focus on postwar broadcasters. In separate accounts, John Figueroa, George Lamming, and Edward Kamau Brathwaite have all cited the importance of hearing West Indian poetry over the airwaves from the 1940s into the 1950s (Figueroa, *Caribbean Voices* 1:xiv; Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* 65-6; Brathwaite, *History of the Voice* 87). Perhaps most influentially, Brathwaite emphasizes the role of the BBC's West Indian programming in the international promotion of what he calls the "nation languages" of Caribbean poetry, the varieties of non-"standard" English developed following colonization (5-6, 87). However, Brathwaite—like Figueroa and Lamming—focuses on *Caribbean Voices* (1945-1958), the successor program to *Calling the West Indies*, and on the efforts of long-time producer Henry Swanzy. This later program was so influential that Figueroa borrowed its

name for the title of his anthology. More recently, scholars including Peter Kalliney, Laurence Breiner, and Glyne Griffith have contributed valuable analyses of *Caribbean Voices* and its role in the formation of a Caribbean literary community and even a particular Caribbean aesthetic.

In the postwar period, *Caribbean Voices* introduced listeners to such talents as Sam Selvon, George Lamming, V.S. Naipaul, and Brathwaite himself. Yet this focus minimizes Marson's role in building networks of communication between geographically dispersed black populations. The relative lack of attention to *Calling The West Indies* may reflect anxieties about Marson; her uneven poetic works are difficult to assimilate into postwar constructions of the radical Caribbean literary tradition. Furthermore, Marson's tenure at the BBC was clouded by conflicts with performers and staff. Some of these conflicts were of her own making, but at least some of them were caused by resentment that a black West Indian woman might achieve Marson's position of power and influence. These conflicts took their toll: after repeated stress leaves, Marson was institutionalized for mental illness in January of 1946. Upon her release in October of that year, she returned to Jamaica. She did not broadcast for the BBC again.

Beyond such questions of marginalization, the postwar emphasis of Caribbean radio scholarship also obscures the global conflict that catalyzed the growth of broadcasting services for West Indian men and women both in Britain and in the Americas. The context of total war demanded that the British government secure the cooperation of all subjects, both at home and abroad. Though unwilling to grant political concessions at the time, the British government came to realize the importance of representing West Indian subjects on the radio in order to shore up support for the war

effort. Under wartime censorship and propaganda directives, Caribbean broadcasting could not be entirely revolutionary; indeed, many of Marson's contributors genuflect to Britain, a gesture that fits awkwardly with the established canon of post-war, anti- or post-colonial literature from the region. As *Calling the West Indies* developed, however, it enabled the projection of colonial identities distinct from Anglocentric versions of British identity; combined with the intimate and polysemic aural registers of radio, this projection fostered new forms of cultural expression for West Indian artists. The program forged connections among anti-racist and anti-imperial intellectuals from the West Indies, America, and Britain; it encouraged the establishment of a West Indian literary tradition by praising poets past and present; and it began, slowly, to recognize and celebrate the particular linguistic heritage of the West Indies by broadcasting "nation language" literature in the form of folk tales and poems. By representing aspects of identity beyond the binary of mother country and colony, *Calling the West Indies* contributed to the formation of post-imperial communities of belonging at regional, national, and transnational levels.

Projecting the Empire to the West Indies

Many late colonial writers were reluctant to broadcast on behalf of the BBC because of the complicated signals such cooperation sent to listeners overseas. Writers were wary of a process of ideological slippage in which an implicitly pro-imperial position could be read under the sign of anti-fascism. For almost a year, Anand resisted invitations to deliver broadcasts from both Orwell and Sir Malcolm Darling, head of the India Section. In a letter to Darling in March of 1941, Anand argued that broadcasting on

behalf of the government that had imprisoned members of the Indian Congress party would enforce on him “a kind of vague neutrality, the strain of which can be very harrowing for the more timid individual, who is torn between conflicting loyalties” (qtd. in West, *Broadcasts* 15). While Orwell and Forster understood the injustice of the British Empire as a problem of moral hypocrisy, Anand foregrounded the disciplinary violence of imperialism and shied away from defending it. It was only when he realized the global ambitions of Germany and Japan that Anand felt he had no choice but to contribute to the British Empire’s propaganda war. Anand’s compromise captures the ambivalent power wartime broadcasting offered to British colonial subjects; forced to choose between principled non-involvement in the radio war and a vexed form of agency, many chose the latter.

The subtle process of give-and-take through which writers collaborated in order to participate in an anti-fascist war complicates narratives which present imperial broadcasting in binary terms, as a tool of either subjugation or revolution. Many accounts of mid-twentieth century broadcasting figure networks like the BBC Overseas Service as invasive tentacles of empire deliberately working against the political aspirations of colonized populations. Frantz Fanon, in “This Is the Voice of Algeria” (from *A Dying Colonialism*, 1959) offers a characteristic assessment when he argues that before the emergence of pro-independence stations in the mid-1950s, Arab Algerians saw the radio set itself as “a symbol of French presence”; so long as it was identified with French-operated Radio-Alger, the radio could only ever be “a material representation of the colonial configuration” (73). This is not, as Fanon explains, a predetermined effect of the medium: under the right circumstances, radio can as easily become an agent of radical

transformation as of colonial subjugation. Most often, radio manifests its transformative potential through illicit broadcasts operating outside the control of colonial powers, as in the revolutionary *Voice of Free Algeria* broadcasts that began emanating from Egypt in late 1956 (Fanon 82). With the advent of this new iteration of radio resistance, listening in became a political act, “not the adoption of a modern technique for getting news, but the obtaining of access to the only means of entering into communication with the Revolution, of living with it” (83). Radio became a dissident channel through which discourse could circulate and thereby link dispersed listeners.

In describing illicit listening as “entering into communication with the Revolution,” Fanon indicates the power of the radio counterpublic to instill a sense of communally generated meaning. As Ian Baucom has argued, radio listening in such circumstances is not simply a passive acceptance of one group identity (free Algerian) over another (colonized subject). Rather, tuning in combines individual agency and group solidarity by giving each audience member a role in the constitution of a new public entity mediated through the wireless: though oriented around the radio as a common source of discourse, listening and interpretation remain individual actions that enable a collective politics (“Fanon’s Radio” 25). In an echo of Michael Warner’s theory of the affiliative “public,” Baucom argues that Fanon’s prototypical radio listeners “assemble themselves as Algerians through their common, but discrete, consumption of a narrative of Algerianness, which, on consuming, they differentially reproduce” (27). The illicit radio broadcast becomes a venue through which dissident listeners constitute themselves as a counterpublic to the official culture of colonial Algeria.

Baucom and Fanon provide useful models for thinking about dissident listening

practices, but their theories require some adaptation in the case of wartime broadcasts to the West Indies, where the interplay between official and alternative cultural formations was much more varied. For one thing, the relationship between mother country and colony was very different; the West Indian territories, especially their politically and culturally engaged middle classes, had always considered themselves culturally aligned with the “mother” country (Rush 1-8 and *passim*). This affective connection was partly due to the foreshortening of history by colonialism; the erasure of indigenous populations on the islands meant there was effectively no unitary pre-colonial tradition which could be drawn upon to build up into a mythical narrative of nation-formation. As diverse islands brought together under the aegis of colonialism, the geographically far-flung and socio-culturally distinct West Indies did not have a particularly stable collective identity separate from the empire itself (Rush 178). Furthermore, as each colony had its own administrative link to the mother country, political relations tended to operate directly between Britain and each individual territory, rather than multilaterally among the colonies themselves. The idea of an independent “West Indies” was therefore a notion grounded in imperial history and articulated through imperial means.

For many years, the strong affective and administrative bonds linking individual colonies to the imperial metropole dampened the political will necessary for regional independence. Unlike Fanon’s account of Algeria in the 1950s, there was no organized insurrection in the British West Indies in the lead-up to the Second World War. For much of the 1930s, however, the Caribbean colonies endured significant labour and class unrest connected to the larger global depression and to a pattern of social and economic neglect by Britain. The waves of rioting and protest, which reached a peak in 1937-38, were

sufficiently disruptive to occasion a West Indian Royal Commission led by Lord Moyne (Walter Edward Guinness), which was tasked with proposing solutions to the economic and social troubles of the islands.⁵⁷ Such overtures could not undo the strains that had begun to appear in the fabric of British-West Indian relations. The breakdown of order in the Caribbean in the late 1930s was enough to disabuse many West Indian intellectuals and leaders of their residual faith in the ability of Britain to provide for its colonies (Schwarz 6). Because the geographic dispersal of the islands made coordination of an independence movement difficult, however, much of the work of building political alliances and networks took place among West Indian intellectuals who had moved to Britain, including George Padmore and C.L.R. James (Schwarz 7).

Woefully underdeveloped broadcasting resources in the region exacerbated the problem of inter-island communication and served as a metonym for British neglect of the West Indian colonies (Jarrett-Macauley, *Life of Una Marson* 146; BBC WAC, E1/1294/1 *passim*). There was little in the way of local, island-based radio, which meant that most transmissions received on the islands in the 1920s and 1930s came via shortwave from the United States or Britain. Even in London, where a growing number of intellectuals were based, opportunities were limited; despite interest within the Corporation in providing the West Indies with programming that would reinforce ties to Britain, BBC broadcasts to the West Indian colonies had evolved haphazardly, largely due to underfunding. Initially, the West Indies had received broadcasts through the Empire Service, a generalized daily program begun in 1932 and designed for

⁵⁷ Though the Commission would complete its report in 1940, the British government blocked publication of the report for fear its frank discussion of poor social and economic conditions in the West Indies, and its recommendation of regional self-government, would stoke further unrest and provide fodder for Axis propaganda (Morley n.p.).

transmission to the colonies and Dominions of Britain at staggered intervals throughout the day (Briggs 2:370, 374). Though not entirely neglected, the Caribbean region was far from a high priority. The main targets of the Empire Service were the settler populations of the British colonies; little attention was paid to indigenous populations or (in the West Indies) those of African, South Asian, or East Asian descent (Potter 111-12; Rush 154-5). The BBC offered what might be characterized as an oblique listening experience in the Caribbean: listeners heard programming directed primarily at much larger audiences in Canada, while the vagaries of shortwave transmission through variable atmospheric conditions meant that West Indian listeners could also occasionally pick up broadcasts directed towards India (Briggs 2:375, 381, 387). Given the frayed tensions caused by decades of socioeconomic neglect, this lack of representation over the wireless made it difficult for many West Indians to imagine a meaningful role for themselves in the British Empire. The BBC, like the British Government, seemed uninterested in acknowledging the concerns and culture of a region with a specific history of colonization and creolization.

The build-up to war precipitated growth and change in the Overseas Service. As the propaganda war with Germany accelerated in the late 1930s, international broadcasting hours increased from 16 hours a day in 1936 to 20.5 hours a day in 1943 (Briggs 2:392, 3:492). If the extension of overseas broadcasting succeeded at linking Britain and its colonies, it also brought the war into the homes of colonial subjects who might have otherwise tried to ignore it. Despite the fact that over 10,000 West Indians enlisted in the armed services (mainly in the RAF), and many thousands more volunteered for other forms of war work, the war seemed to be unfolding half a world

away (Deer 109). But radio took a war that had seemed *over there* and brought its realities to bear on daily life in the colonies, especially once combat flared up in the spring of 1940.

The arrival of the war in West Indian homes could be unsettling. Jamaican poet Philip Sherlock's "Dinner Party 1940" (1943) illustrates the ways in which radio accounts of the war intruded audibly on the lives of the middle classes of the West Indies:

'Do you mind the news while we eat?'

So guests assenting

The well-bred voice from Daventry

Mingled with sounds from the pantry

And slowly through the ether spilled

Its syllables . . . not silencing

augmenting

The show of wit which never fails

Thanks to 7.30 cock-tails . . . 'and at Narvik

Where for five days a storm has raged

a few were killed . . .'

'More mutton, Alice?' 'Yes, it's delicious, dear,

Yesterday at bridge I held three aces, three . . .'

'in the Baltic

it is reported from Stockholm that the

soldiers fled

leaving a number of dead' . . .

‘But don’t you like it cold with guava-jelly?’ (ll.1-18, ellipses in original)

In this poem, the radio news, transmitted by shortwave beam across the Atlantic from the Overseas transmitter at Daventry, weaves in and out of the conversation, suturing colonial commonplaces together with global conflict. After wavering on the bifurcated soundscape of colonial dinner party and European carnage, the poem moves to claim that the news from the failed British campaign at Narvik cannot affect the lives of British subjects thousands of miles from the war: the news “did not really silence the sounds from the pantry / Or the show of wit which never fails” (ll.22-3). And yet the closing lines of the poem indicate that the trauma of war has entered the lexicon of the speaker: “Cold mutton is delicious with guava-jelly / And does not seriously incommode / Like cold lead in the belly” (ll.25-7). This contrast between meat for the table and meat for the battlefield amplifies the ironic ambivalence of the earlier claim about the news “not silencing / augmenting / The show of wit which never fails / Thanks to 7.30 cock-tails.” Even thousands of miles away, the “well-bred voice” of the BBC insists on representing the conflict to listeners who might prefer to ignore it; war news produces not apathy but a defensive augmentation of genteel inanity. This defensive “tuning out” of the war would become increasingly untenable as the debacle at Narvik yielded to the invasions of Belgium, the Netherlands, and France, events which effectively ended the period of the “Phoney War” and brought new threats to the British home front. Though still far away, threats to the imperial metropole became increasingly hard for Caribbean listeners to ignore.

While such poems dramatize the psychological split between colonial home and European conflict, BBC officials were troubled by the more fundamental question of just

how many people were listening. Estimates for the number of wireless sets spread across the islands are hard to verify. On 23 December 1941, an unidentified official wrote to John Grenfell-Williams, who served as Assistant Controller for the Overseas Service for much of the war, and who became the first head of the postwar BBC Colonial Service; the official cited estimates from the Trinidadian government that the total potential radio audience in Trinidad numbered between 20-30,000 (R46/92). In a later memo, Grenfell-Williams quotes a report by the Empire Parliamentary Association, just back from a tour of the West Indies. The report describes the state of broadcasting infrastructure in the Caribbean as “nothing short of a scandal... [I]n Jamaica, there is nothing except an amateur equipment which was taken over on the outbreak of war... There are estimated to be only 12,000 sets in an Island with a population of over a million” (30 May 1944, E1/1301). Even taking into account the fact that each set could serve several listeners, the potential audience across the whole of the West Indies could not have numbered more than 100,000 during the war, and was probably much less.⁵⁸ Officials could not determine how many tuned in to *Calling the West Indies*; the department of Listener Research, while proving very useful on the home front, had no resources to pursue surveys of overseas audiences. There was some secondary evidence of public interest; internal correspondence indicates that Marson’s presence, especially in the early months of the program, received considerable attention in the West Indies, and that the contents of broadcasts were reported in brief, thereby extending the reach of the program through print (R46/92). “While we have proof of a great deal of publicity in the West Indian press,” wrote Grenfell-Williams in November of 1941, “and while we get a fairly large

⁵⁸ Some years before the war, in 1933, the *BBC Yearbook* estimated that the total listening audience in Jamaica, Trinidad, British Guiana, and Barbados was between 38,000 and 40,000 (qtd. in Rush 155).

number of letters, most of them favourable in their criticism, we are badly in need of information and comment of a constructive kind” (17 Nov 1941, E1/1294/1). The impressionistic and anecdotal responses the BBC received did not help them to describe or quantify precisely the tastes and expectations of their listening audience.

Despite this lack of firm information, officials knew that they could neglect the West Indies only at the risk of further alienating a restive population. Starting in 1940, the BBC implemented regular programming designed specifically for the West Indies as part of a broader attempt to reach out to audiences throughout the colonies—as opposed to the Dominions, which were somewhat better served (Potter 117). The increase in specialized programming was designed to reinforce ties between the metropole and its colonial sources of material and human resources. Reinforcing those ties involved more than simply talking *about* colonial contributions to the war; listeners in the Caribbean and elsewhere had to feel as though they were part of the national community being imaginatively constructed over the radio.

But for many colonial listeners, identification with the sound of British radio had meant relinquishing an embodied social identity. As with domestic broadcasts, the Overseas Service had presented a uniform acoustic image of radio citizenship analogous to Michael Warner’s universalized liberal subject at the centre of public discourse: speakers had usually been marked as male, metropolitan, middle- or upper-middle class, and educated at an elite level. Entry into the public, Warner argues, requires an erasure of any class, ethnic, racial, or gender identity that is seen as “particular” because not middle-class, white, male, and heterosexual (Warner 39-44, 51). This erasure of individuality applies to both the wielders and the audience of a discourse. Overseas listeners, should

they wish to enter into the imagined community of British cultural life via their participation as radio listeners, had to abandon their particularity as colonial subjects, whether that difference manifested itself in rurality, accent, pigment, or class. While changes to this pattern would be gradual and piecemeal, the global conflict helped to spur movement towards a less limited representation of the varieties of Britishness.

Una Marson: Poetry, Activism, and Cultural Independence

As the war ramped up, BBC Overseas producers strove to depict, acoustically, an empire that was inclusive, tolerant, and representative of its listeners. For the West Indies, this resulted, after a few sporadic broadcasts, in a series of “parties” which aired every few weeks beginning in December of 1940. The broadcasts were a combination of propaganda and entertainment in which messages from soldiers and other war workers stationed in Britain alternated with performances from musical groups, including Rudolph Dunbar and his Negro Choir.⁵⁹ Cecil Madden, head of the Empire Entertainment Unit (later the Overseas Entertainment Unit), was so pleased with the atmosphere of a West Indian “party” broadcast on Boxing Day 1940 that he scheduled another for early 1941 and, soon thereafter, arranged for the establishment of a regular series of West Indian broadcasts (Memos 28 Dec 1940, 3 January 1941, R46/92).

In arranging for more regular West Indian programming, Cecil Madden specifically praised Una Marson for her hard work in arranging and hosting the Boxing Day broadcast. Marson was not altogether unfamiliar to the BBC, or to Madden. She had

⁵⁹ An accomplished bandleader and composer born in British Guiana, Dunbar would go on to become the first black conductor to lead the London Symphony Orchestra at the Royal Albert Hall. This 1942 concert included pieces by Mendelssohn and Dvořák, as well as William Grant Still’s “Afro-American Symphony” (1931) (“Rudolph Dunbar’s Albert Hall Triumph,” *London Calling* 140 [14 May 1942]: 5).

periodically contributed scripts and suggestions to the Empire Service in the late 1930s and into 1940, but her BBC debut had come not through radio but through television. The BBC had launched a short-lived television service—the first of its kind—in November of 1936 (Briggs 2:594-622). Marson visited the experimental television headquarters at Alexandra Palace in the summer of 1939 while showing a visiting Miss Jamaica around London. She caught Cecil Madden’s attention while at the studios, and he offered her freelance work securing interviewees for the television program *Picture Page*, which he was then producing (Jarrett-Macauley, *Life* 144). The war forced the cancellation of all experimental television broadcasts, but when *Calling the West Indies* began to take shape for the wireless Overseas Service, Madden sought Marson out. She joined *Calling the West Indies* as a full-time staff member in March of 1941, shortly after its launch. In doing so, she became the first woman of colour to host a BBC program. Indeed, her unprecedented hire caused consternation at high levels within the BBC. Marson’s staff file records an exchange among administrators regarding whether or not the Ministry of Information or the Colonial Office were opposed to the hiring of persons of colour for such a position (Sir Guy Williams to Mr. Chesterton, 21 Jan 1941, L1/290/1). Director of Empire Services R.A. Rendall checked with the Colonial Office and assured the hiring committee that “they were very anxious that we should make this experiment though they suggested that we should take the probationary two months rather seriously in this case” (Rendall to Williams, 28 Jan 1941, L1/290/1). Though willing to break new ground in hiring Marson, Rendall and other officials at the BBC seemed unsure of her abilities—or her allegiances.

This wariness on the part of BBC officials stemmed from the fact that, in hiring

Marson, they were securing the services of a well-connected and prolific representative of interwar black progressivism. Remarkable though her appointment was, it was only one of series of “firsts” for Marson. Born in 1905 into a middle-class household in the countryside of Jamaica, she became that country’s first female editor-publisher when she launched a magazine called *The Cosmopolitan* in 1928. Marson’s intentions for the magazine were socially progressive and feminist, as she made clear in one of her editorials from the spring of 1928: “This is the age of woman. What man has done, women may do” (qtd. in Jarrett-Macauley, *Life* 30). Her 1932 play *At What a Price* was the first all-black production in Kingston; it went on to be the first all-colonial play staged in London’s West End (Jarrett-Macauley, *Life* 43, 53-4). Marson also contributed actively to a number of political and social causes: in the late 1930s she helped establish the Jamaican chapter of the Save the Children foundation and edited *The Keys*, the journal of the League of Coloured Peoples. Through her commitment to progressive causes including feminism and anti-racism, she became an important figure among the West Indian intelligentsia not only in Jamaica but also in London, where she lived from 1932-1936 and 1938-1946.

Marson’s political development was shaped by two sustained encounters with prominent African leaders. In the summer of 1934, Marson welcomed Sir Nana Ofori Atta to London on behalf of the League of Coloured Peoples. Ofori Atta was the flamboyant ruler of the Gold Coast kingdom of Akyem Abuakwa and a relatively forward-thinking leader who welcomed the advancement of women and promoted education among his subjects (Jarrett-Macauley, *Life* 68). The pair became close over the course of that summer, and their frequent conversations sharpened Marson’s critique of

colonial policy. She began to make connections with African students and intellectuals in London, to read extensively about African issues and literature, and to speak out about the failures of British rule over Jamaica and other colonies (Jarrett-Macauley, *Life* 71-3).

Events of the following summer crystallized her Africanist sympathies: having been offered a temporary post at the League of Nations in Geneva, Marson watched as tensions escalated over Italy's plan to invade Abyssinia. As her position in Geneva came to a close, Marson approached the Abyssinian government and was offered an administrative position with their legation in London. Her employment began just as Italy invaded; over the next few months, Marson watched in despair as the League of Nations proved ineffectual at protecting the African nation (Jarrett-Macauley, *Life* 98-103). The failure of the League (and of Britain in particular) to defend its more vulnerable members convinced Marson—along with many other interwar intellectuals—of the severity of the fascist threat and of the need for a more vigorous defense of progressive principles. Unlike some British intellectuals, however, Marson grounded these new convictions in an anti-colonial Africanism that challenged the notion of Britain as a virtuous imperial force. The reluctance of Britain to defend the League's purported ideals of national self-determination in the case of Abyssinia, together with the fact of the empire itself, reinforced the hollowness of its claims to benevolent leadership in international affairs.

Marson's critiques of imperial racism emerge, if somewhat sporadically, in her poetry of the late 1930s. Over the course of her career, she produced four volumes of verse and published her work in such venues as *The Keys* and *Poetry of the Negro*, a 1949 anthology compiled by Langston Hughes. Alison Donnell and Delia Jarrett-Macauley

have done much to recover Marson's artistic legacy following years of neglect.⁶⁰ As both scholars point out, Marson is in some ways a difficult subject for rehabilitation in the post-independence era of Caribbean literary canonization because she does not adhere to a consistent political tone of national liberation. Much of her verse is, as Jarrett-Macauley phrases it, "pure Romantic derivation" which draws heavily on the conventions of English nature poetry (*Life* 41). Her first two collections, *Tropic Reveries* (1930) and *Heights and Depths* (1931), tend to portray a female speaker desperate for male affection and attention. Such imitative and seemingly anti-feminist characteristics run against the understandable emphasis placed on nationalist or regionalist poetry since the consolidation of a corpus of Caribbean literature in the 1970s (Donnell, *Twentieth-Century* 42).

Though many of her poems do not stoke current academic interests, Marson includes in her later collections (*The Moth and the Star* [1937] and *Towards the Stars* [1945]) several poems that remain remarkable documents of her position as a black female West Indian intellectual. In "Cinema Eyes" (1937), for example, she warns a younger acquaintance against the racialized standards of beauty that dominate the filmgoing experience: "I used to go to the Cinema / To see beautiful white faces... / My ideal man would be a Cinema type – / No kinky haired man for me, / No black face, no black children for me" (*Selected Poems* 139, ll.5-6, 10-12). Many of her most effective poems refer specifically to her experience of racial ostracization in London, a city that had yet to

⁶⁰ Donnell has produced an edition of Marson's *Selected Poems* (2011), and features Marson prominently in her literary-historical survey *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature* (2006) and the *Reader in Caribbean Literature* (1996, co-edited with Sarah Lawson Welsh). Jarrett-Macauley's contributions include *The Life of Una Marson, 1905-1965* (1998) and a short overview of Marson's wartime contributions to radio entitled "Putting the Black Woman in the Frame: Una Marson and the West Indian Challenge to British National Identity" (1996).

experience substantial immigration from the Caribbean such as would arrive with the post-war Windrush generation. Her poem “Little Brown Girl” (1937) expresses the urban alienation faced by new arrivals:

Little brown girl
 Why do you wander alone
 About the streets
 Of the great city
 Of London?
 Why do you start and wince
 When white folk stare at you?
 Don't you think they wonder
 Why a little brown girl
 Should roam about their city
 Their white, white city?
 [...]
 I heard you speak
 To the Bobbie,
 You speak good English
 Little brown girl,
 How is it you speak
 English as though it belonged
 To you?

(Selected Poems 92-94)

Through poems such as “Little Brown Girl,” “Kinky Hair Blues,” and “Cinema Eyes,” Marson sought to intervene in debates about what it meant to be both black and British, and what it meant to be a subject, but not a citizen, of the British Empire. Though raised on Wordsworth’s *Lyrical Ballads* and Palgrave’s *Golden Treasury*, Marson quickly realized that the world described by her poetic influences accommodated neither her racial difference nor her desire for greater political rights for the West Indies (Jarrett-Macauley, *Life* 19).

Yet Marson believed that things could change. Her father had been a minister, and she never deviated from the faith in which she was raised. She saw in Christianity a moral weapon in the struggle for political freedom and the alleviation of want. “He Called Us Brethren!” (1937) apostrophizes the mother country with a plea that Christian morality might overwhelm imperial complacency:

England, England, heart of an Empire
 That reaches to remotest parts of earth [...]
 How slow thou art to comprehend the truth,
 The universal truth that all must learn –
 And thou the foremost for thou hast set
 Great claim upon the holy words of God.
 [...] [S]tronger than the bonds
 That bind the peoples of one Race
 Is the same blood that flows –
 That flows alike through black and white
 Making us one in Christ. (*Selected Poems* 94-5, ll.20-1, 23-26, 31-35)

While Marson advocated a cross-race unity under God, she also came to believe that, in order to be recognized as equal, any cultural group had to realize its potential through intellectual and artistic achievement. Her faith-based conviction of the fundamental equality of all peoples had been modified by her exposure, in her late 20s, to the cultural nationalism espoused by Indian intellectuals including Rabindranath Tagore, Pandit Nehru, and Gandhi, as well as the African-American writer James Weldon Johnson. Marson became convinced that the path to political independence lay through cultural independence: many of her articles published in the Jamaican journal *Public Opinion* in the late 1930s echo Johnson's assertion that no "people that has produced great literature and art has ever been looked upon by the world as distinctly inferior" (Johnson, qtd. in Jarrett-Macauley 118). Marson thus set out on her radio career with a deeply religious sense of the moral injustice of racial prejudice, and a commitment to manifesting cultural pride through artistic excellence. In mobilizing both a Christian doctrine of equality under God and an Anglophone literary tradition of liberal humanism and freedom of expression, Marson effectively turned the discourses of colonialism back on themselves. Her apparently moderate politics, as compared to postwar anticolonial poets, belie the agency provided by her religious and aesthetic outlook. For the rest of her life, these convictions would guide Marson's efforts at promoting West Indian independence and prosperity through work as a broadcaster and activist.

Wireless Black Atlantic: Transnational Solidarity

Marson's extensive résumé and her connections within West Indian and African literary and political circles proved indispensable to her work as producer and host of

Calling the West Indies. Although intended to strengthen ties between the West Indies and Britain, and thereby reinforce a sense of loyal “Britishness” among West Indians, the program allowed Marson to champion other vectors of identity and cultural affinity that were at times Africanist, anti-colonialist, and regionalist. Her broadcasts explored the shared experience of racialization common to many people of African or Asian descent, the disjuncture between ideals of liberal democracy and the realities of colonialism, and the linguistic particularities that distinguish the West Indies as a region. Little changed about the medium involved in this renegotiation of identity; the shortwave beam still moved information in a single direction, from Britain to the Caribbean colonies. But Marson repurposed this imperial channel by virtue of the voices she invited to the airwaves. She contributed to a refiguring of the dynamic between Britain and the West Indies by changing the input at the source point in order to foreground racial, ideological, and linguistic markers. In a pattern typical of black internationalism, the exchanges that Marson broadcast depended on the social and cultural resources of the very imperial metropolis of which they were a critique (Edwards 5).

The aural community that Marson forged at the BBC exists in a complicated relationship to the question of Caribbean nationalism. The “West Indies” were in some senses a construction, a community imagined by an imperial master. And yet this imperial imagining had palpable consequences, both historically and in everyday life; the Caribbean colonies were bound by a common language and a shared experience of slavery, colonization, and British education. Tasked with addressing the linked but heterogeneous islands of the West Indies, Marson had to balance representation from across the islands while emphasizing their unity in diversity. It was a fundamentally

diasporic approach, one which, by drawing on the internationals gathered in wartime London, enabled a consideration of both the commonality and plurality of black experience (Gilroy 80). Inflected by contributions from other corners of the black Atlantic, *Calling the West Indies* enabled the elaboration of a provisional and quasi-nationalist West Indian consciousness, rooted in imperial history but informed by the experiences of others of African descent and colonial extraction. This consciousness was “quasi-nationalist” in the sense that it was not articulated as an outright independence movement over the wireless, much less as one rooted in ethnic absolutism; rather, the West Indies as promoted through Marson’s broadcasts was an intermediate construction in both theoretical and historical terms, somewhere between the dependence of the colonies and the full independence they secured in the 1960s.

Marson’s vision of cultural independence dovetailed with the wish of the BBC to include more colonial voices in its projections of the empire, even if the Corporation would have balked at outright calls for political self-rule. When *London Calling*, the BBC magazine for overseas listeners, announced the expansion of broadcasts to the West Indies in March of 1941, it stressed the efforts that the Corporation was making to secure colonial participation: “As far as is possible West Indians and people with West Indian interests over here will be brought to the microphone in talks, special West Indian News, interviews and variety” (“Extended Service” 13). Early episodes of *Calling the West Indies* were modest in ambition; their scope was limited to musical performances and messages to relations back home. Over time, however, Marson began to change the format of the program. On 6 May 1941, Marson invited Dr. Harold Moody, President of the League of Coloured Peoples, to deliver a “message home” to the West Indies. Unlike

most contributors, who spoke only briefly, Moody spoke for four minutes and was paid for his contributions (Memo, Joan Gilbert to Mr. Boswell, 15 May 1941, R46/92).

Speeches like Moody's opened the door for longer interviews with West Indians who could provide a glimpse of their life in Britain; these interviews began to appear in late May of 1941, with broadcasts including "In a Munitions Factory" and "A Minister in the Blitz." Such broadcasts did double duty: they instilled pride in the West Indian contributions to the conflict while reinforcing the sense of duty that imperial subjects owed to the mother country.

Over the next four years, Marson brought dozens of speakers to the microphone. The list of intellectuals, artists, and activists featured on *Calling the West Indies* includes not only Harold Moody but also his brother Ronald, a prominent modernist sculptor; Elizabeth McDougald of the Red Cross; Maida Springer, an American labour organizer of West Indian descent; and Randolph Dixon, correspondent for the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the most widely circulated African-American newspaper during the war. With each of these guests, Marson explored how issues of race intersected with their larger artistic and political projects. Maida Springer, for example, stresses the multiracial character of the American labour movement in her interview of 30 March 1945, and represents unions as vehicles for the advancement of racial equality as much as labour rights (*CWI* Box 22, File 1945). Other figures captured the complex dynamics of moving in predominantly white cultural circles as non-white artists and intellectuals. In discussing his sculpture, Ronald Moody makes casual reference to the racialized ways in which critics receive art by non-European artists. He notes that critics have often said that his work "has remained faithful to my racial origin, and my early environment," although Moody claims no

conscious attempt on his own part to sculpt in a “Primitive” style. He goes on to express hope for an art form beyond racial essentialism: “[I]n the West Indies we lack the rich heritage of an indigenous art. I feel that we’ll produce a culture that is neither African nor English, but will be something which, for want of a better name, we shall call West Indian” (*CWI*, 31 Jan 1943, Box 21, File 1941-1943).

This sampling indicates that, beyond her literary concerns, Marson wanted to build a transatlantic community of thinkers and cultural producers in the service of progressive causes of all kinds. Overtly revolutionary content was impossible; there were limits to what could be broadcast to the colonies. In a memo from 17 November 1941, John Grenfell-Williams addressed the constraints of broadcasting to the Caribbean. In particular, he noted the impossibility of fully addressing the kinds of political unrest documented in the Report of the West Indian Royal Commission, completed the previous year:

As far as the real problems of the West Indies are concerned, for obvious reasons we have had to strike a middle course between demonstrating our interest in and sympathy with the difficulties of the people of the West Indies and giving vent to grievances, which would be of assistance to the enemy... We could not, for example, handle fully the Report of the West Indies Commission, publication of which was withheld. (E1/1294)

Given that administrators like Grenfell-Williams were obliged to avoid any topic that might undermine official British policy in the West Indies, political discourse on programs like *Calling the West Indies* had to remain unprovocative. Censorship protocol ensured that any taboo topics raised during the initial scripting of an interview would be

cut in transmission.⁶¹ For example, in an interview with Roi Ottley, the first African-American war correspondent for a major U.S. newspaper, the censors struck out Ottley's mention of a U.S. organization "carrying on a programme to persuade the United States government to support a West Indian Federation" (17 September 1944, *CWI* Box 22 File 1944). The censor also deleted Ottley's praise of Marson as the only woman of colour in the U.K. or U.S. to host a radio program; a note in the margins claims that this would be acceptable for U.S. audiences but not for "W.I." (West Indian) audiences. Despite such censorship, Ottley and Marson engage in a long conversation about the changes in race relations brought about by the war, and offer predictions about black economic opportunities in the postwar, which Ottley expects will worsen in the short term. While direct discussions of decolonization and nationalism may have been forbidden on the imperial networks of the BBC, Ottley's comment that "[t]he condition of the negro in the world is the barometer of democracy" would have struck a chord with progressive listeners oriented towards independence.

A more pointed example of the intervention of the censor occurs in an interview between Marson and George Orwell that aired on *Calling the West Indies* on 7 May 1942.⁶² This interview is the first collaboration between the two for which any script remains; they would go on to record two episodes of the poetry program *Voice* for the India Section, along with other writers including T.S. Eliot and Mulk Raj Anand.⁶³ The

⁶¹ BBC censorship policy demanded that all broadcasts be scripted beforehand, including interviews, which then had to be read out verbatim. A switch censor present in the studio would cut the microphone of any presenter who strayed from his or her script.

⁶² Currently housed in the *Calling the West Indies* files of the Written Archive Centre, this interview does not feature in the *Complete Works of George Orwell* edited by Peter Davison in the late 1990s, nor does it appear in W.J. West's compendium of Orwell's war broadcasts. While Marson refers to him as "George Orwell" in her remarks, the script itself calls him by his real surname, Blair.

⁶³ Marson and Orwell first worked together in August of 1941, just before he officially joined the BBC. Orwell had a small role playing a colonial slave owner alongside Marson in a radio play written by

interview details Orwell's experiences in Burma and in the Spanish Civil War, his commitment to socialism, and his thoughts about the future of English-language literature. The interview was cleared for broadcast with the exception of a short passage, which reads as follows:

MARSON When did you consciously become left-wing?

BLAIR About 1927 or so, while I was in Burma.

MARSON Did the poverty there strike you?

BLAIR Properly speaking, there is no poverty in Burma. It is a very rich country, but all the same, imperialism is not defensible really, even when it does not happen to oppress that particular area.

(*CWI* Box 21, File 1941-1943)

Orwell's remark about imperialism comes across as offhand, as if the indefensibility of imperialism were a *fait accompli*, as indeed it may have seemed to many West Indian listeners. It is perhaps the casualness of this remark that earned the intervention of the censor, because later on Orwell makes a more mitigated comment about the future of British imperialism, which remains uncensored:

BLAIR I think the basic fact about countries like India or the African colonies, or the West Indies, etc., is that we can't any longer govern them on the old terms. On the other hand, they can't defend themselves, and

Orwell's future India Section colleague Venu Chitale (Bowker 284; Davison, *CW* 12:544). Bowker further claims that Marson and Orwell may have enjoyed a romantic relationship (284), although there is no solid evidence for this. The only corroboration seems to be a 1949 letter preserved at the Orwell archive at University College London, in which Marson sends greetings "from an old friend" and says at one point "I have talked a lot about myself because I know you must have some little interest in me and wondering a bit" (Marson to Orwell, 2 April 1949; George Orwell Collection, UCL).

they can't be entirely self-supporting, so one must make some sort of loose partnership on comparatively generous terms before it is too late. Because if we don't, they might be lost to some new imperial power like Japan, and they will simply be worse off than before. (*CWI* Box 21 File 1941-1943)

This comment aligns with Orwell's self-justifications for contributing to the wartime BBC in the first place: for all its injustice, the British Empire was preferable to a Nazi or Japanese empire, and until the Axis was defeated, Britain and its colonies had to work together. Despite the fact that censors muted the more strident anti-imperial content of Orwell's interview, the very mention of an alternative governance structure—a "loose partnership" rather than a paternalistic imperial relationship—represents a significant achievement.

Beyond his statements about imperialism itself, Orwell would for many listeners have represented a degree of literary respectability that affected the reception of *Calling the West Indies* as a whole. He was one of several established British writers and intellectuals whom Marson and her team invited to participate in the program. Marson unsuccessfully sought contributions from Louis MacNeice (Jarrett-Macauley, *Life* 160), but she succeeded in bringing Scottish critic, writer, and broadcaster L.A.G. Strong to the microphone to offer his assessments of the growing body of West Indian poetry and prose being aired. Strong's participation presages postwar contributions to *Caribbean Voices* by critics including MacNeice and Stephen Spender. Most of these authors would have considered themselves anti-imperialists.

As Peter Kalliney notes, the involvement of metropolitan writers like Orwell, Strong, Spender, and MacNeice in Caribbean broadcasting is important for reasons

beyond their support for, or disavowal of, colonial independence. Regardless of such brass-tacks political considerations, interactions between the London literary establishment and the nascent Caribbean literary scene effected complex relations of institutional validation and assimilation (Kalliney, “Metropolitan Modernism” 94). Affiliation with colonial intellectuals contributed to the progressive credentials of white British writers and actualized the role many had hoped radio would play in bringing together cultures from around the world. For West Indian intellectuals, the involvement of British writers lent *Calling the West Indies* even greater cultural capital. Especially in later years, as *Calling the West Indies* became *Caribbean Voices* and played host to an ever more vibrant Caribbean literary boom, this process of exchange became a means of pursuing ideals of aesthetic autonomy that benefitted intellectuals on both sides of the Atlantic (Kalliney, “Metropolitan Modernism” 90-5 and *passim*; “Introduction,” *Commonwealth of Letters* n.p.). Transatlantic solidarity thus validated and reinforced the aspirations for autonomy—both political and artistic—embedded in the cultural production of the West Indies.

Wireless Black Atlantic, Part Two: Caribbean Poetry and Nation Language

Beyond these international connections, *Calling the West Indies* served to strengthen proto-national sentiment among West Indian listeners and participants. Marson was keen to demonstrate a radio-generated rapprochement between islands that often seemed as far apart from one another as they seemed far from Britain. Speaking of West Indian soldiers in Britain on 3 September 1942, Marson noted that “what I think is proving most valuable is their growing consciousness of belonging not to Jamaica, or

Trinidad or Antigua—but to the West Indies... The thing that has interested me most is the growth of real friendships between lads from different islands who only met over here for the first time” (*CWI* Box 21, File 1941-1943). *Calling the West Indies* was not simply facilitating the expression of a previously existing and stable regional identity; the entire wartime expatriate experience enabled what Laurence Breiner describes as a “West Indianification” that brought together a group of people who had up to that point been dispersed both geographically and intellectually (96). The experience of common isolation within the metropolitan context of London bound West Indians together. For one thing, their respective home islands appeared more alike from the vantage point of London, forging a kind of inter-island solidarity; moreover, West Indians who considered themselves “British” were often shocked to discover upon arrival in London that native Britons did not see them as such, and often labelled all West Indians as “Jamaicans” (Rush 170-2). Encouraging connections between West Indians became, for Marson, a way of recovering a positive collective identity from the exclusionary operations of normative Britishness.

For Marson, the key to cementing this nascent identity was the development of a shared language and a shared literature. As the program evolved, Marson increasingly used *Calling the West Indies* as a vehicle for the promotion of West Indian poetry. Griffith links this transformation to Marson’s participation in George Orwell’s radio poetry program *Voice* in late 1942 (Griffith 198); while *Voice* undoubtedly spurred Marson to emulate its audio “magazine” format, she had already broadcast several poetry-themed programs to the West Indies by the end of 1942. Much of the poetry broadcast on *Calling the West Indies* was formally and politically conservative.

Nonetheless, these poems were a means of building up a sense of literary tradition in the West Indies, and could thereby serve as exercises in nation-formation. In an explicit celebration of the racial and cultural hybridity of the islands, one transmission broadcast in November of 1942 focused on the poetry of the various ethnic groups in the West Indies. Although Marson announces that listeners will hear from the four “major races,” the script only contains poetry celebrating the Indian, Chinese, and African heritage of the islands, indicating that the fourth example (presumably European) had been cut (*CWI* Box 21, File 1941-43).⁶⁴

Marson and her contributors were eager to demonstrate the burgeoning artistic and intellectual culture of the islands. In a broadcast that aired on 14 June 1942, the program featured works written and read by Grenada-born poet Calvin Lambert, which were set to music. Though stylistically unadventurous, Lambert’s poetry succeeds in answering its own call for the development of a regional literature: “Let us awake and give the world our share / Of literature to mould the destiny / Of the tempestuous age in which we live” (“A Request to the West,” 14 June 1942, *CWI* Box 21, File 1941-43). At the same time, however, Lambert directs this call for a new regional literature towards the aims of Britain as a global power: “This world-catastrophe is spread / To native man, in native lands. / What will remain to speak of Europe’s Art? / Who will survive to write the page of time?” (“War Planes,” 14 June 1942). While Lambert was and remains a relative unknown, Marson also praised the contributions of more established poets, including Tom Redcam, J.E. Clare MacFarlane, and Vivian Virtue. On the occasion of the death of

⁶⁴ This may not have been intentional; Marson was known to prepare too much material for her broadcasts, often cutting poems and paragraphs as she assembled her scripts (R46/92). Still, the lack of any white West Indian poetry in the script indicates that, by the time the show went to air, only three cultural groups were to be represented.

Constance Hollar, an early pioneer of Jamaican poetry, Marson dedicated an entire episode to Hollar's memory, and featured poems written in her honour by Lena Kent, A.C. Hutton, and Alan Wiles (25 March 1944).

For writers like Lambert, MacFarlane, and Hollar, mother country and colony were bound fast together by both sentiment and poetic form; gestures at regional consciousness had to proceed through pre-modernist models of English-language literature and with an understanding that the West Indies existed within the empire. As the program evolved, *Calling the West Indies* would move beyond these Euro-centric poetic forms, to include idioms more specific to the West Indies. On 12 November 1942, Marson and her team presented a folk story collected by Dorothy Clarke and published in the *Daily Gleaner*, Jamaica's largest newspaper. Titled "Brer Nancy and de Woss-woss," the story participates in the anancy (or "nancy") tradition, which was one of the most prominent narrative forms to survive the journey from West Africa to the West Indies. Anancy narratives usually feature as their central character a trickster figure in the form of, or with some attributes of, a spider; indeed, the form derives its title from the word *ananse*, which means "spider" in the Akan language of Ghana ("Anancy"). Originally an oral storytelling form, these narratives tend to be written in dialect when transcribed in order to represent more closely their spoken origins. The opening of "Brer Nancy" gives a sense of the narrative voice:

One day, Brer Blackbud siddung pan one tree-limb ab tek sun, an him see tree butcher come wid a cow, and him mek no nize, him watch dem when dem kill de cow. When it down, him see dem cut up de meat so carry it to one lock-up place. When dem ketch ah do', dem say 'One, two, tree, me

no touch libber” an de do’ open, mek them carry in de meat. Bamby dem come out again an gone. (*CWI* Box 21 Folder 1941-43)

As in most anancy stories, “Brer Nancy and de Woss-woss” celebrates the protagonists’ clever subversion of established order. In this case, having learned the secret of entering and exiting the storeroom, Brer Blackbud tips Brer Nancy off about the stash of meat.

Although Brer Blackbud informs Brer Nancy that escape from the storeroom requires that one not leave with a cut of liver (“One, two, tree, me no touch libber”), Brer Nancy ignores this advice, and becomes trapped in the storeroom while Brer Blackbud escapes. Once they discover Brer Nancy, the butchers tie him to a tree and prepare to brand him as punishment. Only through Brer Blackbud’s intervention (with the assistance of a small army of “woss-woss,” or wasps) does Brer Nancy succeed in escaping from the butchers, before sharing the spoils of victory with Brer Blackbud and the wasps.

This synopsis indicates some of the political valences of the story, not least of which is the triumph of trickster figures coded as black (the West African anancy figure and the blackbird) over the butchers. The apparent slippage of characters between animal and human forms—a spider able to walk away with a great quantity of meat or to be tied to a tree—facilitates a shift from fable to historical representation. The branding with which Brer Nancy is threatened, for example, is at once an element of the fable-world and a representation of the bodily trauma inflicted on those, like slaves and dispossessed agricultural workers, caught on the wrong side of the islands’ often violent and inequitable system of discipline. At a level beyond the overt diegesis, the very act of sharing anancy stories is culturally freighted. The history of anancy storytelling is rooted in Afro-Caribbean folk culture and based on the assumption that fictional subversions of

authority can in some way model real-world resistance, or at the very least compensate for the difficulties of achieving that resistance. As a coded form of subversion and a vestige of African culture in the West Indies, the telling of anancy stories was prohibited in colonial educational institutions (Arnold 56-7). Furthermore, well into the middle of the twentieth century, anancy stories were frowned upon by a growing black cultural establishment that sought to foster literary respectability along European lines rather than encourage ties to the slavery-era past (Arnold 57). It was not until the late 1960s that folk poets such as Louise Bennett would achieve recognition *as poets* for their work in demotic traditions and dialects (Brathwaite 26-8).

Although examples of folk literature like “Brer Nancy” occurred far less often on *Calling the West Indies* than literature that emulated European models, their frequency grew as the war went on. Late in the war, the program began to include dialect poems by Marson, Claude MacKay, and others. These poems can often seem like caricatures today; but in many cases, they were sincere attempts to depict aspects of lived experience in a language closer to that spoken by many residents of the islands. In the blind medium of radio, shadings of vocal difference became an important vehicle for the communication of “West Indianness” as distinct from “Britishness.” Robert Warren’s poem “Poor We Country Folk,” which aired on 27 May 1945, offers an example of a poem spoken from the perspective of an agricultural labourer selling his produce at a Kingston market:

Inna market people poke
 Ya tings an’ tink a joke
 Wen ye tell dem nuh fe dweet.
 ‘n laugh like sinting ketch dem sweet.

Kingston people? Dem aal right.
 Sink we ride jackass aal night
 Fe seel dem peas an' corn fe nuttin!
 Dem kyan nyam dem ham an' muttin!

(*Caribbean Voices* scripts [microfilm], 27 May 1945, BBC WAC)

From today's perspective, this kind of poem can appear uncomfortably close to a kind of auto-minstrelsy, in which a racial identity is performed for an outside audience. And yet questionable appropriations seem not to obtain in this situation; the poem was written by a Jamaican, chosen by the editors of the *Yearbook of the Jamaican Poetry League 1940* and then by the producers of *Calling the West Indies*, and broadcast back to a West Indian audience. The possibility that this poem represents an act of class ventriloquism is harder to adjudicate; little is known about Robert Warren, although his status as a published poet may indicate relative prosperity. Notwithstanding these concerns, Warren's adoption of an agricultural produce-seller's voice is sympathetic; he complains about the inequalities between city and country, and silently reproves urbanites who presume they can take advantage of him and his labours. Like "Brer Nancy," "Poor We Country Folk" stages a resistance to figures of authority through the use of local dialect and literary forms.

The inclusion of folk literature on *Calling the West Indies* directed listeners' attention to a tradition at once synchronous with and distinct from British poetry of the twentieth century. Transmission of non-standard accents and regional dialects encouraged a sense of West Indian cultural autonomy by foregrounding the differences between the linguistic and poetic traditions of the colonies and Britain. In this sense, broadcasting

poetry from the West Indies back to the West Indies contributed to the formation of what Brathwaite has called *nation language*, a more celebratory term than “dialect” and one that entails liberation from certain metrical constraints of English-language poetry (Brathwaite 5, 13, 17). Nation language, for Brathwaite, emerges from a plural linguistic state; the term encompasses all of the varieties of spoken and written English from the Caribbean that exhibit a tension resulting from the suppression, and eventual re-emergence, of the rhythms and inflections of the African and indigenous languages that circulated among early slave populations (5-7). West Indian nation language is a product of the linguistic contact zone between a dominant idiom and other, subordinate idioms, whether residual (African) or emergent (demotic Afro-Caribbean). While nation language has the potential to challenge the linguistic hegemony of English as a colonial language, it does not replace standard English with a unified, positivist version of Caribbean English; rather, as Matthew Hart has argued (adapting the work of Simon Gikandi) the condition of the emergence of nation language is one of reaction and relation, not pure linguistic identity (Hart 123).

The extra-verbal variations of speech audible via shortwave—inflections, cadence, vowel tones—produce meaning beyond the lexical inheritance of English. In doing so, they echo Kamau Brathwaite’s claims about Caribbean orality in *History of the Voice*: “The poetry, the culture itself, exists not in a dictionary but in the tradition of the spoken word. It is based as much on sound as it is on song. That is to say, the noise that it makes is part of the meaning, and if you ignore the noise (or what you would *think* of as noise, shall I say) then you lose part of the meaning” (17). The celebration of Caribbean nation language on the air shifted the particularities of accent and dialect from the realm

of noise—unwanted sound or distortion—to a productive dimension of poetic meaning.

Laurence Breiner argues that this emphasis on the heard sound of language had a profound effect on the development of Caribbean poetry, beyond simply validating nation language. It trained West Indian audiences to listen for differences in accents, dialects, and delivery, and laid the groundwork for the privileging of oral and performance poetry in the later twentieth century (Breiner 98-9).

Indeed, one can trace a lineage from the first wireless articulations of nation language to Paul Gilroy's move, in *The Black Atlantic*, away from the poststructuralist obsession with textuality in favour of a music-derived rhetoric of gesture, inflection, and kinesis (77-78). Though Gilroy focuses on the transatlantic history of black musical forms, his argument that textuality deprives scholars of a language by which to analyze "performances in which identity is fleetingly experienced in the most intensive ways" holds true for broadcast poetry as well (Gilroy 78). Both the spoken word and performed music are embodied forms, experienced ephemerally when broadcast. Both assert the material origin of the artwork, whether voice or bodily movement. In doing so, they bear traces of the bodily particularity of the artist. In the case of broadcast poetry, the effect of nation language inheres, partly, in the inflections, cadences, tones, and stresses of the voice, which connect speaker and listener. In asserting a regional identity, nation language asserts a measure of bodily particularity on the part of the speaker by indicating island of origin, socio-economic class, and commitment to one register of speech or another. While radio cannot represent the most contested aspect of West Indian identity—race—it can nonetheless approximate the aural trace of disenfranchisement and material dispossession by representing rural and working-class accents. In representing this

disenfranchisement and dispossession in the context of the West Indies, it offers a reminder of Stuart Hall's claim that race is the modality in which class is lived; that in a racially binarized society, poverty disproportionately affects the subjugated half of the binary (Hall, "Race" 341). In introducing a spectrum of West Indian voices to the wireless, *Calling the West Indies* claimed for the radio public a measure of embodied history, a colonial otherness which had previously been excluded from the airwaves emanating from the metropole.

The representation of atypical accents and dialects in West Indian broadcasts met with resistance from listeners at the time. Some listeners found it difficult to escape internalized prejudices about accents; John Figueroa has noted that "many people in the Caribbean felt that poetry on the BBC, even Caribbean poetry, should be read by English voices" (qtd. in Griffith 204), although this may have as much to do with preconceptions about appropriate "radio voices" as about "literary voices." The Colonial Office, whose cultural politics were often more responsive to those of the colonial plantocracy than those of non-white West Indians, was critical of the show and its host, summing up its response as "[t]oo much Jamaica, too much Una Marson" (R.A. Rendall to A.S.D. [likely John Grenfell-Williams], 2 Jan 1943, E1/1294/2). At times, the question of accent proved divisive even among listeners supportive of regional variety; an undated and anonymous internal report from late 1941 or early 1942 notes that "We are accused, too, on occasions, of using too many speakers from some particular island. But we do recognise the friendly rivalry which exists between the islands, and we try very hard to find men from all parts of the West Indies to take part in our programmes" ("Notes on Broadcasting to the West Indies," E2/584). On 19 May 1941, the West Indian programs

division received a telegram from Port of Spain, Trinidad, which claimed that public interest in *Calling the West Indies* was virtually non-existent in Trinidad owing to a perceived focus on Jamaican speakers and issues (R46/92). Such regional frictions preoccupied the producers of *Calling the West Indies* throughout the war. But despite such complaints, the producers largely succeeded at their task of providing the most representative sample of voices from across the West Indies while drawing from a limited pool of students, soldiers, intellectuals, and war workers.

While *Calling the West Indies* struggled to represent the racial diversity of the Caribbean vocally, it came also to play a mediating role between West Indians and white Britons. In a broadcast of 3 September 1942, Marson notes that war has at the very least brought citizens of the British Isles into contact with colonial citizens whose existence had up to that point been all too easy to ignore: “If we want understanding and sympathy among peoples of different races and colours, we must first have knowledge of each other—and at least the war is compelling us to meet one another over here” (*CWI* Box 21, File 1941-1943). In reality, things were more difficult than Marson’s on-air assessment might indicate. She clashed frequently with the Colonial Office and the West Indian Commission, both of which favoured increased representation of white guests on *Calling the West Indies* (Grenfell-Williams to Rendall, 11 March 1942, E2/584). In a long undated report from early in 1942, Marson responded to allegations that she allowed non-white West Indians to broadcast at the expense of white West Indians: “We usually have a good mixture—white, brown, black—and the number of white lads [broadcasting messages home] keeps up and is a good percentage when we realise only 3% are white in the West Indies” (E2/584). For its part, the upper administration tended to side with

Marson. In addition to Grenfell-Williams' regular support for Marson's efforts, R.A. Rendall (then the Assistant Controller for Overseas Services) noted that Marson had "special difficulties" to deal with, including "the proper holding of the balance between white and black and the criticism of the West India committee on this point" (7 Jan 1942, E2/584).

Addressing the Mother Country: *West Indies Calling*

Thanks to Marson's prominent role as an ambassador of West Indian culture in Britain, her voice can still be heard today. Despite the importance of *Calling the West Indies* in introducing vocal diversity to the imperial airwaves, few recordings remain of Marson's voice. The episodes of *Calling West Africa* or George Orwell's program *Voice* in which Marson participated have not survived. The National Sound Archive of the British Library possesses three acetate discs (out of four recorded) from an episode of *Calling the West Indies* featuring L.A.G. Strong; on this tape, Marson's voice introduces Strong and closes the program, which is to say that her presence is minimal. There is, however, one other recording of Marson's voice, preserved in a 1943 propaganda film entitled *West Indies Calling*.⁶⁵ Produced by the Ministry of Information, *West Indies Calling* was part of a larger effort to highlight West Indian contributions in Britain, and would have been shown between or before features at British cinemas. This film uses the format of the radio message program that Marson hosted in order to introduce Britons to the various war jobs West Indians were performing. A large group of West Indians of various hues gather at Broadcasting House in an informal party setting, during which Marson approaches the microphone and introduces a number of speakers, all of whom are

⁶⁵ The film can currently be accessed online on YouTube, or via: <http://bit.ly/OOnp1w>

men of colour. Beginning with the first guest—Learie Constantine, a well-known Trinidadian cricketer employed during the war by the Ministry of Labour—the audience is introduced to a variety of war jobs being performed by Caribbean Britons, which the speakers continue to narrate in voice-over. Marson's voice, though seemingly altered by many years in London, nonetheless retains hints of a distinctly non-British cadence and inflection in certain moments. The other speakers display a range of accents.

By pairing the brown bodies of its presenters with their varied West Indian accents, the film presents a visual correlative to the insistence in radio on the bodily particularity of its announcers. Viewers not only watch and hear them speak while learning about West Indian contributions to the war; the film actually ends with the image of white and black West Indians dancing together, a rare if not unprecedented depiction of wartime interracial intimacy. The moment of intimacy is gestured at rather than boldly asserted: most of the dancing couples are not interracial, but one interracial couple features in close-up, while two others feature in the background. However fleeting, the staged romance of the dance is especially remarkable given the ample evidence collected by scholars like Sonia Rose about the extent of racial prejudice in the UK during the war (Rose 245-86). While interracial cooperation and integration were promoted by British authorities in the Colonial Office and elsewhere, officials often stressed that acceptable interactions did not include romantic fraternization (246-9). This visual defiance of Colonial Office policy may simply be a case of one hand not knowing what the other is doing. The Ministry of Information, whose mandate of maintaining public morale and order would have included the smoothing over of racial tensions, may not have been fully attuned to the Colonial Office's mandate to bear in mind colonial attitudes to race while

West Indians were in Britain.

More intriguingly, the closing scene of black, brown, and white West Indians dancing together can be read as a bracketing off of the creolized world represented by the Caribbean colonies. Given the long history of cultural and racial intermixing in the West Indies—to which the film alludes in its introduction—the film can be seen as representing a particularly “West Indian” situation. The framing device of the roomful of West Indians broadcasting to Britain becomes a means of safely containing the perceived threat of miscegenation, and treating it as a peculiarly “colonial” situation. That some Britons resisted the return and continued presence of West Indians in the 1950s—even of former soldiers returning to areas where they had been stationed during the war—indicates that Britain may not have been ready for the return of the imperially repressed (Deer 109). Nonetheless, the decision to represent this kind of fraternization was a bold one, because it represents social barriers that came under pressure during the war. Once presented with the image of a multiracial community, no matter how it may be framed or contained, the audience must at least entertain as a possibility the notion of a creolized British Empire.

The ambiguity of this final scene, its presentation of bodily difference within a particular, limited frame, encapsulates the constraints inherent in broadcasting a new version of Britain that included a plethora of racial, regional, and class identities. Marson, Anand, Orwell, and others accepted such constraints as the price of reaching a large audience and participating actively in wartime discussions of national and imperial belonging, social organization, and post-war planning. But there was a constant tension between official and unofficial uses of radio, between maintaining the vast imperial war effort and daring to challenge its shape and objectives. To a certain extent, even such

mitigated forms of dissent could be folded back into the larger propaganda aims of the British government: the more dissent and diversity could be aired through the BBC, the more the government could claim to be a tolerant, democratic, and pluralist imperial nation. The imperial networks of the BBC were thus precisely hegemonic, in the sense that they provided an elastic form of containment for the class and colonial unrest that might otherwise have destabilized Britain and its empire (Williams, *Marxism* 113-14; Hall, "Culture" 334). Nevertheless, Britain left the Second World War a transformed polity, with a Labour government in power and possessed of a mandate for substantial social reform, with the independence of India essentially a matter of when, not if; even Jamaica, whose independence from Britain would not arrive until 1958, was granted a new Constitution with full suffrage in 1945. The success of Caribbean decolonization movements in the late 1950s and 1960s indicates that wartime articulations of national consciousness formed part of a larger, and ultimately productive, movement for regional autonomy.

In the context of war, Marson's deployment of regionally specific poetry was thus always doubly voiced. The demands of propaganda ensured a message of colonial cooperation with Britain at a time of crisis, and prevented overtly pro-independence messages from reaching Caribbean listeners. By making late-colonial voices audible from the centre of the British Empire, *Calling the West Indies* challenged simple models of exchange between centre and periphery, and accentuated the mutual implication of white and black British subjects in the mediated projects of modernity. The semantic impact of hearing West Indian poetry read in West Indian voices extended far beyond the literal content of words; it expanded the horizon of national possibility in a manner analogous to

the belated inclusion of Northern and working-class English accents on the BBC in the late 1930s and 1940s, and prompts consideration of the relationship between audibility, representation, and citizenship in late modernist texts generally. By seizing the modern mechanisms of control and using them for their own patterns of circulation, these writers offered a reminder that in accounts of late imperialism and culture, sound matters. The articulation of alternate cultural formations depends on the audible as much as on the legible, and emerges in practices that work through technologies and institutions of mediation.

Conclusion

In the opening scene of Graham Greene's *The Ministry of Fear* (1943), Arthur Rowe turns to a medium of uncanny acoustic power to hear his fate. Rowe has come to a small fair in a Bloomsbury square looking "to mislay the events of twenty years" amidst the rubble of the blitz (6); he wants to forget the mercy killing of his wife, his subsequent institutionalization, and his present despondency. At the suggestion of a passer-by, Rowe steps into the tent of Mrs. Bellairs, a fortune-teller and spiritualist. He can barely distinguish her figure in the darkness of the tent; her words emerge as if from a lump of undistinguished clothing. Rowe is surprised to find that Mrs. Bellairs possesses a "deep powerful voice: a convincing voice" (8). When she begins to explore his still-raw personal history, Rowe snaps at her: "Don't tell me the past," he says. "Tell me the future" (9). The effect is instantaneous: "It was as if he had pressed a button and stopped a machine. The silence was odd and unexpected" (9). Rowe has inadvertently hit upon the code phrase that Mrs. Bellairs—member of a fascist fifth column in London—was waiting for. She proceeds to pass on instructions intended for a secret recipient. Machinelike, sonorous, and inscrutable, Mrs. Bellairs—whose faux-French name translates roughly into "beautiful air" or "beautiful tunes"—might be taken for a different kind of medium altogether. She is a node in a network of illicit information and subterfuge; in uttering the secret code, Rowe tunes in to a frequency reserved for dissidents and saboteurs.

As Nancy Mitford and Rebecca West discovered, radio was an unstable medium that could reveal unpleasant ideological tendencies. But the scene with Mrs. Bellairs does not simply parallel the acoustic revelation of the political uncanny through radio figures

like Lord Haw-Haw. In demanding that the medium turn away from the past and towards the future, Rowe gives voice to fundamental changes underway in British broadcasting and British culture more generally. That the Second World War marks a pivotal point in twentieth century British history goes without saying. During the war, however, a profound shift in public discourse occurred in Britain; without abandoning the lessons that the past might hold for the wartime nation, the public began to consider a wider range of futures than had previously been thought possible. The war served to accelerate development on a series of sociopolitical fronts, in what Paul Addison has called “an astonishing example of the uses of adversity” (14). Sustained economic planning became not only possible but necessary; social security and universal health care were enshrined as collective rights and shared political responsibilities; women took on greater roles in factories, businesses, and government; the political aspirations of the colonies began slowly to bear fruit, first in India and Pakistan, then Ghana, then across the empire.

Throughout these transformations, British listeners tuned in to hear the signs of change filtered through the voices of newsreaders, politicians, intellectuals, artists, and performers. Radio broadcasting was so closely bound up with the flow of information in Britain that it becomes difficult to separate the constitutive and representative functions of the medium. Radio served as both mirror and lamp to British society by alternately reflecting transformations already underway and casting its light forward. Thus, while J.B. Priestley called, in the plainest language, for massive socio-economic changes on the home front, Louis MacNeice chose to imbue the form of his radio plays and features with a nascent collective ethos of cooperation and collaboration as a path to victory. The fact that these writers’ modernist and populist tendencies coexisted on the wartime BBC

indicates that the medium had become a cultural force whose principles align with Priestley's "broadbrow" ideal. The BBC sought to be all things to all listeners during the conflict, and to a remarkable extent succeeded at its overlapping goals of democratic representation, high artistic achievement, and objectivity in reporting.

The crucible of a mass-mediated global conflict had forced British writers to rethink their engagement with publics on a local, national, and international scale. Whereas writers in the 1930s took ideological sides, often in international conflicts, the war caused them to reconsider the validity of national allegiances as vehicles for the promotion of political and aesthetic ideals. Existential threat, on an individual and collective level, urged authors to forgo strict binaries of right and wrong and to embark instead on the less heroic, but potentially more productive, path of collaboration. In becoming public intellectuals, they adjusted their ambitions to meet the expectations of both the government and the population at large. It was not always an aesthetically fruitful compromise; Stephen Spender, commenting in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1943, protested the narrowness of wartime work offered to writers:

Many poets employed in the services, or exalted to the precarious Paradiso of the Ministries, or the BBC, must feel as I do. Artists are commissioned to paint pictures; but writers are commissioned only to write films, scripts, pamphlets, anything, so long as it is certain that it will not be of the slightest value or interest in five years' time. (qtd. in Hewison 84)

But if collaboration at times stunted writerly ambition, it deepened writerly impact on the issues of the day. The war offered authors the chance to contribute meaningfully to a struggle whose antagonists presented radically different visions of the role of the artist in

society. Building on the momentum enabled by wartime solidarity, writers were able to overshoot government prescriptions and connect with audiences in unstable and unpredictable ways. The counterpublics sustained by broadcasting—variously anti-imperial, socialist, aesthetically adventurous, or fervently demotic—gave listeners a sense of direct connection with pressing intellectual concerns, while they gave writers the sense that they were not simply aping official propaganda. For both cultural producers and consumers, these counterpublics seemed to offer a way forward from the Britain of the 1930s.

Study of the wartime broadcasts of these authors enables an understanding of how they negotiated what might be called, to borrow to a phrase of George Orwell's, "the subtle network of compromises" (*CEJL* 2:83). If the war put the lie to residual notions that artistic production can ever be fully divorced from political considerations, it nonetheless reinforced aesthetic autonomy as an ideal, however unattainable, that would help demarcate what Orwell called "The Frontiers of Art and Propaganda" (*CEJL* 1:149-153). The involvement of writers in radio—as in film, written propaganda, and journalism—took place on a fraught middle ground between those illusory frontiers. Though struggles on this middle ground inevitably involved muddying themselves in the puddles of political compromise, writers took solace in the fact that such compromises would become less common, not more, following the defeat of the Axis powers. Ironically, the more disinterested a wartime talk or work of art could claim to be, the more valuable it became as an example of what the Allies were fighting for.

For some, the sense of possibility stemming from the war only lasted so long. J.B. Priestley quickly became disillusioned by the cultural influence of "Admass," his

shorthand for a globalized, materially prosperous, and deradicalized culture of consumption (Baxendale, *Priestley's England* 177). The spirit of participatory democracy and common endeavour that had animated the early years of the People's War seemed to fade in favour of a government run by faceless technocrats: "One day in the late summer of '45," Priestley wrote in 1958, "Revolutionary Young England was invited to 10 Downing Street, to be thanked for its election services, and was shot as it went upstairs. Who pulled the trigger, I don't know" (*Topside* 15). Against the vibrant sense of possibility that his "Postscripts" had at once captured and engendered, a sense of exhausted resignation to officialdom seemed to set in amongst the public. Instead of inheriting a culture of creation and community, the nation had been taken over by something he dubbed "Topside," a new form of Establishment England (and he was back to calling it "England") that blended tradition, bureaucracy, and the love of power (4-14). "*Topside*," Priestley states, is "*the reaction against a revolution that never happened*" (14, emphasis in original).

The sense of disappointment that Priestley felt at postwar developments reveals a perception, increasingly common among liberal and progressive intellectuals, that the power they once held over public debate was waning.⁶⁶ With public attention fixated on the future of the nation during the war, radio had opened up a vast field of engagement for writers interested in framing the character of British cultural and political life, a field characterized by feedback and iteration and by a process of constant negotiation between dictating and reflecting public expectations and tastes. But the same forces of public opinion that had forced the BBC to appeal more directly to listeners' tastes from the late

⁶⁶ Stefan Collini argues that this perceived diminution of influence has long characterized formulations of the intellectual as an "absent presence" in British cultural life, especially in the postwar period (*Absent Minds* 435-98 and *passim*).

1930s on effected a postwar diffusion of the power held by the Home Service on the domestic front and the Overseas Service on the international front. While the launch of the Third Programme in 1946 would ensure a forum for highbrow content for decades to come, the tripartite division of broadcasting services (Light, Home, and Third) served to institutionalize cultural hierarchies while splitting the attention of the national radio public. The resumption of BBC television broadcasting in 1946 only added to a media landscape already populated by radio, cinema, and print. The coronation of Queen Elizabeth in 1953 represented the first major television spectacle in Britain; by 1955, television viewing would exceed radio listening in Britain (Hajkowski 13). That same year, the establishment of the Independent Television Authority and its ITV network broke the remarkably long-lived hold of the BBC over telecommunications in Britain.

In an echo of the initial mistrust that some felt towards radio, many writers found it difficult to embrace television with any fervour. Though he was enthusiastic about radio, T.S. Eliot resisted the new audio-visual medium because he thought it further distanced the public from what he considered appropriately elevating and challenging forms of art (Coyle 192). Auden was outright dismissive; in a 1972 interview with the *Paris Review*, he declaimed, “I don’t see how any civilized person can watch TV, far less own a set” (qtd. in Carey 214). For some writers, television simply represented another imperfect medium that, while it had its drawbacks, offered certain advantages. In an article in the *BBC Quarterly* in late 1953, MacNeice acknowledged that television, by pairing sound and image, provided viewers with a form of spectacle with which radio could not directly compete (129). But he worried that, as television and other media continued to grow in popularity, the audience might forget the ability of radio to offer an

imaginative experience free of visual determinants:

Let us pray then that *all* the media survive. Radio and the films have not yet killed books and there are many words including many poems which it is best to read on the page. Above all do not let us, with 3D and such impinging on us, think that a multiple technique is necessarily ‘better’ than a simple technique. Many music lovers prefer to hear music with their eyes shut and who wants to live all the time in the world of Mr. Disney’s *Fantasia*? (“Plea for Sound” 135)

MacNeice never tried his hand at 3-D filmmaking. Although he would go on to direct two plays for television in 1958 (Strindberg’s *Pariah* and *The Stronger*), he never felt at home in the medium (Stallworthy 429). If MacNeice was at least theoretically open to the possibilities of television as a medium, it may have been too late in his career for him to take the same kinds of risks with television as he had with radio less than twenty years earlier.

Four years later, Priestley gave voice to a similarly resigned acceptance of new media. He could not hide his disappointment that the public enthusiasm that had animated British writers’ success in radio broadcasting in earlier decades was passing. No matter how resistant he may have been to the seductions of “Admass,” Priestley saw adaptation to new media as the only choice open to mid-century writers and thinkers. Writing in 1957, Priestley argued that it was the duty of the intellectual to “go after his audience wherever that audience may be”:

You may wish, as I have often wished, that the media of mass communications had never been invented; but they have been invented,

they are with us... Therefore, if we think of ourselves not simply as exponents of the printed word, but as creators, as makers, as inventors; as belonging to one of those eternal types I mentioned earlier, we should go for the audience wherever it may be found and try to learn those new techniques demanded by the new media... I feel very strongly that, certainly in this country, we would have had better films, we would have had better radio and we would be having better television if more writers had thought it their duty to learn how to use these media and so found new audiences; in the hope, of course, of bringing those audiences to the older arts of the printed word and the theatre. ("The Author and the Public" 27-8)

Priestley's shift in tense when referring to the media of mass communication, from the film and radio the public "would have had" to the television they "would be having," is telling. In consigning film and radio, rather prematurely, to the dustbin of media past, he indicates a belief that the eclipse of the former by the latter is all but complete. Reports of the death of cinema and of radio are, and always have been, greatly exaggerated.

Priestley's nostalgic tone nonetheless reflects a sense that the moment of primacy for both media had passed. Given his more extended involvement in radio, it is easy to imagine that the tone of regret over opportunities lost is most pointedly directed at broadcasting. Even though the wireless would continue to play an important role in the media diet of Britons and others around the world, neither radio nor its prime exponents, including Priestley, would enjoy the degree of influence that they enjoyed during the war.

The preeminence of radio as a site for discourses of national identity and national

culture did not last long. Radio reached its apogee during the Second World War as a medium for propagating stories of national and transnational belonging. For a brief historical period, the sound of an individual's voice and the weight of that individual's words could affect the shape of debate on a national scale. The same crisis that cemented writers' resolve to participate in the public sphere brought that public sphere to new life, as listeners tuned in to hear representations of the events and ideas that shaped both the immediate and the more distant future. Writing the radio war demanded an attention to the tenor of public discussion and a willingness to step in and influence that same discussion. In bringing a diversity of opinions, accents, and aesthetics to the radio, British writers moved beyond entertainment and information to open up new possibilities for belonging: to Britain, to England, and to the nations of the Commonwealth to come.

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“Archival Sources” indicates the file locations for all correspondence, administrative documents, surveys, and Listener Research Reports cited in the dissertation, and is organized according to the physical archive in which the documents are located. “Other Works” includes all radio plays, features, and talks, along with books, articles, films, and other materials, that are referred to by name in the body of the dissertation.

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