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**Literary Representations of Safety in British Fiction of the Long Decade**

**1939–1950**

**Jacqueline Kyte**

**PhD Thesis**

**Birkbeck, University of London,**

**English and Humanities,**

**2016**

**Declaration**

I, Jacqueline Kyte, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this is indicated in the thesis.

## Acknowledgements

My profound thanks go to my supervisor, Kate McLoughlin, for sharing her knowledge and expertise through many productive discussions and for her meticulous feedback, advice and guidance.

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Deep and special thanks go to my family – Ray, Abby, Zoe and Holly – who have encouraged me in this undertaking. I celebrate the love we have for each other, which strengthens and endures.

Finally, I dedicate this work to my parents, June (1926–1987) and Jim (1923–1984). Their childhood and youth were shaped by the war and postwar years and they are always in my thoughts.

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## Literary Representations of Safety in British Fiction of the Long Decade 1939–1950

### Abstract

During and after the Second World War – a time of acute national danger – British authors reflected the huge premium placed on safety, exploring and expressing it in various manifestations. Safety is a fundamental human need, and yet it is a contingent concept. A major component of being safe is not being endangered – and the novelists addressed in this thesis were alert to the reciprocal relationship between the safe and the unsafe, between the desire for safety and the presence of danger. Critical work has largely been concerned with the crisis of conflict, with depictions of heroic combat or the impact of bombing raids on the Home Front; safety and its cognates have received little, if any, attention. This thesis investigates the protean representations of safety during the long decade, 1939–1950, in four key manifestations.

**Safekeeping:** psychological and emotional safety may not be coincident with physical safety. The novels selected – *Saplings* (1945) by Noel Streatfeild, *Doreen* (1946) by Barbara Noble and *Charley is My Darling* (1940) by Joyce Cary – assimilate the ground-breaking advances in child developmental psychology to represent the contingency of safety in the figure of the child evacuee.

**Safe home:** home is widely construed as safe and unsafe. Winifred Peck depicts how safe home is destabilised in wartime in *House-Bound* (1942), while *Pied Piper* (1942) by Nevil Shute and *Hangover Square* (1941) by Patrick Hamilton narrate safety in relation to rescue, homecoming and states of interior exile.

**Safe talk:** talking can be safe, as in the therapeutic talking cure, and unsafe ('Careless Talk Costs Lives'). *Pretend I Am a Stranger* (1949) by Jack Aistrop and *Mine Own Executioner* (1945) by Nigel Balchin represent conflicted experiences of talk for the war veteran and the lay analyst respectively. In *Tell It to a Stranger* (1947), Elizabeth Berridge captures the powerful currency of talk, juxtaposing its operations of openness and secrecy, which are compromised when mediated by technology.

**Safety and grief:** grieving can be a disorderly, unsafe process but also a way back to psychological and emotional safety. *Back* (1946) by Henry Green, *The World My Wilderness* (1950) by Rose Macaulay and *Little Boy Lost* (1949) by Marghanita Laski are read in relation to models of healthy (safe) and unhealthy (unsafe) grieving.

Building on the work of David Bromwich in *Skeptical Music* (2001), this thesis also engages with larger questions of representational intent, in which the desire for safety is often commingled with the allure of danger. Exploring fictional representations of safety enables us to think about literature's specific and heightened response to wartime and postwar conditions and its resonances for contemporary readings in our own time.

## Literary Representations of Safety in British Fiction of the Long Decade 1939–1950

### Introduction

‘Out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety.’<sup>1</sup>

In the short story ‘Fear of Death’ (1943), F. J. Salfeld’s narrator describes the experience of being under enemy bombardment on a warship in the dangerous waters of the Mediterranean. Hoping to survive the onslaught, the men – off-watch when the alarm is sounded – gather below decks, surrounded by dangerous explosives in the ship’s magazine:

So there we were, a dozen blue-overalled men in this chilly cavern stacked from deck to deckhead with cordite and shells – safe so long as no bomb struck or, if the magazine had to be flooded, we could get out before the water rose; and with some prospect of escape if the ship, supposing her torpedoed, did not sink too quickly.<sup>2</sup>

The physical safety of Salfeld’s mariners is frighteningly and explicitly conditional on the events of the next few moments – ‘so long as’, ‘if’ there is time or ‘if’ escape back up the ladder to the turret, remains clear and, finally, ‘if’ the ship does not sink. The syntax itself conveys the men’s collective mental drive to weigh safety against imminent danger, experiencing the two states as close correlatives. In Salfeld’s story, the unnamed narrator reflects on the precariousness of the lives of his comrades and on his own threshold of fear, which is the primal danger-reaction needed to maximise safety – ‘We had our first lull and I

<sup>1</sup> *Henry IV, Part 1*, II, 3, 8–9, *The Arden Shakespeare*, ed. by David Scott Kastan (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 198.

<sup>2</sup> F. J. Salfeld, ‘Fear of Death’, in *Short Stories from the Second World War*, ed. by Dan Davin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 121–26 (p. 123).

the glad relief of not having been too much afraid', he says, testing the strength of an instinct for survival hitherto unknown to him.<sup>3</sup>

The fictional manifestations of safety are widely construed in this thesis as physical, psychological and emotional; its forms occur as a locus, as an idea (ideologically and culturally determined) and as a feeling (affect). These representations are discussed as a neglected but significant aspect of literature's response to the unprecedented crises encountered during the elongated decade of the 1940s. In acknowledging that the manifestations of safety range well beyond the individual's basic need for physical protection, this thesis engages safety's cognates of health, wellbeing, intactness, deliverance, sanity and completeness. In addition, the literary formulations of safety are frequently coincident with its opposite, danger. In an inescapable commingling of the two, the prose fiction of this period features unsettling juxtapositions, best revealed by grouping the texts thematically rather than chronologically; this is a structural decision to which I will return when addressing methodology. This thesis therefore acknowledges that alongside representations of safety, the literature of the 1940s engages explicitly with the presence and the allure of danger, both as heightened experience and to counteract the maddening inertia of an extended lull, unique to the Blitz experience. For instance, in Henry Green's short story, 'The Lull' (1943), diverse firemen visit the station bar and reprise their stories of fires past 'seeking to justify the waiting life' they are currently living. In this period of safety and inactivity, one fireman asks another, 'd'you think there'll ever be another blitz?'; the reply comes, 'if he doesn't put one on soon we shall all be crackers'.<sup>4</sup> The men may go mad with waiting, for when they are not fighting fires, their *raison d'être* is lost and their masculinity diminished; passers-by have only contempt for their uniform that 'two years ago, was good in any pub for a drink from a

<sup>3</sup> Salfeld, 'Fear', p. 124.

<sup>4</sup> Henry Green, 'The Lull' (1943) in *Surviving: the Uncollected Writings of Henry Green*, ed. by Matthew Yorke (London: Penguin, 1992) p. 109.

stranger'.<sup>5</sup> Curating his collection of stories from the Second World War, Dan Davin was also alert to compelling danger and to the 'sense of battle as the absolute experience' in stories and films, which tended to present an exclusively 'heroic myth' necessary to the nation's sense of itself.<sup>6</sup> However, Davin recognised how much more is at stake in representing war and that 'there is nothing like the continual sense of an imminent ending to give one an acuter sense of the value of men and of life'.<sup>7</sup> Kate McLoughlin observes that readers and critics (as well as authors) may first be drawn to the spectacle of conflict – such is the 'dazzlement' of war writing, which grips us, but which should also 'sadden and horrify' us.<sup>8</sup> Certainly, the extra-textual impact of war writing can be particularly far-reaching and long-lasting, consisting in vivid and visceral depictions of danger and fear, which the twenty-first century reader experiences vicariously and at times, with relish. Prose fiction, especially storytelling with its structure of cause and effect, can bring coherence to the most inchoate of ideas and can employ multiple approaches, as this thesis attempts to show in the selected narratives representing the unprecedented exigence of life on the Home Front.

It is the primary intention of this thesis to track and trace multifarious forms of safety across diverse literary responses to the war and postwar on the Home Front. Safety is elastic and elusive, yet can be fixed and vivid, as in the subjective dream image of home. And safety can be bought: in the Second World War, some could afford a passage to America (which might be safe or unsafe) or had access to the deep, solid and comparatively hygienic shelters of West End hotels, to the neutral Republic of Ireland or the remote country house. Investigating the literary representation of safety also has particular resonance for our own times. The centenary anniversaries of the First World War and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the end of the Second World War have refocused academic and popular attention on the

<sup>5</sup> Green, *Surviving*, p.110.

<sup>6</sup> Dan Davin, ed., *Short Stories from the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. ix.

<sup>7</sup> Davin, *Stories*, p. xiii.

<sup>8</sup> Kate McLoughlin, *Authoring War: The Literary Representation of War from the Iliad to Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 20.

events and legacy of these global conflicts, so that both wars are now subject to the long view and the contemporary perspective. Safety continues to be placed at a premium and as the threat from terrorism remains high, there is much to be understood from literary representations, which resonate with widespread and universal human needs.

The core definitions of safety are presented below, before being distilled to its specific meanings in wartime and in selected political thinking. Inter-disciplinary theorists, whose work, on safety and well-being, have shaped this thesis, are introduced and positioned in sections on safety in psychology and safety as a social and cultural construct. The introduction then moves on to give an account of the critical literature regarding safety in fiction of the period, before giving a summary of what is contained in each of the four chapters.

### **Definitions and the theoretical frameworks**

Safety means different things in different contexts; selected meanings and theories (from the 1940s and recent times) are taken up to illuminate the themes examined in each of the four main chapters: safe-keeping, safe home, safe talk, safety and grief. The definitions given below are central to the theoretical frameworks on which the arguments for the chapters are built.

Safety, n.<sup>9</sup> *Safety* derives from classical Latin, *salvus* meaning ‘safe’ and ‘uninjured’. Safety is the state of being out of danger, of being free from harm and in a protected state, achieved through the acts of safekeeping and safeguarding. It also means unlikely to *cause* hurt or injury, the quality of not being dangerous or presenting a risk. Something or someone who is saved or delivered from peril is rescued or salvaged; so, safety is related to survival, the condition of having lived through danger. In law, safety pertains to a

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<sup>9</sup> Safety n. (1), *Oxford Dictionary of English*, ed. by Angus Stevenson, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 1565.

judgement which cannot be overturned; it is sustainable, durable and reliable, as in a safe conviction.<sup>10</sup> Safety acquires the cognates of soundness, wholeness, intactness and integrity – in a physical sense, as in the health and well-being of the body, as mental soundness or sanity, and as spiritual wholeness, which equates to salvation. Related to these core meanings are concepts of consolation, the alleviation of sorrow after loss or mental distress,<sup>11</sup> compensation, amends or recompense in recognition of suffering or injury<sup>12</sup> and restoration to an earlier state of wholeness.<sup>13</sup>

The notion of security, meaning freedom from anxiety, care or apprehension, together with assurances of freedom from specific danger, is also coincident with safety. Security often pertains to the confidence of a nation that its citizens are being protected – which continues to be the priority of governments in our own time, dealing with enemies who may be unknown and largely hidden from view.<sup>14</sup> In wartime, security also resides in the safeguarding of the state against collective or individual threats from espionage, criminal activity, illegal entrance or escape. With reference to encryption or communications, security measures protect the operations of the state from unauthorised access, aiming to eliminate or minimise the risk of being intercepted, decoded or tapped. These applications are detailed in the introductions to Chapters Two (Safe Home) and Three (Safe Talk), in which the selected writers scrutinise the human impact of the state's responsibility for the protection of its citizens at a time of acute and declared national danger.

To summarise, cognates of safety include psychological and emotional as well as physical meanings, and the following terms – wholeness, intactness, completeness, integrity, sanity, health and well-being – will appear in the discussion as it evolves. Associated concepts include salvage and salvation, consolation and compensation, vicarious safety, the

<sup>10</sup> Safe, adj. (4), *ODE*, p. 1565.

<sup>11</sup> Consolation n., *ODE*, p. 372.

<sup>12</sup> Compensation n., *ODE*, p. 355.

<sup>13</sup> Restoration n., *ODE*, p. 1515.

<sup>14</sup> Security, n. (1), *ODE*, p. 1610.

calculation of risk and the allure of danger. The thesis is concerned throughout with the paradox of safety and its protean nature, so that antonyms such as unsafeness, danger, harm and injury, threat and fear (the affective response to danger or its anticipation), are essential concepts.

### **Political safety and security: special meanings in wartime**

The mid-seventeenth-century thinker Thomas Hobbes brought the concept of safety into modern political theory by articulating the relation between the citizen and the state that still prevails. It is a relationship made manifest in state interventions and illustrated by the government initiatives relevant to the investigation of ‘safekeeping’ in Chapter One (for example, the 1939 evacuation programme, ‘Operation Pied Piper’) and ‘safe talk’ in Chapter Three (in which I give an account of the ‘Careless Talk Costs Lives’ campaign and related propaganda). For Hobbes, the office of the sovereign ‘be it a monarch or an assembly’, consists in ‘the procuration of the *safety of the people*’, to which he adds that:

By safety here is not meant a bare preservation, but all other contentments of life, which every man by lawful industry, without danger, or hurt to the commonwealth, shall acquire to himself.<sup>15</sup>

The principal threat to the people’s safety and the secure state, the destroyer of peace, is war; McLoughlin distils and iterates the Hobbesian view, which is that ‘war is what civil society and sovereign authority are instituted to avoid’.<sup>16</sup> From a contemporary perspective, Nick Mansfield considers the conceptual framework of war as formulated by Hobbes, Kant *et al*, but for Mansfield, our rejection of war must be understood as a paradox whereby:

We reject war because it ruins social relations, shatters bodies and savages our human rights. Yet, we also look to war to *preserve* the social, *protect threatened lives* and *enlarge rights* [...] War kills and saves simultaneously. It destroys the things in the name of which it has been implemented.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. John Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 222.

<sup>16</sup> McLoughlin, *Authoring*, p. 20.

<sup>17</sup> Nick Mansfield, *Theorising War: From Hobbes to Badiou* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 172.

Judith Butler challenges the paradox. In her collection of essays titled *Precarious Life* (2004), she argues that a perpetuation of violence, (which according to Mansfield, ‘destroys the things in the name of which (war) has been implemented’) is not inevitable. She proposes that violent events, which represent a nation’s ‘unbearable vulnerability’ to danger and destruction, should instigate ‘patient political reflection’ and she asks what, politically, ‘might be made of grief, besides a cry for war’.<sup>18</sup> Her essays, written after September 11, 2001, and the arguments she advances, reflect the pragmatics and politicising of safety and its procurement. Freedoms and the ‘other contentments of life’ so firmly asserted by Hobbes, were curtailed during the decade of the 1940s, as in our own times. In Butler’s view, the United States’ government’s response to the 9/11 attacks ‘heightened nationalistic discourse, extended surveillance mechanisms, suspended constitutional rights, and developed forms of explicit and implicit censorship’.<sup>19</sup> These actions constitute (attempted) forms of safety closely bound to the concept of defence and protection – as violent retribution and as security measures which limit freedom. Butler’s ‘points of departure’ redirect us towards a newly conceived, secure public and private life, taken up specifically in Chapter Four of this thesis, which deals with safety and grieving.<sup>20</sup> Specifically, Butler asks if ‘there is something to be gained from grieving, from tarrying with grief, from remaining exposed to its unbearability’; the question itself is a challenging point of departure, which promotes safety in ‘our collective responsibility for the physical lives of others’ – a significant concept in the argument of Chapter Four.<sup>21</sup> Jahan Ramazani, whose interest is the modern elegy, also grasps the power of grief to undo, but in *Poetry of Mourning* (1994) he maintains there is a melancholy (a pathological impulse) about the recent tendency ‘not to achieve but to resist consolation, not

<sup>18</sup> Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004/2006), p. xi.

<sup>19</sup> Butler, *Life*, p. xi.

<sup>20</sup> Butler, *Life*, p. xii.

<sup>21</sup> Butler, *Life*, p. 30.

to override but to sustain anger, not to heal but to reopen the wounds of loss'.<sup>22</sup> For there to be safety in the grieving process, a different perspective is called upon: Chapter Four draws on Tony Walter's model of bereavement, a sociological approach that links safe (healthy) grieving to biography. His model of the durable biography 'enables the living to integrate the memory of the dead into ongoing lives' and it provides a framework to the chapter.<sup>23</sup>

### **Safety in psychology**

Safety is in the mind, in fiction as in life. Therefore, this thesis draws on selected theories of psychological safety and recovery, the human subject's defence mechanisms when faced with threat and their responses to trauma. These theories are given detailed critiques in the chapter introductions, particularly if the work was published outside the period under consideration (the 1940s) and is subject to contemporary re-appraisal. In psychology, Abraham Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs* (1943) remains influential as a holistic synopsis of the psychology of human motivation and behaviour, and it provides a useful starting point. His taxonomy offers a model of individual human development, which, by extension, can pertain to the social and cultural development of an entire community. The original hierarchy, presented as a triangle of diminishing levels, from the basic needs of the organism or organisation to its transcendent peak, is based on pre-potency. Maslow posited that the appearance of one need rests on the prior satisfaction of another, more potent need. Accordingly, the human subject is a perpetually wanting animal, where every drive is related to the state of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of other drives. In his model, the physiological needs (positioned at the base of the triangle) form group one of the deficiency needs. Safety, like the need for food and shelter, is such a potent need that when absent or threatened, the organism may be dominated by it:

<sup>22</sup> Jahan Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. xi.

<sup>23</sup> Tony Walter, 'A New Model of Grief: Bereavement and Biography', *Mortality*, 1.1 (1996), pp. 7–25 (p. 7).

The whole organism is a safety-seeking mechanism [...] we may say of the receptors, the effectors, of the intellect and the other capacities that they are primarily safety-seeking tools [...] we find that the dominating goal is a strong determinant not only of [the subject's] current world-outlook and philosophy but also of his philosophy of the future. Practically everything looks less important than safety, (even some physiological needs being satisfied are underestimated). A man, in this state, if it is extreme enough and chronic enough, may be characterised as living for safety alone.<sup>24</sup>

Significant here is the narrowing of interest – but living for safety alone may be subject to misdirection when the allure of danger intervenes, as has been suggested. Notwithstanding Maslow's persuasive framework, the hierarchy can be challenged: alternative preoccupations (such as the process and the craft of writing itself) can function to displace, even transcend, physiological needs, or at least lessen their potency. For instance, emotional sustainability occupies the role of primary need and drives the human subject, superseding the pre-potent, basic stages, as in the case of the character of Barbary in Rose Macaulay's *The World My Wilderness* (1950). Barbary develops the tactic of creative salvaging, which sustains her, forging a pathway directly to psychological and emotional safety, even when it puts her in physical harm's way. Maslow's theory is thus a useful starting point, a mainspring to an appreciation of the nuanced and counter-intuitive ways safety is depicted in the fiction.

Also relevant here is Maslow's focus on differences between the danger-reaction in adults as compared to those of children. He maintains that adults have been taught to inhibit at all costs and that, in the child, physical discomfort may 'seem to be immediately and *per se* threatening and seem to make the child feel unsafe'.<sup>25</sup> Anna Freud, a contemporary of Maslow whose work informs Chapter One, appears to dispute this when her findings showed that young children would accept considerable discomfort and risk, provided they were close to their mothers, whom they perceived as the source of total security. External changes that make the world look unreliable or unpredictable (in spite of the presence of the mother) may induce anxiety in the child and Maslow asserts that 'the child's need for safety is his

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<sup>24</sup> A. H. Maslow, 'A Theory of Human Motivation', *Psychological Review*, 50 (1943), 370–96 (p. 376).

<sup>25</sup> Maslow, *Motivation*, p. 377.

preference for some kind of undisrupted routine or rhythm.<sup>26</sup> His claim (still upheld) is that the child needs an organised, predictable and reliable world, which he/she can count on as a protection from that which is unknown and untested.

Anna Freud collected valuable empirical evidence at the Hampstead War Nurseries during the late 1930s and 1940s, focusing particularly on the safety and welfare needs of the child. Concurring with Maslow, Freud's work on children and war showed that they respond in more creative ways than adults to both internal and external threats. Her studies on the child's defence mechanisms, deployed to reduce anxiety, centre on the protection of the ego; she posited that protection from anxiety takes the forms of denial, displacement, intellectualisation, projection, rationalisation, fantasy, undoing and withdrawal.<sup>27</sup> Children's symptoms of distress and their danger-reactions also differ qualitatively from those of adults, depending on their stage of development.<sup>28</sup> The 1940s was therefore a period of significant advancement in the psychology of adult and child development, specifically relating to the factors that made children feel unsafe. John Bowlby published 'Forty-four Juvenile Thieves' (1944), proposing that adolescent delinquency could be causally linked to loss and separation in childhood, and as a practitioner, he pioneered psychotherapy with whole families.<sup>29</sup> Donald Winnicott had been appointed as consultant psychiatrist to the government's evacuation programme known as 'Operation Pied Piper' – a post indicating that government was at least thinking about the psychological impact of separation. Maslow's overview and the groundbreaking work of Freud, Bowlby and Winnicott, which centred on the internal world of the child, provide the framework for analysis of the depictions of the child evacuee in Chapter One. Bowlby's attachment theory informs the thesis as a whole, as do Freud's defence mechanisms of displacement, denial, fantasy and withdrawal.

<sup>26</sup> Maslow, *Motivation*, p. 377.

<sup>27</sup> Anna Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* (London: Hogarth Press, 1936/1986), p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> Anna Freud and Dorothy T. Burlingham, *War and Children* (London: Medical War Books, 1943), p. 44.

<sup>29</sup> John Bowlby, 'Forty-Four Juvenile Thieves: Their Character and Home-Life', *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 25 (1944), 19–52.

For a contemporary perspective, I turn to Adam Phillips and his collection of essays *One Way and Another* (2013). His essay ‘Bombs Away’ is about ‘what the British psychoanalysts – especially the increasingly important child analysts – used the war, wittingly and unwittingly, to articulate about the child’s putative nature’.<sup>30</sup> According to Phillips, the practical consequences of the Blitz, ‘the pragmatics of evacuation, and its emotional cost – produced a proliferation of competing descriptions most notably in Britain from D. W. Winnicott, John Bowlby’ and Anna Freud.<sup>31</sup> Phillips synthesises as follows and with strong echoes of Maslow:

The child is, and comes to represent, the person most vulnerable to devastating interruption: from inside by the instincts, from outside by the nurturing environment; the mother who is, herself an independent subject. The child is addicted to routine, to reassurance, to attachment, to going on being, to continuity of care: in this post-war story the radical antitheses of the new Blitz reality.<sup>32</sup>

He continues:

Whether we like it or not, it is always the dream-work that is putting history back in the picture. It is always free association that is linking us to our unprecedented specific pasts. In psychoanalytic theory and practice after the war there are bombs everywhere. What some of the analysts forgot was that children take history personally.<sup>33</sup>

Taking history personally and imaginatively – and doing the dream-work involved in the making of fiction – is what the novelists in this thesis undertake.

The social anthropologist Mary Douglas provides an earlier exploration of what Phillips recognises as the safe ‘nurturing environment’ which is disrupted by war, impacting on the child and adult alike. Douglas first set out her theory on dirt as a symbol of disorder and contamination in *Purity and Danger* (1966). Focusing on cleanliness as a ritual of control, Douglas asserts that ‘most of us would indeed feel safer if our experience could be

<sup>30</sup> Adam Phillips, *One Way and Another: New and Selected Essays* (London: Penguin, 2013), p. 156.

<sup>31</sup> Phillips, *One Way*, p. 160.

<sup>32</sup> Phillips, *One Way*, p. 175.

<sup>33</sup> Phillips, *One Way*, p. 176.

hard-set and fixed in form'.<sup>34</sup> Perceived danger, she argues, is thought to exist in transition states and when boundaries are transgressed, yet disorder 'by implication is unlimited [...] its potential for patterning is infinite [...] also it has potentiality. It symbolises both danger and power'.<sup>35</sup> Douglas's dirt and disorderly contamination can be seen as analogous to the destructive impact of war to reveal subsets of order (part of the safe, nurturing environment described by Phillips) and disorder (unsafe). Each category contests the other, advancing an understanding of the contrary nature of safety in the novels discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter Four.

One of the ways in which meaning is reconstructed from actual and psychological disorder is by employing the transformative patterns of narrative. Constructing a story (from suffering or loss, for example) is central to established psychological perspectives and relates to safety in the mind; it is also, in my view, the essential conscious and unconscious work of the novel. In *The Wounded Storyteller* (2013), Arthur W. Frank gives a personal testimony embedded in a psychological framework. His subject is recovery from personal suffering, resulting from illness; disease and trauma can induce a 'state of severe distress [which] threatens the intactness of a person'.<sup>36</sup> But Frank, who also promotes the healing effects of agency and control involved in storytelling, argues that through their stories the ill or wounded 'create empathic bonds between themselves and their listeners', and that 'stories can heal'.<sup>37</sup> Both Frank and his contemporary Judith Herman argue that making a narrative turns fate into experience; and they acknowledge that reconstructing any story involving suffering, activates safe and unsafe talk, notably when the story closes in on the 'unspeakable' event.<sup>38</sup> In *Trauma and Recovery* (1997), Herman identifies stages of recovery after trauma, in which

<sup>34</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966/2002), p. 200.

<sup>35</sup> Douglas, *Purity*, p. 117.

<sup>36</sup> Arthur W. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness and Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995/2013), p. 169.

<sup>37</sup> Frank, *Storyteller*, p. xx.

<sup>38</sup> Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1992/1997), p. 176.

she emphasises the importance of control in maintaining feelings of safety and well-being. Indeed, Herman highlights control as essential, because ‘establishing safety begins by focusing on control of the body and gradually moves outward toward control of the environment’.<sup>39</sup> She notes (following Freud) how the survivor needs to rebuild damaged ego functions: some may invest in a ‘fantasy of rescue’, while others have to give up cherished aspects of their lives in order to gain power, control and freedom – a sacrifice which may threaten the individual in the short term for longer-term gains in safety.<sup>40</sup> Herman scrutinises how storytelling can be beneficial to the teller and the reader, although for her, literary catharsis as a mode of exorcism is ‘an implicit fantasy in many traumatised people’ and unhealthy as a means to recovery. She cites Melissa Soalt, a therapist whose ‘goal is to have [survivors] taste fear but know that they can fight back anyway’.<sup>41</sup> The planned encounter with danger, which is part of Soalt’s therapeutic programme, also suggests authoring and reading the work of fiction, wherein the story is powerful enough to provide vicarious experience of fear, emerging better prepared to confront danger.

Cathy Caruth draws together psychology and textual practice in her theory of trauma, which informs Chapter Three on ‘Safe Talk’. Her concept of ‘double-telling’ – the ‘oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival’ – identifies the paradox of telling, as the mode of release from unproductive repression.<sup>42</sup> Also significant to this thesis is her recognition that ‘literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing’.<sup>43</sup> This may be another version of Butler’s ‘tarrying’, not only with grief but with the nature of the wound that has given rise to grief, the opening up of what it means to know and survive with both. Caruth’s concept of

<sup>39</sup> Herman, *Trauma*, p. 160.

<sup>40</sup> Herman, *Trauma*, p. 166.

<sup>41</sup> Herman, *Trauma*, p. 198.

<sup>42</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed*, p. 3.

‘the story of a wound’ frames the readings in Chapter Three, since her texts (like the novels of Aistrop and Balchin) engage ‘a central problem of listening, of knowing, and of representing that emerges from the actual (imagined) experience of crisis’.<sup>44</sup> Further, Frank is positioned with Caruth for his emphasis on the body-self and on types of narrative, and with Herman in her search for a dynamic language: ‘The wounded storyteller, ending silences, speaking truths, creating communities, becomes the wounded healer.’<sup>45</sup>

### **Safety as a social and cultural construct**

A sociological approach considers what can be objectively evidenced as a danger to human safety (war, for example), while recognising the subjective perception of danger; feeling safe may not be coincident with being safe (and the reverse may also be true, as investigated in Chapter One). The sociologist Ruth Simpson suggests an interconnectedness of objectivity and subjectivity, whilst positioning safety and danger as largely sociological constructs. She argues that:

Perceptions of safety and danger are [...] products of social construction, collective agreement and socialisation. While objective danger certainly exists, perceptions of danger do not derive directly from observations of the empirical world. The objective environment provides only inconsistent and ambiguous information, permitting ample room for socially constructed beliefs. Three cognitive frameworks – the Cautious, Confident and Neutral frameworks – organise perceptions of safety and danger. Each framework begins with a default assumption about safety and danger and ‘marks’ certain items as different from this default. In shaping expectations, these frameworks also contribute to perceptions of horror, humour, excitement and fear.<sup>46</sup>

Simpson’s position resonates with the work of Mary Douglas; as a social anthropologist, Douglas’s work introduces safety’s alignment with socialised activities of control, orderliness and cleanliness. Purging and cleansing are therapeutic for Winifred Peck’s spatially determined characters in *House-Bound* (1942), in which the pragmatics of housework destabilise the wartime home. But the house, in which its inhabitants close themselves off

<sup>44</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed*, p. 5.

<sup>45</sup> Frank, *Storyteller*, p. xvii.

<sup>46</sup> Ruth Simpson, ‘Neither Clear nor Present: The Social Construction of Safety and Danger’, *Sociological Forum*, 11.3, 549–62 (p. 549).

from the threatening wider world, is a hub of over protection and dependency on those rituals, shoring up the sheltering but claustrophobic site. Informing Chapter Two is also Gaston Bachelard's influential work *The Poetics of Space* (1958), which theorises the place of safety and shelter known as home.<sup>47</sup> Bachelard's focus on the intimacy of the house establishes that it has 'reality and virtuality', in which the 'imagination augments the values of reality', transforming the object to 'the uncommon value of all our images of protected intimacy'.<sup>48</sup> Peck's work is a foil to the novels of Nevil Shute and Patrick Hamilton – the latter engage images of oneiric home, sharpened by distance and out of reach, safe within the protected territory of the day-dream.<sup>49</sup>

Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) directs attention to the operations of the ordinary common man who, in Shute's novel for example, finds himself in unfamiliar, dangerous territory. Certeau examines 'ways of operating', aiming to articulate an 'operational logic whose models may go as far back as the age-old ruses of fish and insects that disguise or transform themselves in order to survive'.<sup>50</sup> At a time of dislocation from home, actual and symbolic, the narrative space opens up for dreams of home and the imagination turns to effective tactics deployed for rescue, escape and returning home. By enlarging the concept of lack of home to the condition of statelessness, Edward Said reflects that 'for a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live'.<sup>51</sup> In his essay 'Reflections on Exile', Said expands what it means to be away from home and denied its protection, for 'the sorrow of estrangement' from home is profound and transcendent.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. by Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969/1994).

<sup>48</sup> Bachelard, *Poetics*, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> Bachelard, *Poetics*, p. 17.

<sup>50</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Stephen F. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984/1988), p. xi.

<sup>51</sup> Edward W. Said, 'Returning to Ourselves', in *Power, Politics and Culture: Interviews with Edward W. Said*, ed. by Gauri Viswanathan (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), pp. 419–431 (p. 419).

<sup>52</sup> Edward W. Said, 'Reflections on Exile', in *Reflections on Exile: And Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta, 2001/2012), pp. 173–86 (p. 182).

Furthermore, exiles are ‘eccentrics who *feel* their difference as a kind of orphan-hood’.<sup>53</sup> His word ‘as’ is doing essential work, in comparing loss of home with the state of never quite belonging, never knowing the safety and security of the primary attachments of life. In the reading of *Hangover Square*, presented in Chapter Three, Patrick Hamilton’s protagonist is an exemplary exile, a schizophrenic outsider, whose state is also symbolic of an estrangement from the nation to which he belongs, unprotected and profoundly at odds with the politics that led to the Munich Pact of 1938.

These theoretical frameworks are applied to the main inquiry of this thesis into the literary representations of safety throughout the decade. Meanwhile, the whole is also informed by the assertion, posited by the contemporary critic David Bromwich that the literary artefact can inculcate in readers affective and cognitive responses to danger, which shape expectations and construct ideologies of safety. In the collection titled *Skeptical Music: Essays on Modern Poetry* (2001), where Bromwich engages in his own ‘walk of criticism’, he treats the literary work (usually the poem but, by extension, prose fiction) as the ‘work of consciousness’, which aligns with the strangeness and originality of both psychology and fiction writing.<sup>54</sup> Bromwich is concerned with the writer’s desire to capture an audience beyond the present moment, in an ‘effort to make a worldly order prevail or to find and keep an order of the spirit’.<sup>55</sup> The novels discussed here, influenced as they are by the specificity of historical disorder, attempt to represent that ‘order of the spirit’ that constitutes safety. Engaging with such works may, in Bromwich’s terms, bring us into the ‘arenas of spectatorship’, which may expose us to voyeurism and to ‘interests difficult to disclose’, and in which ‘the spectator’s sense of impassioned delight in the bare survival of a danger from

<sup>53</sup> Said, ‘Reflections’, p. 182.

<sup>54</sup> David Bromwich, *Skeptical Music: Essays on Modern Poetry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. xi.

<sup>55</sup> Bromwich, *Music*, p. xiv.

'experience' can also pass into acts of destruction.<sup>56</sup> That is to say, Bromwich advances the notion that (reading) literature can itself be a safe (consolatory or empathic) and an unsafe experience, particularly involving the exhilaration that comes from witnessing danger and emerging unscathed. It is an idea about the intent and reception of literature that is explored at various junctures in the thesis and from a personal perspective.

### **Critical approaches to literature and safety**

Literature and safety are most closely related in the field of clinical psychology, as illustrated above by the work of Frank and Herman. In addition, this section gives an overview of the range of critical approaches (in cultural and social history, critical biography and the visual arts) that depict safety and its representation in the Second World War, before tracing selected literary perspectives.

The critical interest in safety in the Second World War has come, in the main, from social and cultural historians who have examined archives of life writing, notably those held by Mass-Observation (M-O), or documents relating to the building of shelters (associated with poor standards of hygiene and credited with the rise of respiratory disease among the sheltering population). In *The Taste for War* (2011), Lizzie Collingham presents food as fuelling the 'engine of war' and starvation as a weapon of war; if food rationing was an attempt to 'protect the fair and equal distribution of food' in countries at war, it was also held responsible for an unequal and thriving black market.<sup>57</sup> In *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives* (1998), Penny Summerfield examines gendered discourses of war and transformed lives for women: experiences of emancipation are juxtaposed with the social imperative for women to return to the cage of the home, charged with reconstructing the domestic haven.<sup>58</sup> Both writers draw on the M-O archives and on oral narratives, selecting material in which safety is

<sup>56</sup> Bromwich, *Music*, pp. 232–43.

<sup>57</sup> Lizzie Collingham, *The Taste of War: World War II and the Battle for Food* (London: Penguin, 2011), p. 11.

<sup>58</sup> Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives: Discourse and Subjectivity in Oral Histories of the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 11.

tangential to the central narratives of anxiety, deprivation and trauma. Using this approach, literature is evaluated mainly for its cultural and historical authenticity.

Literary critics have tended to focus on the representation of danger's impact and allure in the Second World War and its aftermath; in searching for safety, this thesis draws on writing from the period. In addition to the main texts selected, I refer to short stories and essays by Alun Lewis, Elizabeth Bowen and Henry Reed). Certain contemporary critics do examine the literary figure of the war-traumatised or evacuated child: in *The Writing of Anxiety* (2007), for example, Lyndsey Stonebridge finds that 'the figure of the child in this period was not only one of anxiety but also one which generated anxiety'.<sup>59</sup> Stonebridge focuses on shocking images of traumatised children, conveying the violation of innocence to the adult spectator. She claims that the 'war craziness of children' is depicted in literature because it is 'preferable to the spectacle of fully-blown adult psychosis', noting its function as a consolatory displacement strategy.<sup>60</sup> The resilience or safety-seeking inventiveness of the child *per se* is not explored. Jenny Hartley, in her comprehensive survey of British women writers of the Second World War, *Millions Like Us* (1997), places her emphasis on the adult writer's desire to entertain and finds that 'the potential for plot and sentiment offered by evacuees was too good to miss'.<sup>61</sup> Hartley's interpretation is that the point of view adopted in most evacuation narratives is typically adult and that the subject is approached with caution (as if dangerous):

What of the evacuees themselves? Here women writers seem to have held their fire. Criticism could be tantamount to treason, a lapse of faith in the powers of the open house to take in and heal.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Lyndsey Stonebridge, *The Writing of Anxiety: Imagining Wartime in Mid-Century British Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 9.

<sup>60</sup> Stonebridge, *Anxiety*, p. 54.

<sup>61</sup> Jenny Hartley, *Millions Like Us: British Women's Fiction of the Second World War* (London: Virago, 1997), p. 57.

<sup>62</sup> Hartley, *Millions*, p. 57.

She posits that any inquiry into the impact of evacuation on the child's ego was reined in, for fear of negative representations – a refusal of the surrogate-mother obligations, wherein 'domestic fiction could have a quasi-maternal role in easing the more tractable problems of wartime life'.<sup>63</sup> The writer who most clearly provides a foil to the psycho-analytical enquiry into the interiority of the child evacuee is Evelyn Waugh. In *Put Out More Flags* (1942) his caricatures of a monstrous, conniving group of evacuees is entirely subversive, representing them as a plague visited upon the villagers – Waugh maintained that the novel was written purely for pleasure and entertainment, adding that he did, in the first weeks of the war, 'suffer severely from "evacuees"'.<sup>64</sup>

A critical, biographical approach to the work of five writers during the decade characterises Lara Feigel's *The Love-charm of Bombs: Restless Lives in the Second World War* (2013), in which she examines the intense restlessness of those who looked upon the experience of remaining in London as an aesthetic as well as personal challenge. A heightening of artistic awareness comes with Feigel's assertion that 'the writers and artists tended to be particularly receptive to the temporal and erotic freedom offered by the war in part because they could switch off from the danger and enjoy the raids as aesthetic events' (5).<sup>65</sup> Some did not switch off so readily: Rose Macaulay, who was working as an ambulance driver, 'found refuge from sadness and pain in the camaraderie of her fellow workers and in her own bravery [...] By writing articles, she made it clear that she had not accepted the war itself, even if she accepted her role within it' – itself an unsafe position to declare.<sup>66</sup>

This thesis has sought critical guidance through the fiction of the 1940s from Gill Plain's *Literature of the 1940s* (2013). Plain's insight is that 'the war permeated the literature' of the long decade, requiring an expansive 'fruitful and necessary opening up of war's

<sup>63</sup> Hartley, *Millions*, p. 3.

<sup>64</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Put Out More Flags* (New York: Black Bay Books, 2012), p. x.

<sup>65</sup> Lara Feigel, *The Love-charm of Bombs: Restless Lives in the Second World War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 5.

<sup>66</sup> Feigel, *Love-charm*, p. 60.

hinterland' – it is a model that I have attempted to follow in this thesis.<sup>67</sup> Specifically, her section called 'Grieving' and my own realisation that loss is in the substrate of each novel discussed, have influenced the direction of this thesis towards its final Chapter Four: Safety and Grief. Plain differs from much of the criticism of the postwar by attending to expressions of grieving and survival where others focus on guilt. Psychological survival is also central to Leo Mellor's examination of the disorder of the bombsites of the Second World War, excavated for their cultural and literary significance in *Reading the Ruins* (2011).<sup>68</sup> Mellor finds that from the disorder of ruins emerges the possibility for 'narratives of reclaiming, rebuilding and remaking' – imaginative points of departure which combine historicism and close attention to textual practices, enabling him to follow the 'contours of post-war British culture and its literary validation'.<sup>69</sup> His emphasis on restoration and recovery – the remaking of a cultural identity after loss and fragmentation – aligns with notions of integrity and wholeness. This work particularly informs the close reading of *The World My Wilderness* offered in Chapter Four, in which I argue that the formlessness of the bombed city itself gives rise to the creative reclamation of Macaulay's protagonist, Barbary – an exemplary salvager who is herself ultimately and precariously salvaged. Mellor's book is also part of the continuing critical revaluation of the literature and culture of the 1930s and 1940s, to which this thesis hopes to contribute.<sup>70</sup> Equally, this study is mindful of Adam Piette's view in *Imagination at War* (1995) that the private stories from the war years are 'stories about broken minds, anaesthetised feelings, deep depression and loss of any sense of value' – a palpable, psychological lack of safety has prompted the critics cited above to look at depictions of psychological survival.<sup>71</sup> Particularly in the communicative sphere of literature,

<sup>67</sup> Gill Plain, *Literature of the 1940s: War, Postwar and 'Peace'* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 2.

<sup>68</sup> Leo Mellor, *Reading the Ruins: Modernism, Bombsites and British Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>69</sup> Mellor, *Ruins*, p. 2.

<sup>70</sup> For further reading on breaking the bounds of existing period perceptions, see Leo Mellor and Glyn Salton-Cox, 'The Long 1930s', *Critical Quarterly*, 57:3 (2015), pp.1-9.

<sup>71</sup> Adam Piette, *Imagination at War: British Fiction and Poetry, 1939–1945* (London: Papermac, 1995), p. 5.

as this thesis attempts to show, there is an extensive reworking of values into a transcendent commitment to the safeguarding of the anonymous other and to a self-determined future, alongside ‘the documenting of the war’s power to displace and unsettle’, which Piette foregrounds.<sup>72</sup>

The medicalisation of safety is suggested by Victoria Stewart who further examines prevailing discourses and narratology of the period in *Narratives of Memory: British Writing of the 1940s* (2006). She focuses on memory and amnesia as narrative discourses, identifying ‘the medical model of memory’ employed by Balchin in his novel featuring the psycho-analyst Milne, discussed in Chapter Three.<sup>73</sup> Stewart emphasises that novelists, like Balchin and Aistrop, demonstrate a grasp of psychoanalytical or medical conceptualisations of memory, which assist the reader in assessing the behaviour of their protagonists.<sup>74</sup> Fragments recalled are introduced as clues so that the narrative takes on the structure of a thriller. She notes that a variety of popular literary forms, including the thriller, were mobilised in the belief that literature was no longer just another way of interpreting the world, but a way of changing it. Literary discourses thus sought ways to console the reader alongside ways to unsettle. For instance, in *Urban Gothic of the Second World War* (2010), Sara Wasson suggests that ‘gothic literary forms are valuable in that they do not neatly subsume loss and death into a narrative of healing and survival’, questioning traditional elegy and literature’s potential for healing.<sup>75</sup> Although the texts selected for this thesis are not exemplary of the gothic mode, they are valued for a similarly challenging range of manifestations, some of which seem counter-intuitive to safety, as mentioned previously in connection with Bromwich’s ideas about extra-textual danger and fear. I return to Elizabeth Bowen for a sense

<sup>72</sup> Piette, *Imagination*, p. 7.

<sup>73</sup> Victoria Stewart, *Narratives of Memory: British Writing of the 1940s* (London: Palgrave, 2006), p. 167.

<sup>74</sup> Stewart, *Narratives*, p. 170.

<sup>75</sup> Sara Wasson, *Urban Gothic of the Second World War: Dark London* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 157.

of what reading books and sharing stories meant to an endangered society and her conviction that:

What was sought in books – old books, new books – was the communicative touch of personal life. To survive, not only physically but spiritually, was essential [...] they assembled themselves from stories and poems, from their memories, from one another's talk.<sup>76</sup>

The need of protagonists and readers alike to assemble and complete themselves supports the claim that safety can be embodied in the ‘communicative touch of personal life’ and its engagement with the external conditions of a unique period, which the novels discussed here represent.

### **Writing safety in the war and postwar – methodology**

In her detailed survey of the literature of the 1940s, Plain asserts that the ‘period 1939–1951 takes Britain through a series of seismic cultural and political shifts’, asking if literature was ‘able, or willing, to respond?’ to such upheaval.<sup>77</sup> Literature’s response was granular, far from homogeneous and resistant to reification – the prose fiction alone was both experimental and realist in its mode, at times within the same text. Henry Green’s novel, *Back* (1946) is discussed in Chapter Four but other experimental works which, regrettably could not be included here, include the stories of Anna Kavan.<sup>78</sup> The focus on safety in this thesis necessarily comes with its own, inherent limitations when faced with a richly diffused literary output. The twelve texts finally chosen to investigate safety as a significant, representable and longed for concept in the fiction of the period, collectively span the elongated decade, range across genres and are equally divided between male and female authors and perspectives. They are characterised by a prevailing realist approach, selected because they advance an investigation into the protean nature of safety, albeit to the exclusion of experimental more works by Graham Greene, Henry Green and Elizabeth Bowen, which have been extensively

<sup>76</sup> Hartley, *Millions*, p. 3.

<sup>77</sup> Plain, *Literature of the 1940s*, p. 2.

<sup>78</sup> Anna Kavan, *I am Lazarus* (London: Peter Owen, 1945).

discussed in relation to danger and anxiety by Feigel (2013), Mellor (2011), Plain (2013), Stonebridge (2007) *et al.*<sup>79</sup> The thesis identifies and discusses the formal literary devices of representation, in order to determine the embodiments and manifestations of safety and its cognates, through close reading of the eleven novels and one group of short stories. In my view, forms of safety in their relation to associated dangers are best revealed by organising the texts according to the four subsets or themes: safekeeping, safe home, safe talk and safe grieving, rather than chronologically. It would be interesting to structure an investigation into safety tracked through the decade, which could reveal a different pattern of fault lines and tensions. The chosen texts include examples of established genres (the domestic novel and the thriller for instance), which seek to entertain, question, provoke and challenge prevailing cultural and national imperatives. Literary innovation in these works takes the form of theme and original subject matter (rather than stylistic experimentation), such as child evacuation, war on the domestic front or unsafe talk and propaganda within a civilian community.

This thesis presents the work of little known authors (such as Aistrop and Peck) and the lesser known novels of established writers (such as Streatfeild and Cary) alongside canonical texts of the period, such as Hamilton's *Hangover Square*. The phrase 'the long decade of 1939–1950' indicates an attempt to link continuities and discontinuities through the prism of safety, historically framed; historicism is an essential approach and each chapter has an introduction that situates the fiction culturally, historically and conceptually to advance the thesis.

## Chapters

Building on the theoretical frameworks and critical perspectives introduced above, this thesis investigates safety and its literary representations in four key manifestations.

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<sup>79</sup> For example, Graham Greene's *The Ministry of Fear* (1943), Henry Green's *Caught* (1943) and *Loving* (1945) and Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* (1948).

## **Chapter One: Safekeeping**

This chapter introduces evacuation as an unprecedented state initiative calculated to keep the children safe, and as the theme central to the emergent child-centred narratives discussed: *Saplings* (1945) by Noel Streatfeild, in *Doreen* (1946) by Barbara Noble and in *Charley is My Darling* (1940) by Joyce Cary. The novels are organised in this order rather than chronologically, to trace the increasingly nuanced arc of safety and coincident lack of safety in the inner world of the child who is a figure capable of generating anxiety, as suggested by Stonebridge. Following the child psychologists Freud, Bowlby and Winnicott, the chapter argues that the figure of the child evacuee is modelled as complex, idiosyncratic and resilient, yet requiring constant reassurance from figures of attachment. In literature, adult safety needs may be projected on to the figure of the vulnerable child, arousing strong impulses of provision and protection, within and beyond the narrative. David Bromwich's 'scenes of risk' are introduced in this chapter, to interrogate the idea that a text can offer vicarious experiences of danger and fear surrounding the child, promoting psychological change. This process differs from catharsis, as noted by Herman, in that it does not involve the expulsion of fear through affective change. Rather, and here I position myself as a sample contemporary reader, the child evacuee in peril engages empathy through visceral and cerebral responses to her plight and that of her protectors.

## **Chapter Two: Safe Home**

This chapter investigates home as an archetypal expression of safety, which is put under unprecedented strain by the exigencies of war and which is transformed, disrupted and made unsafe. For those away from home and directly in harm's way, home remains the first and always dream place of safety, as proposed by Bachelard. The chapter considers the domestic sphere destabilised by conditions of war, as represented in *House-Bound* (1942) by Winifred Peck. In this novel, Peck's protagonist must redefine the boundaries of her existence, physically and symbolically, asserting that safety at home is coincident with orderliness,

cleanliness and ritual, while feeling unsafe equates to dirt, disorder and transgression.

Building on the work of Douglas in *Purity and Danger* (1966), the chapter examines Peck's depiction of the woman whose need for safety and order at home initiates a degree of psychological and emotional transcendence with which to resist the unpredictability of dangerous forces, over which she has no control. Secondly, the world of rescue, escape and returning home is narratively driven by the strategist's turn in *Pied Piper* (1942) by Nevil Shute, in which the work of Certeau on the operational logic of the common man is applied to the uncommon, dangerous conditions of occupied France. Certeau's effective ways of operating inform the reading of the protagonist's mainly physical survival, for himself and the group of children he successfully brings home to England. Thirdly, and in contrast, home is represented as illusory and oneiric for the psychologically exiled protagonist of *Hangover Square* (1941) by Patrick Hamilton; home is both a dream and tangible, identified as 'Maidenhead', the place of his safe but lost childhood. The reading draws on Said's *Reflections on Exile* (2001) to examine what it means to be internally in exile and how the protagonist seeks to replace his feelings of alienation with solace and safety – for him ultimately unattainable.

### **Chapter Three: Safe Talk**

This chapter discusses *Pretend I Am a Stranger* (1949) by Jack Aistrop and *Mine Own Executioner* (1947) by Nigel Balchin, two novels of the post-war that fictionalise the 'careless talk' (dangerous talk) wartime imperative set against the legacy of unspeakable trauma. Both novels reflect and enact the harmful impact of silent withholding and repression, exploiting increasingly popularised debates around the 'talking cure' and psychoanalysis. The chapter begins with an account of the campaign referred to as 'Careless Talk Costs Lives', its manifestations in government propaganda and its impact on both combatants and civilians. There follows an account of the growing potency of talk for those suffering from combat stress and trauma in the form of the 'talking cure', as practised in the psychoanalysis of the

period and before. The healing potential of talk (the correlative opposite to dangerous, treacherous talk) is taken up in the late twentieth-century by Frank in *The Wounded Storyteller* (1995) and Herman in *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), focusing on the construction of a personal story of trauma, which provides psychological control and safety by turning fate into experience. However, both Frank and Herman acknowledge that any story involving suffering involves safe and unsafe talk, a conflict which is examined in the fiction and which drives these postwar novels, selected for their wounded storytellers. In contrast, Elizabeth Berridge uses the short story form in *Tell It to a Stranger* (1947). Her collection explores the powerful currency of talk, juxtaposing its operations of openness and secrecy, further compromised when mediated by a technology that is vulnerable to interception and misdirection, as investigated by David Trotter in *Literature in the First Media Age* (2013).<sup>80</sup>

#### **Chapter Four: Safety and Grief**

This chapter proposes that loss, and the psychological and emotional response to loss, which is grief, is in the substrate of all the works discussed in this thesis. Grieving can be a disorderly, unsafe (unhealthy) process, but also a way back to psychological and emotional safety and restored wholeness, in order to accommodate the loss. Firstly, the chapter gives an account of models of grieving. Significant to this chapter, for its connection to the healing properties of talk and storytelling and for its new idea of durability, is Walter's 'durable biography' in 'A New Model of Grief: Bereavement and Biography' (1996). Also informing the chapter is Butler's 'tarrying with grief' (2004) and the concept of taking time, opening up to the disorder of grief in order to connect to the suffering of others. The processes of salvage and creative reclamation offer ways of approaching loss and grief, to make safe lives altered by loss. The chapter first discusses the protagonist's unsafe delusions of the world as it once was in *Back* (1946), Henry Green's novel of consolatory fantasy. *The World My Wilderness*

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<sup>80</sup> David Trotter, *Literature in the First Media Age: Britain between the Wars* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

(1950) by Rose Macaulay represents, in the figure of Barbary, the concept of creative reclamation and salvage, and *Little Boy Lost* (1949) by Marghanita Laski depicts compassion for the anonymous ‘other’ and the safe, unselfish conviction that one can put the safety of another before one’s own comfort and orderliness – and, in so doing, gain completeness for oneself. The legal term ‘safe conviction’, defined earlier, can be applied to the judgement arrived at by Laski’s protagonist, Hilary Wainwright.

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This study begins and ends with the safety of the child, in his/her own right and by extension, as the embodiment of the safety needs of the adult. During the period 1939–1950, the literary figure of the child was significantly enlarged and explored by the writers discussed in Chapters One and Four, as a direct consequence of the special premium placed on safety in a war which displaced and orphaned children on an unprecedented scale (comparable only to the current refugee crises). These novels express a collective conscience at work. In Chapter Two, ideologies of safety centre on the place we call ‘home’, and in Chapter Three, the physical intactness of the individual who survives combat – or more particularly the trauma of capture, torture and imprisonment – is a departure rather than an end point for the novelists, whose interests coalesce around emotional and psychological safety. The thesis attempts to trace safety through remarkable and diverse shifts of emphasis – for example, from the needs of the individual to the collective safety possible when grounded in a responsibility for the lives of others, or from the banality of domestic routine to flights of disorderly fantasy that attempt to retrieve a lost past. The visceral and cerebral sharpness of the chosen works are testament to the urgency of the time, an opportunity for realist writers to grasp the specificity of the war and postwar with its sense of a ‘suspended present’.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> For a discussion of the significance and representation of temporality in the wartime short story, see Lara Feigel, ‘The Only Diary I Have Kept: Visionary Witnessing in the Second World War Short Story’, *Textual Practice*, 29:7 (2015), 1289–1309 (p. 1292).

## Chapter One: Safekeeping

### Introduction

This chapter introduces evacuation as an unprecedented state initiative, calculated to keep the children safe at the onset of war and in anticipation of bombing raids targeting British cities; it was called ‘Operation Pied Piper’. Alert to this break-up of the family and to the separation of children from one or both parents, the experience of evacuation is a theme central to the emergent, child-centred narratives employed in *Saplings* (1945) by Noel Streatfeild,<sup>1</sup> *Doreen* (1946) by Barbara Noble<sup>2</sup> and *Charley is My Darling* (1940) by Joyce Cary.<sup>3</sup> In his survey of the novel published in 1946, Henry Reed’s view was that:

Almost every important English writer of the moment (since 1939) has essayed to treat it (childhood) [...] the reason is perhaps to be sought in the growing acceptance of the importance which is attached to childhood and infancy by psychology'.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter argues that the figure of the child evacuee in literature embodies complex and resilient psychological defences, coexistent with the need for reassurances of safety from figures of attachment, described by the child developmental psychologists, Anna Freud, John Bowlby and Donald Winnicott. War and the child is a powerful alignment in which the literary figure of the child is itself a site of risk and danger, on to which is projected the safety needs of the adult author, character and reader. Building on the work of David Bromwich, this chapter advances an argument central to the thesis, that the reader vicariously experiences fear and danger, yet emerges feeling safer as an extra-textual response.<sup>5</sup> The safekeeping of children is of universal significance, and what is in the best interests of the child is often a

<sup>1</sup> Noel Streatfeild, *Saplings* (London: Persephone, 1945/2000); page numbers are given in the text of Section 1.1.

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Noble, *Doreen* (London: Persephone, 1946/2005); page numbers are given in the text of 1.2.

<sup>3</sup> Joyce Cary, *Charley is My Darling* (London: Faber, 1940/2009); page numbers are given in the text of 1.3.

<sup>4</sup> Henry Reed, *The Novel Since 1939* (London: Longmans, Green and Co. for the British Council, 1946), p. 23.

<sup>5</sup> David Bromwich, *Skeptical Music: Essays on Modern Poetry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

complex and nuanced judgement in the real world, and for any adult acting on the child's behalf.

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The British Government put the safety of the civilian population at the centre of its preparations for war on what was to be, for the second time in two decades, the Home Front. An ambitious evacuation programme prioritised the safekeeping of children between the ages of five and fifteen years by moving them from towns and cities, vulnerable to air attack, to areas seen as unlikely targets for enemy bombing. The scheme was finally activated on August 31<sup>st</sup> 1939, having been developed during the 1930s and given urgent attention, following the crisis of Munich and the failure of that diplomacy in September, 1938. On 3 November, 1938 Sir Herbert Morrison (MP and then Mayor of London) opened a debate in the Commons on Air-Raid Defence with a direct challenge to government and to the newly appointed Home Secretary, Sir John Anderson. Morrison's motion was 'this House expresses its grave concern at the admitted unpreparedness to protect the civil population when the country was brought to the brink of war'.<sup>6</sup> He went on to accuse the government of inertia, reminding the House that 'eight years have gone since air raid precautions (A.R.P.) had the attention of ministers', suggesting that work on the twin elements of A.R.P. (shelters and evacuation) had made little progress since 1930.<sup>7</sup> In April of 1939, the complex Civil Defence Bill was given its second reading, with Morrison still urging the government to 'come down to brass tacks' on the logistical measures required for an undertaking of such scale and significance.<sup>8</sup> Once passed, the Bill facilitated a scheme to prioritise the safety of children, which could be implemented regionally, overseen by the Ministry of Health and

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<sup>6</sup> 'Air-Raid Defence', HC debate, *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 380 (3 November 1938), col. 411–536.

<sup>7</sup> 'Air-Raid', col. 416.

<sup>8</sup> *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, HC debate, 345 (4 April 1939), col. 2654.

presented to the general public, using campaign materials devised by the Ministry of Information.

Tom Harrisson and Charles Madge, the editors of the first wartime Mass-Observation (M-O) collection, *War Begins at Home* (1940), concurred that the public, as well as government, understood that the threat from bombing raids was unprecedented in its seriousness.<sup>9</sup> Even though the air raids predicted at the outset of war did not materialise, there followed ten months of heightened anxiety and suspense, during which period the editors of M-O gleaned that the ‘fact’ of the aeroplane’s capacity to drop bombs, and the ‘fear [...] the fantasy that floats around it’ signified that the air raid was ‘for the first time in Western warfare [...] the main psychological, if not the main physical weapon’.<sup>10</sup> The provision of shelters and evacuation was seen as central to saving lives in the event of attack from the air but, importantly, it was instrumental in maintaining civilian morale and in avoiding mass panic – an attempt to inculcate psychological calm. This articulates a shift in thinking about the collective psychological state of the civilian population in relation to its physical safety, in which civilian fears required as much attention as their physical protection, which was the chief concern of the politicians. Some consideration of mental strength was reflected in the paternalistic injunction of the poster, ‘Keep Calm and Carry On’; it was devised in 1939 to allay civilian panic and to encourage the resilience and endurance of the masses, but its insipid, condescending tone and its stiff-upper-lip attitude rendered it inappropriate – it missed its mark and was never distributed.<sup>11</sup> This chapter focuses on the paradox of desirable and necessary physical safety, achieved at some cost to the psychological and emotional safety of child evacuees and the adults attempting to protect them. The evacuated child is

<sup>9</sup> Tom Harrison and Charles Madge, eds, *Mass-Observation: War Begins at Home* (London: Faber, 1940/2009).

<sup>10</sup> Harrison and Madge, *Mass-Observation*, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Keep Calm and Carry On’ (1939), artist unknown, <<http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/PST.14814>> [accessed 16 September 2012] ‘To understand the failure of these early posters, in November 1939 the MOI commissioned the public survey organisation Mass-Observation to audit opinion’, which was almost wholly negative. Source: Richard Slocombe: *British Posters of the Second World War* (London: Imperial War Museum, 2010), p. 5.

represented in fiction as both an object of adult anxiety around safekeeping and as the highly charged, figurative vehicle or provider of safety for adults, then and now.

Unabated fears of physical attack, of ‘the onslaught of Goering’s Luftwaffe’,<sup>12</sup> may explain why evacuation (involving the break-up of the family) was accepted as inevitable, eliciting a huge take-up, even though it was voluntary.<sup>13</sup> The scheme was never made compulsory; instead, it was the subject of widespread propaganda, promoted and explained in public information films, poster campaigns and BBC radio broadcasts, as a national safety initiative to move vulnerable citizens out of harm’s way. The propaganda exploited the fears and needs of the adults. One poster carried the insistent directive from an A.R.P. warden to the child on the street: ‘Leave this to us Sonny,’ he says. ‘You ought to be out of London.’<sup>14</sup> Others made for the Ministry of Health targeted mothers, urging them to send their children away to areas where they would be safe and to leave them there during the ‘phoney’ war between September, 1939 and the spring of 1940.<sup>15</sup>

The political aim, committed to the success of the first wave of evacuation, was predicated on the belief that it would operate where it was needed most, amongst the unskilled poor, with limited means to protect itself. Those with large houses and a servant class to run them, and others, living on farms and in schools in designated safe areas, would perform a national service by becoming hosts and by taking in evacuees as part of essential war work. One poster on behalf of the Women’s Voluntary Service (W.V.S.) declared ‘Caring for Evacuees is a National Service’, in a campaign strongly targeting women who were ‘wanted for Evacuation Service’ as part of the Civil Defence campaign.<sup>16</sup> The evacuation of

<sup>12</sup> Ritchie Calder, *The Lesson of London* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1941), p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> Winston Churchill: ‘Cursed hellish invention of war from the air’ (1934); Clement Atlee: ‘The end of civilisation’ (1935); Neville Chamberlain: ‘We may all be in the line of fire’ (1938). All quoted in Harrison and Madge, *Mass-Observation*, p. 41.

<sup>14</sup> Dudley S. Cowes, ‘Leave this to us Sonny’, 1939, poster, PST.13854, IWM Collection, London.

<sup>15</sup> Anon., ‘DON’T do it, Mother – Leave the Children Where They Are’, 1939, poster, PST.8235, IWM Collection, London.

<sup>16</sup> Jack Matthew, ‘Women Wanted for Evacuation Service’, 1939, poster, PST.15092, IWM Collection, London.

the most vulnerable social groups, from overcrowded and deprived areas of London, Birmingham, Manchester and Edinburgh, was presented as a well thought out opportunity for keeping children physically safe, emphasising that anyone who could not make private arrangements to go to the country would have the chance to be taken to billets in private houses, some fifty miles from the danger areas. Schoolchildren who could not go to relatives or friends could be sent away in the care of their teachers.

Streatfeild's novel, *Saplings* begins with one such arrangement. The children of the affluent, middle-class Wiltshire family leave their Regent's Park home, staying firstly with their grandparents in the country and subsequently in various boarding schools, constituting a series of displacements. Other private arrangements were made, like the one engineered by the London secretary, whose brother is unfit for active service and childless in Noble's novel, *Doreen*. Doreen is the child, evacuated to the country for her own safety, who becomes the site of a personal and class struggle between her mother and the foster family to whom she becomes deeply attached. As in several novels of this period, the child evacuee is the site of social disruption, the site of emotional and psychological turbulence projected from the agitations of the adult world. In these novels, the displaced child is credited with an interior life and a range of volatile emotional conditions of psychological complexity beyond the empathy and understanding of most of the adult characters.

These two novels, published at the end of the war, frame the dilemma that physical safety for the child evacuee is not coincident with psychological and emotional safety. In Cary's novel *Charley is My Darling*, the eponymous Charley is a fifteen-year-old boy from London's East End evacuated to Devon. His vivid and ambitious imagination transcends his circumstances, in which the physical, psychological and emotional scaffolding of his existence is gradually stripped away. He is displaced to a location far from sirens and the danger of the bomb but it represents numerous challenges to the boy's sense of where he fits

and who he is, threatening his very sense of self. In this crisis, Cary asserts that his protagonist's most effective defence is his imagination:

The imagination is always looking for significance; both in the physical and moral world – that is its job, to put together coherent wholes, a situation with meaning, a place where the child does know, all the time, where he is.<sup>17</sup>

The evacuee, Charley, is the ‘young cavalier’ of the well-known song. Detached from the world of adults, he seeks self-determination and safety on his terms, regardless of social mores and the law. Charley’s attachment to his love, Lizzie and their shared plan of escaping to America, a dream place of safety, is both impossible and admirable. Although this novel was written and published some years before *Saplings* and *Doreen*, Cary’s depiction goes further than either, in placing the evacuated child in extreme jeopardy, physically, emotionally and psychologically. Cary challenges adult authority, suggesting a differently conceived safety, on the child’s terms.

Politicians were also aware of forms of adult discontent and resentment, which could undermine the evacuation scheme in spite of its aim to save children from injury and death. During the lengthy debate in the Commons of November, 1938, Sir John Anderson had answered numerous questions about the logistics of evacuation (priority groups, billets and allowances, transport and costs) including one question concerning anticipated class resentment. He had replied with an anecdote from a woman known for her truculence, who reportedly said that she ‘would rather have six slum children’ in her house ‘than six deaths’ on her conscience; Anderson claimed that many privileged householders in safe reception areas shared that view.<sup>18</sup> Anxieties about the artificial break-up of the family began to emerge. One leaflet posed the question many were asking: ‘Surely if war comes it would be better for

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<sup>17</sup> Cary, *Charley*, p. 9.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Air-Raid’, col. 480.

families to stick together and not go breaking up their homes?<sup>19</sup> The answer given is that if, as was supposed:

The big cities might be subjected to determined attacks from the air, this would constitute the greater threat to the family [...] but clearly the children will be much safer and happier away from the big cities where the dangers will be greatest.<sup>20</sup>

The collocation of ‘safer’ with ‘happier’ makes the reasonable assumption that a safe child is a happy one, thriving and without anxiety. Contemporary photographs show city children in Wales taking outdoor exercise, looking after farm animals in Devon, trying on donated, good quality American clothing, and in outdoor art classes in the grounds of country houses.<sup>21</sup> The messages coming from official sources were that evacuees were being well looked after, were out of harm’s way and, importantly for bereft parents, they were happy and doing well. The countryside was a metonym for safety, health and well-being, conveyed in BBC reports from the field, in which the voices of the children and their foster families also express delight and curiosity about their new surroundings. The reception family units were shown to be secure and well able to accommodate the evacuees.<sup>22</sup>

Simultaneously and in contrast, Mass-Observation was reporting that although the removal of children from cities had been well organised, their reception in the safe areas, in billets and with host families, was frequently chaotic. Feeling like a beast for sale in a cattle market features in numerous M-O reports of the time, and in other remembered accounts: it

<sup>19</sup> Extract reproduced in Pam Schweitzer, ed., *Goodnight Children Everywhere: Memories of Evacuation in World War II* (London: Age Exchange Theatre Trust, 1990), p. 117; the publication is a ‘collection of memories taken from tape recordings and written accounts of evacuation in the Second World War’. Schweitzer writes that ‘all the contributors felt that their evacuation experience had marked them for life, for good or ill. Most of them have said to us that they would never agree to part with their own children if a similar situation were to arise again, since the emotional price of physical safety was simply too high’ (pp. 6–9).

<sup>20</sup> Civil Defence Public Information Leaflet 3, issued by the Lord Privy Seal’s Office, July, 1939, <<http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/publication/50002200>> (n. p) [accessed 8 March 2014].

<sup>21</sup> Images from ‘The Civilian Evacuation Scheme in Britain during World War II’, <<http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections>> (n. p) [accessed 18 March 2014].

<sup>22</sup> A government leaflet from 1939 took a reassuring tone in attempting to anticipate and minimise doubts: ‘There is room in the safer areas for these children; householders have volunteered to provide it. They have offered homes where the children will be made welcome.’ *Age Exchange*, p. 117. BBC broadcasts confirmed this in sound and pictures: ‘We have been evacuated—from a small town 15 miles from Manchester’; reporter, Olive Shapley; ‘Settling down in the country’ from Saffron Walden in Essex, 1939, <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/ww2outbreak/7922>> (n. p) [accessed 18 March 2014].

was said that foster families picked out the most acceptable individuals and refused others from the mass of new arrivals. Children could be left waiting in a field or on a pavement for hours, only to be billeted with unwilling, resentful foster families. Many of the contributors to *Age Exchange* mention feeling displaced and unwanted leading to insecurity and uncertainty about whether they would even be given a roof over their heads. Harry Cole, his mother and brother, were the last to be picked when they arrived in Norfolk in October, 1940. Having come from their bombed out home in London, he recalled that ‘no-one, it seemed wanted a frightened woman with two cockney boys’.<sup>23</sup> Joy Plant and her sister, Bonnie were evacuated to the South Coast, but once France had fallen, invasion fears increased and the coast was no longer seen as a safe area. After several billets in and around Eastbourne, the sisters were moved to South Wales; she recalls how on arrival:

The place was packed with onlookers who stared at us as if we were strange objects that they had never seen before [...] the task of disposing of us to our homes began. This part was horrible, I felt just like an animal being bought at a sale.<sup>24</sup>

The feeling of being herded and distributed like animals resonates with John Carey’s argument that in representing the emotional experience of wartime, ‘the masses’ were dehumanised by the authorities.<sup>25</sup> The methodology of Mass-Observation in particular is criticised by Carey, who dislikes the programme’s objectivity and its use of a scientific model with its numerical system for referencing participants.<sup>26</sup> Since the focus of M-O as an auditor of public opinion was sociological, its remit was to search and find real incidents of class conflict and evidence of desperately lonely and anxious children, with homesickness as one of the chief causes of unhappiness for the evacuee. The term ‘homesickness’ implies a physical as well as emotional dis-ease brought about by a longing and need for home, outweighing the

<sup>23</sup> Schweitzer, *Age Exchange*, p. 53.

<sup>24</sup> Schweitzer, *Age Exchange*, p. 176.

<sup>25</sup> This feeling is recorded verbatim by someone who experienced evacuation and had not been intellectualised or redacted by the curators of *Age Exchange*.

<sup>26</sup> John Carey: *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880–1939* (London: Faber, 1992/2010), p. 25.

promise of safety.<sup>27</sup> As Ritchie Calder observed in 1941, separation was hard to bear on both sides, especially if set against a risk which was not clear or present:

I know the powerful family ties [...] Women wanted to be in their homes and to care for the working members of the family; they clung to family unity with a devotion which is not to be lightly condemned. Life has little meaning in the drabness of working-class life except in terms of flesh-and-blood relationships. Remarkable and often tragic was the way families said at the height of the Blitz, 'better we all die together'.<sup>28</sup>

The resentment is aimed at the depersonalised state, prepared to take possession of cherished children. As social anthropologists, the founders of M-O were aware that evacuation constituted 'a drastic experiment in social reorganisation' and for them it was remarkable, for its neglect of societal impact in which the planning had treated citizens as mathematical units.<sup>29</sup> M-O summarised the impact of the first wave of evacuation as follows:

1. It has moved vast numbers of people from one place to another very quickly.
2. It has caused a great deal of friction and much child happiness, mostly temporary.
3. It has reversed the prehistoric role of the family, even reversed the whole trend of animal evolution; merely good *intentions* could not hope to stabilise such a process in a few weeks.
4. It has made chaos of our educational system.
5. Its object has now been heavily negativised; in many towns over three-quarters of evacuated groups are back in their danger areas.
6. From the point of view of its A.R.P. intention, therefore, the scheme has failed.
7. This failure must jeopardise or complicate the success of further schemes, while it has cost millions of pounds.
8. And it has left behind many more antagonisms than it has friendships. Many of the upper classes have come into contact with workers for the first time and have been horrified. A minority, mainly in the women's organisations, has turned this horror into pity, and has determined that the appalling conditions which the evacuee children reflect shall be swept away, and very soon; the majority have turned their horror into fear and even, hatred, seeing in this level of humanity an animal threat.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> One widely reported physical manifestation of homesickness and anxiety in the evacuees was enuresis or bed-wetting. Cited in *Mass-Observation*, and used by Streatfeild in *Saplings*, the youngest of the Wiltshire children, Tuesday has a bout. Such symptoms usually disappeared once circumstances improved or the child simply felt less anxious.

<sup>28</sup> Calder, *Lesson*, p. 60.

<sup>29</sup> Harrison and Madge, *Mass-Observation*, p. 336.

<sup>30</sup> Harrison and Madge, *Mass-Observation*, p. 336.

Seen through this lens, evacuation constitutes a major disruption to family life due to the geographical and social dislocations of its members. The reported, affective responses of ‘horror’ ‘fear’ ‘pity’ and ‘hatred’ reveal a spectrum of negativity and resentment towards the evacuees, adding to their feelings of loss. M-O observed that ‘both sides – visitors and visited – waged a war of “atrocities” stories about each other’.<sup>31</sup> Home Intelligence Reports confirmed the general anxiety expressed by many, that ‘insofar as it is articulate, they (mothers) feel it is a manifestation of the very thing we are fighting against – the right of the State to break up family life and to take away one’s children’.<sup>32</sup> Put in these terms, evacuation constituted a crippling disruption of family life and a threat to civilian freedoms; it was an unintended consequence of keeping children safe, a measure which was potentially as destructive to the contentments of civilian life as any devised by the enemy, yet widely accepted as part of the sacrifice.

For those who reflected on the individual impact of evacuation, such as contributors to *Age Exchange*, the greatest achievement of the scheme was that despite the psychological and emotional lack of safety experienced by many, children were kept safe from the air raids that in some cases destroyed family members and their homes. They survived the war, only to bear witness to the transformative, affecting nature of internal displacement. Joan Herring was nine years old at the time of her first evacuation; she arrived in Worthing from Bermondsey and reports moving to three billets within the ten month period she was there without her mother. After briefly returning to London, Joan was evacuated again to Abbots Langley and the second evacuation, this time with her mother, lasted for four years:

<sup>31</sup> Harrison and Madge, *Mass-Observation*, p. 305.

<sup>32</sup> *Listening to Britain: Home Intelligence Reports from May to September, 1940*, edited and collected by Paul Addison and Jeremy Crang from the National Archives (London: Vintage, 2011), report for Wednesday 12 June 1940, p. 107. Gill Plain also draws attention to this apparent contradiction, concluding that ‘In order to win the war, “free” Britain established a regime of unprecedented regimentation – an enforced unity that was to a large extent accepted rather than resented as an repression of personal liberty.’ Gill Plain, *Women’s Fiction of the Second World War: Gender, Power and Resistance* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), p. 8.

Apart from being such important years to a youngster anyway, it seems looking back, like another world, a dream period that I remember so much of. I can't remember the following five years so clearly. Evacuation gave intensity to life because we were surviving an unnatural time of our lives through a war, the outcome of which never seemed as sure as the politicians claimed.<sup>33</sup>

Joan articulates the strange interiority of the time as dreamlike, its other-worldliness pressing on her brain with an intensity of emotion and clarity that evaporates once the evacuation is over. The waking dream and the child's imagination shape experience in ways to which I will return, when discussing the fictional evacuees. Rosemary Davis considers the transformative impact of internal displacement, observing a difference opening up between those children who went away and those who stayed in the danger zones:

When the war ended and the evacuated children re-joined us in London I recollect fearing that they would be superior to us because of their nurtured safety and lack of disruption. It was years later that I discovered that they feared we would claim superiority due to the maturing effects of having 'been there' and involvement in all the major experiences they missed.<sup>34</sup>

If the evacuees wore a veneer of confidence derived from a 'nurtured safety', the children who stayed in cities witnessing the air raids and surviving, wore their special knowledge like a badge of honour, a contest which Streatfeild and Cary depict in their novels. There are a number of contributors who were billeted with childless couples, householders who suddenly found that they were required to fulfil a new role of 'parents', as fictionalised by Noble in *Doreen*. While the child's actual mother was bereft, anxious and feeling incomplete without her child close to her, the foster parents were newly enriched by a child in their lives, whose safety and welfare were entrusted to them. When new attachments were made in this intense and unnatural time, they were reported as strong and secure, giving feelings of wholeness, well-being and pride, for both hosts and evacuees. The spectrum of relationships in the lives of these real children was broad, ranging from trusted attachment to guarded detachment and estrangement. Jane Pepper, living with her parents in a small Buckinghamshire village

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<sup>33</sup> Schweitzer, *Age Exchange*, p. 100.

<sup>34</sup> Schweitzer, *Age Exchange*, p. 61.

describes a prevailing attitude amongst host families, that they were expected to provide more than physical safety for the evacuees:

The general attitude I can recall, even from that early age, was that many of the London children were badly cared for back home and that evacuation was an opportunity for them to be ‘rescued’. To my recollection there was only one London girl remaining in the village after a couple of years, and she was probably the exception. The family abandoned her entirely and she grew up as the beloved daughter of a middle-aged unmarried woman with no family of her own.<sup>35</sup>

A further conflict emerges: just as some children were rescued from abandonment in the safekeeping of the country, some parents, especially mothers, felt the need to escape its unfamiliar freedoms and return to the unsafe city. Most evacuees had never been exposed to the physicality of the countryside before and it was a challengingly different existence, full of imagined dangers. A woman evacuee returned from Somerset because ‘she was afraid of the animals’; a mother reported fear of the countryside at Henley because ‘the kids fall in the river’ and another had a fear of trees, which might fall on children playing close by.<sup>36</sup> Some anxieties about this unfamiliar safe, yet unsafe territory were clearly passed on to children by less adaptive adults, particularly the mothers. However, others were struck by a wonderment that remained with them. Jim Hughes, aged ten, was evacuated with his sister from Bow in East London to a small village near Cirencester. He recalls seeing a swan on the river and a fox for the first time on his way to school; he had never, in London, seen snow drifts so deep that a car could not get through:

We had arrived with ordinary town shoes and no Wellingtons or boots of any kind, so we were unprepared for that winter, which was a hard one. But I look back on that time as being a highlight in my life.<sup>37</sup>

The multidimensional experience of the child evacuee is investigated further in a doctoral study by J.S.M. Rusby, ‘Childhood Temporary Separation: Long-term Effects of Wartime

<sup>35</sup> Schweitzer, *Age Exchange*, p. 170.

<sup>36</sup> Harrison and Madge, *Mass-Observation*, p. 315.

<sup>37</sup> Harrison and Madge, *Mass-Observation*, p. 111.

Evacuation in World War II' (2005).<sup>38</sup> Stuart Rusby's adult interviewees distilled the experience to lifetime 'gains' and 'losses' as a continuum of positive and negative developmental traits mixed with affective responses. The gains were listed as:

'Saved us', self-reliance, confidence, widened horizons, independence, 'brought me out', love of countryside, music, boundaries set, love of books, survivability, breadth of experience, achieving.

It is striking that 'saved us' (removed from physical danger) and 'survivability' (newly enabled to adapt and manage risk) coexist with 'insecurity' and 'striving for identity', the states which, in the summary of emotional legacy given below, describe a lack of safety:

Solitariness, holding back, emotional scars, unfinished business, 'spectators', unacknowledged anger, guilt, dependency, 'hard shell', striving for identity, repressed memories, anger at parents, aggressive, anxious, insecurity, superficial maturity, loner, controlling.<sup>39</sup>

Feeling safe or unsafe in the designated safe areas was by no means a homogeneous state. Both could be experienced by the same evacuee at different times and in changing circumstances: Rusby's study confirms the contradictory yet reciprocal relationship between the two states, best represented by a nuanced spectrum of traits and behaviours. I now detail the ground-breaking child psychologists of the 1930s and 1940s, whose work established ideas of psychological and emotional security through defence mechanisms, attachment and the secure base. Concurrent with wartime conditions, their work enables a close examination of the relationship between the safe and the unsafe for the displaced child in fiction of the period.

### **A psychology of child safety: defence, attachment and the secure base.**

Anna Freud's work on child psychology is central to an understanding of children's anxiety states, of oscillating feelings of safety and lack of safety and the defence mechanisms

<sup>38</sup> Stewart Rusby, 'Childhood Temporary Separation: Long Term Effects of Wartime Evacuation in World War II' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, Birkbeck College, 2005).

<sup>39</sup> Rusby, 'Childhood', p. 250.

activated by threat.<sup>40</sup> Freud, together with the pioneering psychologists who worked alongside her, Donald Winnicott and John Bowlby, collected empirical evidence of outward symptoms and behaviours that revealed the inner life and integrity of the child, a compelling subject for the selected novelists who look beyond the generic child of government discourses and legislation. In addition to Anna Freud's work at the Hampstead War Nurseries, Winnicott was advising on evacuation and Bowlby was working at the Tavistock Clinic on attachment theory, juvenile delinquency and the significance of the secure base. Together they created a paradigm shift in understanding the interiority of the child as a set of complex needs with emotional security at its heart.

In *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* (1936) Anna Freud figured the interrelations between the conscious mind (ego) and the unconscious (id) as a battle ground, where instinctual impulses from the latter force their way into the former. She characterised these interactions as defence mechanisms, which she names as regression, denial, withdrawal, transformative fantasy (performance and play), undoing and identification with the aggressor, as a spectrum of behaviours. Hers is a child-centred approach, which has close affinity with the perspective of the chosen authors and which informs the reading of their novels, centred on the child evacuee. According to Freud, the impulses of the id make:

Hostile incursions into the ego, in the hope of overthrowing it by a surprise attack. The ego on its side becomes suspicious; it proceeds to counterattack and to invade the territory of the id. Its purpose is to put the instincts permanently out of action by means of appropriate defensive measures, designed to secure its own boundaries.<sup>41</sup>

The need of the ego, to secure and defend its boundaries, is the concept that most clearly links the work of Freud with that of Donald Winnicott when he began to consider the removal of the child from home to wartime safety beyond his or her secure, psychological boundaries.

<sup>40</sup> Dr Nick Midgley, the current Director of the Anna Freud Centre, commented that 'Before Anna Freud and her fellows shook up the world of child psychology [...] experts refused to believe that children could suffer grief or depression' <<http://www.hamhigh.co.uk>> n. p. [accessed 12 October 2012]

<sup>41</sup> Anna Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* (London: Hogarth Press, 1936/1986), p. 7.

Both psychologists noted the importance of the proximity of the child to the principle attachment figure and to the home; Winnicott posited that:

It is one thing for a child at home to fight battles round the whole of the house, and then at one o'clock to go in have dinner. It is another thing to stand on one's head in the street for the pleasure of seeing your house upside down before turning in, and it is quite another to be two hundred miles away, feeling convinced that the house is on fire or falling to pieces.<sup>42</sup>

The child who can keep the home base in view and the principal attachment figure close regularly or for most of the time, performs the testing of a secure reality, which is a defence and a protection; when strong, it outweighs risks incurred by being in the midst of danger. As Anna Freud and Dorothy T. Burlingham record in *War and Children* (1943):

We see no [...] states of distress in children when we make the round of London shelters and find them sleeping on the platforms next to their mothers. Our own feelings revolt against the idea of infants living under the condition of air-raid danger and underground sleeping. For the children themselves, during the days or weeks of homesickness, this is the state of bliss to which they all desire to return.<sup>43</sup>

The ego, with its desire to attain a ‘state of bliss’ by being close to a principal attachment figure, aptly accounts for why the displaced child might risk lack of physical safety, preferring to return to emotional solace and security. The main concern of the ego is the safety of the individual at all times and its unending task is to find a balance, between drives and instincts and the external reality encountered. Defence mechanisms are its apparatus for protecting and preserving the safety of the self – performed distress or exhilaration (in transformative fantasy or play) are particularly well illustrated by the evacuees in *Saplings* and in *Charley is My Darling*.

A contemporary of Freud and Winnicott, John Bowlby, further explored defence mechanisms through the impact of separation and loss of the child’s secure base. His publication ‘Forty-four Juvenile Thieves: Their Character and Home-life’ (1944) concluded

<sup>42</sup> D. W. Winnicott, *Deprivation and Delinquency*, ed. by Clare Winnicott, Ray Shepherd and Madeleine Davis (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 51.

<sup>43</sup> Anna Freud and Dorothy T. Burlingham, *War and Children* (London: Medical War Books, 1943), p. 44.

from case studies that emotional trauma, caused by the lack of a secure and continuous home base and the loss of a figure of strong loving attachment (usually the mother) often featured in the lives of the children who appeared in the courts. He reasoned that:

A child's attachment behaviour is activated especially by pain, fatigue, and anything frightening, and also by the mother being or appearing to be inaccessible [...] A feature of attachment behaviour [...] is the intensity of the emotion that accompanies it [...] If it goes well, there is joy and a sense of security. If it is threatened, there is jealousy, anxiety and anger. If broken, there is grief and depression.<sup>44</sup>

His findings, subsequently criticised for his emphasis on the role of the mother based at home, are relevant to the figure of the fictional child evacuee – most significantly in the humiliated, angry and sensitive figure of Charley Brown, in *Charley is My Darling*. The secure base is inextricably bound to the central feature of Bowlby's proposal because it is the safe state from which:

A child or adolescent can make sorties into the outside world and to which he can return knowing for sure that he will be welcomed, nourished physically and emotionally, comforted if distressed, reassured if frightened.<sup>45</sup>

These are the conditions that will restore the ego to a secure equilibrium: it is Freud's state of bliss constituted as home, belonging, food, warmth, safety and security. The child evacuee may be removed from such a base, not once, but several times and for long periods of time. Further, Bowlby explains that:

It becomes evident that man, like other animals, responds with fear to certain situations, not because they carry a *high* risk of pain or danger, but because they signal an *increase* of risk [...] When separation anxiety is seen in this light, as a basic human disposition, it is only a small step to understand why it is that threats to abandon a child are so very terrifying.<sup>46</sup>

Thus, Bowlby's concept aligns with Freud's clinical observations of the ego and its responses to situations, which 'signal an *increase* of risk' making the child *feel* unsafe through fears of abandonment, even though this may be far from the reality. Alert to these findings, writing to

<sup>44</sup> John Bowlby, *A Secure Base: Clinical Applications of Attachment Theory* (London: Routledge, 1988), based on lectures and empirical studies from the 1940s to 1988, pp. 3–4.

<sup>45</sup> Bowlby, *Secure*, p. 12.

<sup>46</sup> Bowlby, *Secure*, p. 12.

the *British Medical Journal (B.M.J.)* in 1939, Donald Winnicott, John Bowlby and Emanuel Miller warned that the child's experience of separation 'can amount to an emotional "blackout" and can easily lead to a severe disturbance in the development of the personality which may persist throughout life'.<sup>47</sup>

For the adult seeking protection, the opposite of emotional blackout is a world of heightened sensation and affective nuances created by the novelist. Given the fact of Operation Pied Piper, historical circumstances gave novelists the figurative vehicle (the child evacuee) through which to explore the contrary and contingent nature of safety. The adult reader is drawn into the enterprise of calculating risks, so that he or she invests in the fate of the child protagonist, fully explored as an autonomous entity with an inner life. In effect, a reader may take the role of adult protector by aligning with the interests of the child, testing his/her own perceptions of safety and fear, which are projected on to the literary figure of the child. In *Skeptical Music* (2001), David Bromwich identifies a literary artefact (the poem, play, story or novel) as a 'work of consciousness' and a first step to establishing the affinity between psychology and fiction that preoccupies him.<sup>48</sup> In brief and apposite to this thesis, he argues that 'the work of art [...] matters because it brings its audience close to a scene of risk'.<sup>49</sup> He engages the complicity of the audience, or in this case the readers, with testing questions by asking why 'we want to look at catastrophes? — look so long at them, and so far into them?'.<sup>50</sup> Bromwich's inquiry into this relationship, between the lack of safety made manifest in a work of fiction and the interests of the reader, informs the thesis as a whole, but is first considered in detail in the section devoted to *Charley is My Darling*; it is a question of reception addressed by Cary himself.

<sup>47</sup> Letter to the *B.M.J.* 16 December 1939 reprinted in Winnicott, *Deprivation*, p. 14.

<sup>48</sup> David Bromwich, *Skeptical Music: Essays on Modern Poetry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), Preface, xi.

<sup>49</sup> Bromwich, *Music*, p. 23.

<sup>50</sup> Bromwich, *Music*, p. 236.

The evacuated child, the object of national safety measures, is thus a paradoxical figure. The state and its officials, in the form of billeting officers, teachers and foster parents, displace parents as the main protectors, creating anxiety in both adults and children. In his Afterword to *Saplings*, Jeremy Holmes emphasises the importance of what professional psychologists had come to realise, that ‘the psychological consequences of separating children from their parents was glossed over in the rush to ensure their physical survival.’<sup>51</sup> The safekeeping of children is a contested undertaking in fiction, illuminating emotional and psychological safety in this period of authorised family break-up and unprecedented internal displacement.

### **1.1 Defence mechanisms in *Saplings* (1947) by Noel Streatfeild**

‘Turns you over, don’t it, to think of the children? I was saying to my daughter only yesterday, we got a lot to be thankful for in this country. Our kids ‘aven’t suffered ‘o’-ever else ‘as.’ (361)

*Saplings* is one of four novels Noel Streatfeild published for adult readers between 1940 and 1945, by which time she was already the widely acclaimed author of popular stories for children. According to her biographer Angela Bull, Streatfeild approached the two categories of readers differently:

Her adult novels were based on genuine war experiences, so that they were both immediately relevant and ultimately valuable social documents [...] her children’s books tend to shy away from actuality [...] she fell back on the clichés of the common place adventure story.<sup>52</sup>

*The House in Cornwall* (1940) is a ‘morass of unlikely conventions’ according to Bull, and a world away from the insight and empathy that she writes into the child’s perspective in

<sup>51</sup> *Saplings*, Afterword by Jeremy Holmes, p. 365.

<sup>52</sup> Angela Bull, *Noel Streatfeild: A Biography* (London: Collins, 1984), p. 177.

*Saplings*. Streatfeild was the daughter of an Anglican clergyman (her father was the Bishop of Lewes, Sussex) and Bull describes the Edwardian world of her childhood in a rural, devoutly Christian home:

Isolated in their quiet Vicarage, the family was a compact little unit, buttressed by all the securities of their class, their age, and of their religious traditions [...] she had freedom, solitude and endless leisure.<sup>53</sup>

As a child however, this was a world of private frustrations. Bull quotes from an Evening Standard piece in which Streatfeild reflected that she ‘didn’t belong’ to the environment in which she was born<sup>54</sup>. Instead, she was ‘a thoroughly theatrical child without a theatre in which to shine’.<sup>55</sup> Subsequently, at aged twenty-three, Streatfeild became a drama student at ADA (later RADA) and during the early 1920s she made a living in the theatre, which finally enabled her to live independently and for a time to take rooms in the same house in Sloane Street as Storm Jameson, with whom she became friends. Literary came to Streatfeild in 1939, in the form of the newly instituted Carnegie gold medal for children’s fiction, which was then being taken seriously as a publishing platform – but, as Bull notes, within six months of Streatfeild’s receipt of the Carnegie medal, ‘war had broken out, and disrupted her writing career’.<sup>56</sup> Streatfeild may have been protectionist in her writing for children but *Saplings* is hard-hitting, drawing explicitly on her experience as an A.R.P. Warden, her work running a regular canteen service for people in the Deptford shelters and her mobile W.V.S. canteen that took tea, cocoa and buns through the blasted streets of South London.<sup>57</sup> On May 10<sup>th</sup> 1941, Streatfeild’s own flat was bombed; like Rose Macaulay whose flat was destroyed on the same night, Streatfeild felt the shock of this loss and subsequently had to live and work in temporary, transient accommodation.

<sup>53</sup> Bull, *Biography*, p. 16.

<sup>54</sup> Bull, *Biography*, p. 29.

<sup>55</sup> Bull, *Biography*, p. 41.

<sup>56</sup> Bull, *Biography*, p. 155. Bull also notes that Streatfeild’s diary entry for 11<sup>th</sup> September, 1940 records ‘Tried abortively to write throughout the day. Blitz or no blitz, must earn my bread and butter’ (172).

<sup>57</sup> Bull, *Biography*, p. 163.

The Wiltshire family at the centre of *Saplings* constitutes a unit of sensitive parents and children about to be threatened by displacement and war time loss. Of the four children, it is the precocious Kim, closest to his mother, Lena, who seeks the limelight with ‘a temperament like a prima donna’ (155). He exemplifies Freud’s framing of the ego, enacting powerful defence mechanisms and strategies of intuitive protection, which in Kim are consciously performative. His instinct is to grasp the nettle of an unfamiliar, unwelcome situation and to confront it head-on, with little insight or maturity to anticipate the aftermath. At ten years old, leaving his home and his parents constitutes a ‘prime moment’ for Kim to perform distress. His screaming elicits tears from Mrs Oliver, the charlady – Kim is exalted:

Tears for him! Head shakings for him! He had no idea what it was all about, he had heard there was going to be a war; though it meant nothing to him, but all his senses told him this was a prime moment to be the centre of the picture. (58)

At the train station, Kim is one amongst hundreds of ‘singing labelled children’ being evacuated but Kim’s is the face that stands for them all as Streatfeild invokes the cinematic close-up:

Kim at no time escaped stares, but pale, with tears on his cheeks, he was incredibly arresting. In no time the camera men, looking for evacuation pictures, had found him. Under various captions he wrung the hearts of half the nation the next morning. [...] When the train came in he gave his best and, as it happened, his only useful performance. (70)

Kim is a reworking of the gifted and resilient children of *Ballet Shoes* (1936), whose egos are gratified by the pleasures of external success for its own sake, internalised as self-validation. Significantly, Kim is the child who takes the least from family life and makes each new place his own secure base; it is Kim who adapts to each new school and who embraces change. Ruth Glover, the children’s ex-governess, has reservations about Kim’s strategies; she is one of Streatfeild’s wise and empathetic adults who represent what we now call emotional intelligence:

Ruth could see he treated himself as if he were a Wurlitzer organ; if one stop failed to move his audience he tried another. This passion for being the centre of the picture

was dangerous [...] it seemed unnatural that before he was eleven he should have found a way to adapt his failings to feed his egoism. (283)

In terms of Freud's defence mechanisms, Kim deploys transformative fantasy. He expresses himself in performance, exercising one of the many natural functions of the ego in its task of maintaining the safety and equilibrium of the self. Kim's performance at the station is 'useful' for two reasons: firstly, his ego is gratified by being centre-stage and secondly, audience appreciation diverts him from feeling real distress. Streatfeild extends the usefulness of Kim's performance further when his tear-streaked face encapsulates the distress of evacuation in the morning newspapers – his composition is an image of damaged innocence in which the child evacuee is the site of wider adult anxiety and pity. Adult trust in the enterprise of safekeeping is tested by such an affecting response, but resolve is strengthened in the absence of an alternative.

Recent theorists have focused on the cultural and political positioning of the child, which is relevant to the literary child in peril. In her review of theoretical texts on childhood in which the figure of the child is 'a magic mirror for culturally mediated adult desires', Veronica Barnsley asserts that:

The status of the child as both a site of individual identity and a collective fantasy of an innocent past promoting a free future, marks childhood as a linchpin holding together historically contingent, cultural assumptions.<sup>58</sup>

The wartime dislocations experienced by the Wiltshire children are seen by their parents as a sacrifice which has to be endured. Losses and separations mark their childhood irrevocably while the lack of emotional safety to be endured is represented as inevitable, an expression of Barnsley's 'collective fantasy' protecting the 'free future' of a nation under threat. In the leave-taking scene in *Saplings* it is the family's charlady who expresses the common view – 'Poor little innocent!' as she mirrors the adult anxiety of the time (68).

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<sup>58</sup> Veronica Barnsley, 'The Child/the Future', *Feminist Theory*, 11.3 (2010), 323–30 (p. 323).

There is little to suggest that Streatfeild had any specialist knowledge of the field of child psychology, but Donald Winnicott's wartime radio broadcasts on evacuees and childcare (which Streatfeild may have heard) are considered by Lyndsey Stonebridge to be a 'key moment in the history of the popularisation of psychoanalysis in Britain'.<sup>59</sup> Winnicott urged parents to be frank about the affective responses to separation they might experience, naming feelings of sadness, guilt, jealousy, anger and abandonment. The doctor who attends Lena in the second half of *Saplings* prescribes a sedative for her son Tony, the child most affected by separation and change, but adds 'I should say that we may have to send him to a psychologist' (166) – talking is on the agenda, but treated with scepticism. Lindsey, the children's aunt, impresses the eldest daughter, Laurel, who judges her to be 'marvellous on child psychology'; Aunt Lindsey, like most of the adult characters, fails to put her understanding into practice (322).

The more typical child evacuees in *Saplings*, displaced from home and without any figures of primary attachment, are the Parker brothers, Albert and Ernie, who first appear in the train station scene of mass evacuation. They represent the experience of many children who took part in the first wave of evacuation – that it was short-lived. Parents quickly took their children back to London, feeling guilt at abandoning them to the hands of strangers, unable to overcome their own sense of loss, compounded by the children's homesickness and by the false alarm of the phoney war. In *Saplings*, Albert Parker is a foil to the sensitive Wiltshire children; he is physically reckless and emotionally detached from his own parents. Mrs Parker expresses anxiety about evacuating her sons ('beyond reasoning'), but it seems misplaced set against the robust defence mechanisms of the boys – in the 'tough world' of the housing block or on the streets of London, 'you had to hold your own [...] or be branded as a whiner and a tale-bearer' (73). Albert knows when silence is safer than speaking, a particular

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<sup>59</sup> Lyndsey Stonebridge, *The Writing of Anxiety: Imagining Wartime in Mid-Century British Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 85.

intuition that will be discussed in Chapter Three; ironically, the well-developed defence mechanisms and performative ego that promote him to be the leader of his street gang, will eventually tip him into delinquency. The Parker brothers return for a second evacuation to the Wiltshire grandparents' home, exhilarated by their recently acquired knowledge of bombs, shelters, sirens and tales of people buried alive under rubble. Albert basks in the enacted 'glories of gangsterism' in London, while his stories of having 'been there' during air raids impress the fragile sensibilities of Tony and Laurel, holding them spellbound with his performance of the sound of a bomb falling from the sky (132). He has witnessed the worst of it and emerged unscathed to deliver the coda to his tale: 'they puts up a great piece of tarpaulin and you aren't supposed to see nothin', but Ernie and me 'ave seen, aven't we, Ernie?' (132). Like Kim, Albert is a performer who revitalises his ego with external rewards and audience validation. At the same time, he allays his fears by enacting danger in a depiction of adult death and destruction with such relish that it undermines the figure of the child as vulnerable and in need of protection. As a reader, I feel uncertainty about how and where to place these protective impulses, further complicated by Albert's mimetic violence during the startling incident at the empty cottage:

Albert threw a stone. It cracked through the glass in the window. Ernie climbed on to the window ledge and pulled at a tile. Several slid off the roof. There was a second when the Wiltshire children were about to stop them, then suddenly they joined in. It was an orgy of smashing. All the pent-up excitement of the world around them came out. All the whispers and grown up waiting for something to happen. All the disbelief in the ordinary world. Nothing was left. Everything that could be torn down or smashed was ruined. (132)

Albert enacts how they 'finish it off' by urinating on the ruins while 'Laurel leant against the wall watching them, shrieking with laughter' (132). Anxiety and fear overwhelm the children, so that the Wiltshire siblings no longer conform to their rules of socialised behaviour, joining in with the physical violence and the destruction of the cottage in an 'orgy of smashing' (132). Finally, they release into gratifying anarchy and involuntary laughter, which is a disturbing affront to the safety-seeking impulses of their protectors. The children are thus emboldened, by enacting violent revenge on the adult world and through an extreme form of transformative

play, in which grown-ups have no say and are punished. The scene prefigures a comparable but more developed scene of destruction in *Charley is My Darling*, when Charley and his gang smash pictures inside Burls House.<sup>60</sup> It also anticipates Graham Greene's short story, *The Destructors* (1954) in which a gang of children systematically destroy Old Misery's house from the inside and delight in burning his savings, 'with the seriousness of creators' and because they can.<sup>61</sup>

In *Saplings*, Tony's participation in the destruction is a brief and untypical episode leading into news of the death of his father in unexplained circumstances, producing feelings of both pain and terror. Streatfeild depicts Tony as a boy with a strong attachment to his father, Alex. He enjoys his ownership of such an admirable adult figure: 'How grand Dad was! He knew lots of things you never thought he knew, and he talked sense, as if you weren't a child.'(8). Confiding in his son about his war work, Alex makes Tony feel excited, important and his father's equal – a reassuring fantasy of the child as father to the man. It also represents what Bowlby described as an important aspect of attachment behaviour, that is 'any form of behaviour that results in a person attaining or maintaining proximity to some other clearly identified individual, who is conceived as better able to cope with the world'.<sup>62</sup> The emotions generated by that proximity, within the aura of the attachment figure and protector, calm and strengthen the ego in its desire to sustain the self. The loss of Alex is a devastating blow for Tony, made unbearable and incomprehensible because it occurs remotely in the unknown, dangerous world of London. At school, the incident of Tony's aggression towards the homesick evacuee, Perkins, prefigures Tony's later despair, when Alex fails to respond to his son's letter. His father's silence (a coincidence rather than neglect or deliberate strategy) 'was too mean' and 'not to his best friends or anybody could Tony talk of his trouble [...] he became as the cat that walked alone' withdrawing from a world

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<sup>60</sup> Cary, *Charley*, p. 283.

<sup>61</sup> Graham Greene, 'The Destructors' in *Twenty-One Stories* (London: Penguin, 1970), p. 15.

<sup>62</sup> Bowlby, *Secure*, p. 29.

contaminated by distrust and anger, which burns inside him (107). Streatfeild is profoundly interested in how children absorb the tensions of the adult world. This family is constructed as a microcosm of the nation, articulated by Alex with statesman-like somewhat pompous gravitas. As they leave their London home, Alex demands adult behaviour from his eldest children, Laurel and Tony:

‘I want you to see yourselves as part of the nation. Everybody’s on the move and practically nobody wants to be... What’s making all this possible without much excitement? Because nearly everybody, including the children, is doing what they have to do without fuss’. (59)

He is the mouthpiece of officialdom, an expression of national unity in the face of so many disruptive life changes, deploying the stiff-upper-lip attitude and emotional restraint that underpinned so much propaganda. Alex’s own death, from injuries received at the bombed Regent’s Park house, will be the catalyst for a deepening of Streatfeild’s exploration of loss and its impact on the children.

The older children are told about their father’s death at school and their responses illustrate contrasting defence mechanisms against the unendurable fact of Alex’s death. Tony’s deep anxiety and hauntings take the form of actual nightmares so that he ‘wakes screaming’ (154). The teacher reports that he is ‘bad-tempered and morose’ (154) and the reader knows that he is haunted by the idea that his father was buried alive, could still be alive under the rubble of the London house. He reasons that ‘in London he would see for himself’, a daunting test of reality that could nevertheless halt his night terrors (144). At the site of the bombed house, Tony fights to make his voice heard by the incident officer but the warden, moved by his distress, takes hold of the child’s chin and raising his face asks ‘Did you know the people that lived there?’(145). The kindness of a stranger almost unlocks him, ‘then the reticence of his age wrapped Tony like a cloak. A sullen mask covered his wretchedness. “No”.’ (145). His denial now consolidates a deeper fear of the truth and his defences seem to have turned in on themselves.

Streatfeild's symbol of the ego's protection against unwelcome change or unbearable reality is the mask or shield, which returns us to the trope of performance and the created persona. Frequently, Streatfeild uses the cover, cloak or shield to give defence a materiality. Laurel 'took refuge in the compensating picture of herself dashing about under bomb fire, rescuing wounded' and 'as a shield she made loud fun of all war precautions', imagining the danger and deflecting it with laughter (57). When she arrives at her grandparents' house to find that her bedroom (her secure base), has been 'given away' Laurel rocks to and fro, as if shielded by an invisible maternal body with 'her arms folded as if to protect her heart' and 'a hard little mask clamped down on grief as if it were the lid of a box.'(78). Adult protection for these bereft children is intermittent but the Wiltshires' servants (Nannie, Mrs Oliver and Mustard, the gardener) exercise a kindly surveillance over the children when they can, so that 'each in her or his way tried to shield the children' and one could see 'the watchfulness in the eyes of all three'(215).

Within the narrative there is a failure of the adult world to consider the psychological safety of the children. At best there is a generalised awareness of upset viewed as collateral damage – an inevitable consequence of the more important task of keeping children physically safe. Laurel, who rocks herself into a foetal position, is also subject to her burgeoning sexuality, with its confusing desire for risky performance and fantasy: she was 'still small and childish looking for her age, but her body was deceptive' housing 'a creature floundering in the mud and flowers of adolescence' (345). Moved from one school to another, Laurel flounders in grief, loss and emotional turmoil. Unable to exploit the potential for comforting female attachments with fellow pupils and teachers, she struggles to recognise that 'in a capsized world' solace and security might reside in the safe haven of school (152). Tony knew that he wanted to shape himself in the image of his father (his transformative project) whereas Laurel is unsure of the person she wants to be. Her conscious self, her ego, which has been crushed by multiple losses, indulges in private imaginings:

There was satisfaction for her ego in her mental picture of herself. She broke away from Laurel the unsuccessful schoolgirl and became Laurel the mother. The pain, when it was forced on her that Tuesday (her sister) did not need her, was very great. (208)

Laurel's ego deploys its defence mechanisms of transformation and withdrawal through rejection after rejection (343). Consolatory images of herself, as the provider of safety for others, are thwarted and she approaches the summer holiday once again with Aunt Lindsey, (who despises her), in despair and in great need of something or someone to restore her – to create and sustain a new picture of herself. John, the husband of Lindsey, a naval officer and war veteran takes that role:

John was what Laurel craved. He needed love, he need looking after. What they gave each other was as delicate as a wood anemone. It was bruisable, intensely fragile [...] John had always wanted children, he had dreamt sometimes of how they would be. (347)

Streatfeild uses the language of romantic and sexual love ('craved') and although John is a two-dimensional character, he enters the narrative to focus attention on Laurel's need for attachment to a capable, trusted adult. John's wife, Lindsey finds their friendship too intimate and freighted with sexual overtones, so that she reprimands them with 'Don't fuss over that girl, John, it isn't decent' and 'really, you two! Can't you be a minute out of each other's sight?' (348). Following the discovery of John's gift to Laurel of a string of pearls, Lindsey confronts her niece in a violent showdown:

She came round the table and shook Laurel so violently that stars danced in front of the girl's eyes and her ears rang. 'You filthy little beast. Messing about with men at your age. Your own Uncle. Serves you right if you have a baby'. (356)

Facing intense renewed rejection, Laurel's only remaining defence is to hide – she takes the train to London, comforted on the journey by her image of Foxglove (the ex-governess, Ruth Glover) 'shining like a lamp in her darkness. She would hide her. She knew it was not true' (358). A significant number of girls were evacuated long-term so that they experienced the

onset of adolescence separated from their mothers and grandmothers.<sup>63</sup> These were female figures of attachment to whom one could ask questions, talk and laugh about sex and ‘crushes’ (older sisters, school friends, trusted older women like Ruth, wise, affectionate, level headed and on their side). Such real world relationships would provide, for a girl like Laurel, a safe emotional anchor.

Laurel’s search for attachment and emotional completion is complicated, illustrated by her testing out of different roles. The family continues to see her as a ‘Motherly little thing’, the Colonel’s paternalistic label denoting the limits of Laurel’s prospects; moreover, Streatfeild does not present her as an escapee from the middle-class expectations of that generation. However, as the grandfather admits, ‘somehow we’ve messed it.’(360). Confessing adult failure, the Colonel is at least open to an alternative future for Laurel in which she could continue her education. Ultimately, Laurel figures as a child who needs to feel safe within a solid family, the secure base provided by her grandparents, before she experiences the wider world.

The narrative trajectory of *Saplings* brings the imagination and empathy of the twenty-first century reader close to the evacuated child, as an embodiment of wartime anxiety and with its urgent focus on individual safety, the safety of the family and of the nation. In British fiction after 1939, the figure of the child is no longer an unselfconscious innocent existing in a single dimension, offering a unified view bound by impermeable safety barriers.

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<sup>63</sup> Rusby’s data collected from his sample of 900 evacuees, shows that the greatest number of evacuees who were away from home for the longest periods of time, were girls between the ages of 8 and 11 at the start.

## 1.2 Contested safety: attachments in *Doreen* (1946) by Barbara Noble

Teacher had tried to persuade her to part with Doreen over a year ago, when the school had evacuated. [...] A child could almost forget you in a year. She had smiled to herself as the months went by and the panicky women had drifted back, full of complaints and hair-raising tales. More fools them she had thought. (3)

Barbara Noble's novel *Doreen* is her only work currently in print, although she published novels throughout the 1930s and 1940s. She maintained a literary life as a reader and script editor for Twentieth Century Fox and from 1953 to 1973 she ran the London office of the American publishing house, Doubleday. *Doreen* begins with Noble's depiction of the strong-willed working-class mother, the London office cleaner, Mrs Rawlings. In 1940, as the war moves from phoney to real, she faces her most difficult decision – to send her daughter, Doreen away from home. She has resisted the government's directive to send her child to a distant place of safety, rejecting it as 'unnatural' and defiantly asserting what she believes is best for her child. She obstinately wants to keep Doreen close. Decisions about her safekeeping during the night raids should be hers alone but as the novel begins 'bombs had fallen and buildings had collapsed, and with them had collapsed [...] her own invincible rightness of opinion' (1). Mrs Rawlings, determined and obstinate, has resisted all official admonishments because:

At the bottom of her heart she knew that all her reasoned objections to parting with Doreen – the grievances and complaints she had so greedily collected of country dangers to a town-bred child – all these were only pretexts. She had kept Doreen in London because she wanted to; because Doreen was her life and her love; because a world without Doreen held emptiness. (3)

Here is a reversal of the child's need to keep the adult figure of attachment within view. Mrs Rawlings is fearful that separation from Doreen will mean losing her daughter, in the act of saving her. She is anxious that her child will be contaminated by the influence of strangers in an unknowable parallel world. However, staying in London now represents risks too great to manage and the mother's options seem equally unsafe: 'Stay in your house and risk being

bombed, go to the shelter and risk getting pneumonia – that was what it amounted to'(10). It is a matter of personal pride that her daughter is clever and that ‘there weren’t many children as well brought up as Doreen’, who is the product of her mother’s careful hard work and attention to detail. (3). Mrs Rawlings’s investment in her child is a microcosm of society’s view of all its children as precious, yet unfinished assets, vulnerable and requiring protection. Noble establishes from the start that the mother’s life means nothing without her daughter to make it complete so that the child central to this novel is keeping the woman safe and her needs (initially) drive the narrative. Simultaneously, the child’s safety, embodying adult investment in the free future of the society and its values, is paramount; these interests are contested priorities in the novel.

Three years prior to the publication of *Doreen*, Anna Freud had published her reports on the children in the Hampstead War Nurseries with the title *War and Children* (1943) as introduced above. Edna Blue (Chairman of Foster Parents’ Plan for War Children) justly praises the work carried out by Freud and her colleague Dorothy T. Burlingham for its empirical rigour and for its aims serving the interests of children whose lives were disrupted by war:

WAR AND CHILDREN is an outstanding contribution in the field of psychology and is as valuable to those working with children on the home front as it is to those working with children in actual bombed areas. It is an accurate record of children in modern war keenly interpreted by the daughter of Professor Sigmund Freud.<sup>64</sup>

*War and Children* is based on ‘case-history notes drawn from daily contact with a living wartime laboratory’, which consisted of three nurseries for 191 babies and children (between nine days and seven years) made homeless by bombardment, displaced from their homes for reasons of safety or placed there, due to the war work commitments of their parents.<sup>65</sup> The nursery workers had daily contact with children who came to them having ‘suffered through

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<sup>64</sup> Freud, *War*, Foreword.

<sup>65</sup> Freud, *War*, Foreword.

bombing, shelter sleeping, indiscriminate evacuation and billeting'; for Freud and Burlingham 'the war-time care of children [had] to be more elaborate and more carefully thought out than in ordinary times of peace' underlining their focus in this crisis.<sup>66</sup> Having previously worked with children in Vienna, Anna Freud recognised that a sudden change of external circumstances, however temporary and however necessary for the child's safety and survival, could adversely affect or arrest his or her psychological and emotional development. It was a radically child-centred view focusing on the psychological wellbeing of the child whose safety is conflicted in Noble's novel.<sup>67</sup>

Doreen Rawlings, like the War Nursery children, suffers from homesickness and the pain of separation from her mother when she is finally sent away from home. The narrative, which takes Doreen from the East End tenement where she lives in poverty and deprivation to an idyllic life in the country with loving foster parents, follows a trajectory promising a safe, consolatory outcome. But Noble explores the conflicted interior world of the child herself as Doreen feels intense loyalty and love for her mother, Mrs Rawlings and a competing growing attachment to her foster parents. Noble's representation problematises evacuation as the straightforward safety measure of official propaganda and like Barnsley's image of the child as mirror to the adult world, the figure of the child evacuee, Doreen can be read as the cultural object on which is projected the anxieties, the best intentions and the emotional needs of the adults invested in the safekeeping of the child:

War conditions [...] deprive children of the natural background for their emotional and mental development. The present generation of children has, therefore, little chance to build up its future psychological health and normality which will be needed for the reconstruction of the world after the war.<sup>68</sup>

Doreen's first displacement is to a London shelter, quickly becoming a regular sleeper in a dismal warehouse basement where, though safe from the bombardment, conditions are

<sup>66</sup> Freud, *War*, p. 12.

<sup>67</sup> Freud's work has been criticised by psychoanalysts and psychotherapists for perceived limitations of her empirical evidence; for Freud, what can be observed is pre-eminent.

<sup>68</sup> Freud, *War*, p. 12.

increasingly discomforting and unhygienic. Mrs Rawlings speaks for the shelter sleepers for whom life is relentlessly degrading when ‘night after night trying to sleep in a deck chair, going to work in the morning in the clothes you hadn’t taken off, you might as well be homeless for all the rest and comfort you got (10). Freud records the ‘weakened bodily condition’ of the shelter sleepers who came to the nurseries, observing that the children may also be ‘shocked not so much by bombing, as by shelter life and war conditions in the family’.<sup>69</sup> Notwithstanding adult revulsion at the thought of children ‘living under the condition of air raid danger and underground sleeping’ the children themselves show no distress if they stay close to their figures of attachment, usually their mothers. Displaced from all familiar notions of home, the children nevertheless appear calm and secure. Freud sees no mystery in this power of attachment; indeed she explicitly rejects any concept of a sacred bond between mother and child, emphasising the development of the child’s emotional life as uniquely imprinted on the mother, biological and pragmatic. So it is with Doreen: the child withstands considerable privation because she is close to her mother as the only provider and protector she has ever known. Doreen and her friend, Edie (a sibling figure) sleep on mattresses on the floor of the shelter and ‘they laughed a lot, underneath the blankets’ (27). Fun with Edie consolidates Doreen’s attachment to her, shoring up emotional stability in the dismal conditions of dangerous London and deflecting the fears of the knowing adults. Like the children of the War Nursery, Doreen is remarkably adaptive to shelter sleeping in the company of her mother and closest friend. Watching her after one such night, her mother seems gratified that Doreen is ‘serene’ ‘untroubled’ and ‘completely tranquil’ (10). Mrs Rawlings is herself a vigilant woman. An intuitive psychologist, she observes her child closely for signs of trouble, and is reassured. Even so, she recognises that children ‘took their tone from their elders’ and ‘knew that she had never shown fear. To show fear was to admit

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<sup>69</sup> Freud *War*, p. 186. Freud uses the term ‘shock’ to denote a specific psychological as well as affective response: ‘in the case of evacuation the danger is represented by the sudden disappearance of all the people whom (the child) knows and loves. Unsatisfied longing produces in it a state of tension which is felt as shock.’ Freud, *War*, p. 84.

danger. And to admit danger was to admit that she was wrong to keep Doreen' (2). She is also reflective and after another noisy night of bombing, she seeks reassurance that Doreen is not frightened, using Doreen's 'I didn't mind' to address the 'invisible audience of her critics' (10). In this way, the mother, feeling 'appeased and comforted' keeps herself more than her daughter psychologically safe (10). But Noble eschews an understating of the risks of remaining in London; Edie is soon to be killed by a fragment of shell-casing on her way to the shelter one evening, a fact kept from Doreen by the adult lie that Edie had gone away to the country. This concealment is as much for her mother's emotional safety as it is for Doreen's. With the night raids intensifying, Mrs Rawlings reluctantly takes up the offer of an arranged evacuation, which provides the central displacement of the novel.

Following separation from her mother Doreen regresses and withdraws, yearning to be able to 'relax in the atmosphere of absolute security which [her mother] radiated for her [...] to be a child again – trustful, guarded, unweaned' (174). Freud's observations on the impact of separation on parents and children who came to the Nursery are organised under headings, which include: 'Reaction to Evacuation', the 'Shock of Separation' and 'Reunion after Separation' – reflected as if by design in the narrative structure of Noble's novel. Removed from the safety of the attachment figure, the child faces an unprecedented loss felt in Freud's terms as shock and since the young child has no sense of this displacement being temporary its impact is not lessened.<sup>70</sup> The attachment figure has itself become a highly charged place of safety, security and belonging, which lives in the child's memory and imagination as 'home':

'Home' is the place to which all children are determined to return, irrespective of the fact that in most cases they are aware of its destruction. 'War' above everything else,

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<sup>70</sup> Freud observed that the older the child, the more capable he/she would be to understand real-world explanations, to reason, to conceptualise time and to develop their own protections. Doreen is a little older than most of the War Nursery children.

signifies the period of time for which children have to be separated from their parents.<sup>71</sup>

On Doreen's first night with her foster parents, Geoffrey and Francine Osborne, 'she had wept for her mother and Edie and the shelter, for everything familiar and comforting in her life up to this dark hour' (34). The shock of separation and her profound loneliness are not yet ameliorated by her safe surroundings and the kindness of the Osbornes, but a place in their home as in their lives has been prepared for Doreen who 'felt curiously elated' at having a room of her own. It is her newly designated place of sanctuary and emotional security which figures intimations of safety for Doreen, however problematic. Towards the end of the novel, Doreen 'had advanced a little way into maturity and the lonely delights of personal sanctuary' (236) and she knew that when Francine knocked, the 'joy of bidding' her enter the room 'set the seal on her ownership' (89).

Freud frequently notes the adaptability of the child and given the opportunity, new ties are formed within the community and new pride attaches to objects. Freud speaks of the 'astonishing robustness of children' in restoring and repairing themselves however temporary that restoration might prove to be.<sup>72</sup> Noble conveys Doreen's vulnerability coupled with her instinct for self-preservation, which is beyond the empathy and comprehension of the adult characters:

At the end of the first week, the Osbornes congratulated each other on the fact that Doreen had completely settled down-giving half the credit to themselves and half to her [...] she now shared their meals and conversation with apparent unconcern, played with the dog, chattered to Lucy and did not cry herself to sleep [...] They did not remotely suspect the state of tension in which Doreen lived from hour to hour or the watchfulness which lay behind her ready acquiescence. But Doreen watched and imitated and laboured to conform the whole time [...] it was an instinct of self-preservation which bade her take on the protective colouring of her background. For as long as she was different, she was marked. Safety lay only in uniformity. (49)

Noble's 'state of tension' hidden by Doreen's instinct to hunker down, keeping safe by being invisible, challenges Freud's theories that the evacuated child will always display disturbing

<sup>71</sup> Freud, *War*, p. 19.

<sup>72</sup> Freud, *War*, p. 64.

behaviours. Freud does observe that the older child who is capable of conceptual thought is better able to protect his or herself with real world logic and Doreen matures in response to her new environment. Treated with consistent kindness, Doreen emerges from her tense state to a condition of easy confidence when faced with the unfamiliar. Meeting her mother's train for the Christmas visit, shopping with her foster mother Francine, meeting villagers, helping her foster father Geoffrey in the garden or 'running across the winter fields' with their dog 'she had forgotten to post sentries of reserve and silence [...] she was as much at ease as she had been at home, and her domain was wider' (59). This child finds a safe pathway back from withdrawal, akin to the testimonies of real evacuees who were enriched for life by their experiences in the country billets, in welcoming inclusive households. Had Freud been able to follow up the wartime nursery children into later years, she may well have found a similar pattern of recovery.

As Doreen becomes more secure, maturing emotionally and psychologically, Noble depicts a matrix of deepening jealousy and class resentment in her parents, who battle for possession and ownership of the child. Meanwhile, the Osbornes acknowledge a 'borrowed happiness' in caring for Doreen who is 'on loan' to them (217). But the battle for possession had begun even before Doreen had arrived; in reaching a decision to look after an evacuee, Francine's own past provides her motivation to become a foster parent. It is Francine's history of feeling unwanted and unloved as a child that drives her:

It did not occur to her that during the course of the morning she had substituted for a perfectly unknown little girl, with different circumstances and a different background, the image of her own young self. A child must be made happy to appease one who had been unhappy. She had summoned a ghost to lay a ghost. (17)

Thus, Doreen becomes the new object of transference, a child who explicitly mirrors the historically complex need of the adult and who can 'appease' past anger and exorcise unhappiness in the child-mother Francine. Doreen is again the saviour of the woman, in a reversal of emotional needs and transferred desire for safety just as she had been for her own mother. Geoffrey Osborne, the foster father also has longings. Concerned with being a good

citizen and embarrassed at being prevented from active war work by reason of his asthma, he notes a ‘hidden vitality’ in Doreen, feeling ‘a certain challenge in her presence. To make Doreen happy, articulate and at ease would be something very well worth doing [...] he resolved to succeed’ – in doing so, he gratifies his own need to feel whole by finding a worthy wartime project (47).

For the real evacuees, formal education was disrupted and of variable quality. Doreen looks forward to attending the village school but her conversations with Geoffrey are an education in themselves. He is a natural teacher, encouraging her questions while nurturing his own creative project –‘proud of her unfolding, he enjoyed showing her off’ (105). Later, he is disarmed, more deeply touched and ‘oddly shamed’ by her unexpected comment. Faced with returning home, Doreen tells him:

“I’d rather live here with you” [...] It was perhaps the shame of any adult when confronted with the trustfulness of any child. In the bantering currency of his habitual parley with her, there seemed no adequate reply. (213)

So Noble depicts a conscientious, educated and sensitive couple, intent on constructing a safe haven for their evacuee and in psychological terms, Doreen comes to embody the fulfilment of Freud’s essential needs. Noble emphasises the couple’s own need for emotional safety and enrichment, implying that they will underestimate the power of Doreen’s attachment to them and their way of life. With the ‘imprint’ of this new life in danger of becoming ‘indelible’ for Doreen, her mother, Mrs Rawlings is alert to changes in her daughter, knowing that ‘the hard, indisputable fact of ownership (is) her only reliable weapon’ (218). She defends and asserts her right as Doreen’s mother by putting an end to ‘this life, this easy, edgeless life’, which is ‘only an interlude’, by taking her daughter back to London where the threat of raids is banished to the shadows. Still recovering from her serious bout of pneumonia, a revealing moment centres on Doreen’s image of herself as strange and anxious about where and with whom she belongs. She glimpses her reflection in a mirror and:

The face she saw looked unfamiliar, was not just the image of herself grown pale and large-eyed but the wrong face, not the one she had expected. Who, then, was she? What did it mean to think: I am Doreen Rawlings? (211)

This moment in the narrative, depicting the child's cognitive awareness of self, identity and belonging, transcends Freud's empirical findings although the focus on self-image resonates with the psychologist's idea of transformative fantasy as protection and defence. Doreen's conflicted self-image as 'the wrong face' mirrors the contest between her adult protectors placing her between contrasting lives, caught between reality and dream – which is the right life and what is the right face? The implications are profound: the triad of adults who have invested their own emotional safety in Doreen might still lose her and the reader's judgement is divided between these precariously contested attachments while empathising with her loss of identity.

The dynamics of safe and the unsafe attachments drive through the narrative for child and adult. Mrs Rawlings, observing her daughter happy and thriving with the Osbornes, senses the crisis of essential closeness and ownership. She is 'forced to give fight' for Doreen to protect her own emotional safety, justifying her decision to take her daughter back to unsafe London permanently, for 'what would be the use of winning the war if she were to lose Doreen?' (219). When the time finally comes for Doreen to leave, Noble channels the child's feelings of imminent loss through her attachment to the place where she has felt safe and happy, Geoffrey's tool-shed. It is a cabinet of curiosities and wonder contrasting with the meagre rewards of London life. The writing conveys a matrix of rich associations and sensations:

She liked its smell, its orderly litter, the queer objects she was always finding unexpectedly which gave it a spice of mystery. Over in one corner, furled and still elegantly new, stood the tent Mr Osborne had given her at Christmas [...] She thought of it as a hostage, a pledge that one day she would come back [...] All the colour and gaiety and breathing space of life seemed contained in this house and this garden. Going back to Dakers Place was like re-entering a box. The lid would close. Daylight would be blotted out. (228)

Noble's greatest empathy in this novel is with the child, indeed any child, whose life is marked for good or ill by wartime displacement. Noble's story depicts Doreen's capacity to form new attachments, but they give rise to an unresolved crisis of identity which mirrors the safekeeping needs of adults. Noble offers no clear solution at the end of the novel leaving Doreen with ambitions well beyond the confines of her London existence in Dakers Place.

Freud's defence mechanism of transformative play and performed identity illuminates the next novel to be discussed. We see the boundaries separating safety and danger vividly delineated, and then transgressed, in Cary's narrative.

### **1.3 Safety, Risk and the Child's Imagination in *Charley Is My Darling* (1940) by Joyce Cary**

The reader has to *feel*, at the end of the tale, 'That is important, that is true'.

Joyce Cary, *Art and Reality: The Clark Lectures*, 1956.

The Anglo-Irish writer, Joyce Cary, published six novels between 1939 and 1945 – it is a substantial output in an otherwise lean period for full length novels, which includes one of his African novels *Mister Johnson* (1939), his trilogy *Herself Surprised* (1941), *To Be a Pilgrim* (1942) and *The Horse's Mouth* (1944) and two novels of childhood *A House of Children* (1941) and *Charley is My Darling* (1940). This last has an explicitly wartime setting offering original material to a novelist concerned with truth and authenticity in an exceptional time; it is, according to Cary's biographer, Alan Bishop 'the most topical he wrote.'<sup>73</sup> This novel was also his first to be published by Michael Joseph. Victor Gollancz, Cary's previous publisher had shown Joseph the typescript of *Charley* having decided to turn it down himself saying

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<sup>73</sup> Alan Bishop, *Gentleman Rider: A Biography of Joyce Cary* (London: Michael Joseph, 1988), p. 250.

that he had ‘published two or three novels by this man Cary’ that he ‘doesn’t sell’ and will not ‘make the grade.’<sup>74</sup> Yet Gollancz found the typescript of *Charley* interesting enough to urge Joseph to read the book. He may have thought it ‘unsafe’ to publish, possibly too critical of the government’s treatment of children and concerned that the reading public may be unable or unwilling to empathise with the delinquent, destructive Charley Brown in spite of his wartime privations.

Of all the figures of the child evacuee discussed in this chapter, Charley is the most resistant to adult efforts to mould him, save him, protect him or teach him. Moreover, as the embodiment of escalating delinquency, we see him corrupting others by leading a gang specialising in theft and burglary, repeatedly and resourcefully evading capture and punishment. Cary is committed to the survivability of his young cavalier – with each turn of events and every breach of social convention, he shows that the boy’s maturing sensibilities coexist with a drive to test himself to destruction, which vicariously tests our investment, as readers, in keeping him safe. We see a subtly drawn literary figure who expresses himself in deeds rather than words but who embodies Cary’s ideas about individual creativity and the child’s imagination faced with loneliness and fear. In depicting Charley’s capacity for self-destruction combined with self-determination, Cary tackles the challenge of all literary representations of danger and destruction, taking us close to that danger in the search for what is ‘important’ and ‘true’, albeit deeply unsettling.

In considering approaches to safety and danger in the text, this section explores the role of the child’s imagination, embodied by the evacuee, Charley who is a dreamer and a maker. Charley is an extension of the artist or writer, making and remaking his scenes of risk and Cary does not hold back in placing his protagonist at the brink of chaos and destruction. Bromwich argues that making a work of art is a controlled, safe way of tasting fear ‘without

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<sup>74</sup> Bishop, *Gentleman*, p. 248.

passing into actual danger' and he makes his case by citing Robert Frost's poem of 1920, 'The Bonfire'.<sup>75</sup> Bromwich argues that in facing artistic constructs of danger and fear we 'grown-ups turn into children much like those in the poem', who are persuaded to 'come uphill with me/and have our fire and laugh and be afraid'.<sup>76</sup> Thus, Bromwich reads the poem as an analogy for moments in a work of art that have the power to provoke fear and which are frequently coexistent with a problematic response, laughter.

Cary exploits the juxtaposition of fear with laughter in his novel *The Horse's Mouth* (1944). The artist Golley Jimson frames the creative life as if it borders a war zone in which he alone has the imagination to see the danger and the absurdity of his position. He describes how 'anyone who has served in a war knows the man who is suddenly full of jokes on the night before an attack, even just before going over the top'.<sup>77</sup> Cary's treatment of Charley, and subsequently Jimson, seem to exist on the same aesthetic spectrum of black comedy infused with pathos:

(Jimson) is afraid that if he does not laugh he will lose either his nerves or his temper, that he will want to run away from his duty, or demand with rage 'what is the sense of anything in a world at war' and either shoot the nearest officer or himself.<sup>78</sup>

So, here is another Cary maker and creator, approaching the end of his life of failed artistic endeavour, during which gallows' humour has been his main defence against the world. Nevertheless, Cary, inventor of both Jimson (the fatalist) and Charley (the dreamer), was alert to the serious business of facing up to the cruelty of the world, which could not be diffused by laughter alone.

Cary's embodiment of danger, fear and laughter is Charley Brown, a fifteen-year-old evacuee from the London slums sent to rural Devon in the first wave of evacuations. His

<sup>75</sup> Bromwich, *Music*, p. 249.

<sup>76</sup> Bromwich, *Music*, p. 234.

<sup>77</sup> Joyce Cary, prefatory essay to *The Horse's Mouth* (London: Faber, 1944/2009), p. 7. Cary's words resonate with the gallows' humour of the Great War trench magazine, *The Wipers Times*.

<sup>78</sup> Cary, *Horse's*, p. 7.

generic name marks him as the representative of many thousands of children displaced for safekeeping but he is remarkable for Cary's investment in a child-protagonist whose creativity and imagination are as powerfully realised as that of any adult character. He comes to safety in the countryside with a reputation for being 'very clever' and the notion that evacuation could be 'a great chance for him, to get him out of a blind alley', that symbol of no-hope poverty that characterises his beginning (19). But Cary's interest is in testing a character thrown back entirely on his own resources, self-determined and unbowed by circumstances, charged with making a life out of an existence, secure enough to see him through. These early character descriptors appear in one of Cary's notebooks: 'Charley likes to be liked – which leads many astray [...] he is generous, affectionate and social [...] Idea. Charley, making himself, needs help [...] Tragedy of children'.<sup>79</sup> Cary's word 'astray' suggests that the boy is wayward and is naturally driven to flout social and moral conventions; and his daring draws other children to him in their risk-taking. Charley makes himself by performing his central role as a hatcher of plans, which thrill and excite the other children, earning him a reputation for leadership and gaining magnetic prestige within his surrogate family, the gang. The novel ultimately insists that Charley has to follow society's law if he is to be accepted but it is a message framed by pathos in the crime-and-punishment of Cary's ambivalent closing scene, discussed below.

Bishop interprets Cary's note about the 'tragedy of children' as his 'response to the war and its appallingly destructive effects on children' in particular.<sup>80</sup> In losing their bearings and sense of belonging through displacement, they nevertheless, in Cary's view, possess an innate drive to express themselves. In the Prefatory Essay to *Charley is My Darling*, Cary emphasises the paradox of the child's combined vulnerability and strength by asserting that 'the child is a born creator. He has to be, for though in sympathy he is one with those he

<sup>79</sup> Joyce Cary Papers (Oxford: Bodleian Library, MS. Cary, 270/S11J).

<sup>80</sup> Bishop, *Gentleman*, p. 250.

loves, in mind he is alone. He has to do his own learning and thinking.' (8). In terms of Freud's essential safety needs of the child in wartime on which this chapter has previously drawn, we observe that Charley is at one with no character of sympathy and attachment. Rather, he embodies the physical, emotional and psychological detachment and isolation, which would naturally stir the pity of the reader. Cary problematises Charley as a figure of pathos by defining his boundless imagination combined with nerve; he seeks danger, excitement and the thrill of the new in his 'learning and thinking' and thus in the making of his identity. Cary's idea of his protagonist as a self-determiner charged with 'making himself' drives the narrative in which adults fail to provide empathy, interest, attachment or moral guidance, which is in any way real to him. The adult world rejects Charley as a mirror of itself. Preoccupied with its own wartime safety-seeking business, it seems irrelevant, redundant and strangely repellent to the reader.

Cary's approach to the safekeeping of the evacuated child juxtaposes safety with the tragic consequences of physical hardship combined with psychological and emotional loss. Charley's is also tragedy resulting from the adult failure of imagination shown by the 'grown-ups, who do not trust the power of [the child's] imagination to form a picture in more than one dimension' (10). Firstly, Cary alludes to the possibility of restoration for Charley to a life with purpose and meaning built on the relationship between Charley and Lizzie Galor. Cary develops Lizzie as a figure of safety and sanctuary for Charley, strong enough to withstand physical pain in the form of beatings but not the emotional pain of separation from him. Secondly, his 'picture in more than one dimension' alludes to the scope of the writer who can represent the agility of the child's imagination in tackling scenes of risk hitherto unimagined.

Charley tests himself in order to learn about risk and to exercise the courage needed to calculate and manage it safely. From sheer pleasure, he quickly begins to exert his spellbinding powers of storytelling and planning. The spellbinder is a descriptor used by Cary

for those who can hold others in thrall, for good or ill, with their powerful manifestations of the imagination:

The political scene in this world (is) dominated by men of imagination, good and bad – men like Lloyd George, men like Churchill, men also like Hitler – by spellbinders, propagandists and fanatics.<sup>81</sup>

For Cary, the power of the spellbinder is to take followers into a world not yet in existence and better than the world they inhabit, but nurtured in the minds of men and women in the real world, by leaders, politicians and artists. As such and in Cary's view it can be a force for good; it can also be dangerously distorted by a self-serving or bankrupt morality.

As if to contrast with Charley's pure act of will in 'making himself' into someone other than the villagers define him, Cary establishes him first as a figure of pathos. The 'undersized boy' from the London slum and the 'sturdy country girl' as yet unnamed, occupy the opening scene of the novel. Charley is 'wretched' and 'ridiculous' but Bessie, later to be called Lizzie, has 'intent curiosity and anxiety' for the boy:

This responsible expression overcame the oddity of her appearance, so that the jersey, the hat, the bottle and the trousers, instead of being absurd, enhanced the gravity to tragic proportions. She was as dignified as Lear in rags, because of the rags. (11)

Bessie is elevated by Cary to a figure of humanity and hidden strength in spite of her girlhood, and she functions as an aspect of our concern for Charley, unflinchingly on his side. As Bessie is elevated in integrity, Charley is physically altered and diminished for 'his body is shrunk by half' (15). With the shaving of his head and his alien ill-fitting clothes, his body is transformed and victimised in a display of embodied otherness. Out of time and place, he is 'changed from a respectable looking young citizen in a brown suit to something between the convict of history and the kind of street Arab represented in old comic papers' (15).

Demonised in the verbal and physical battles that ensue, Charley's body is accorded all the

<sup>81</sup> Joyce Cary, *Selected Essays*, ed. by A. G. Bishop (London: Michael Joseph, 1976), p. 115. Cary's use of the plural suggests that all three national leaders possess all three aspects, at different times and for different ends. See also *The Horse's Mouth*, p. 283: 'Hitler is a boss and no mistake [...] they say it's his blue eyes got the girls [...] he's got something too – he gives 'em ideas.'

hostility and ignorance usually reserved for the criminal, the outcast and the alien. The first cruelties come from the other boys, some idle and some vicious, both natives and ‘vackies’ (there are ‘good vackies and dangerous ones’, 60). Charley’s bald head becomes the target of the name-calling and ridicule (‘Baldy-Baldy-ballocky baldy’), which leads eventually, and inevitably, to the taunting and violence of the mob constituting a ‘human bullfight with a small, angry, desperate boy for the bull’ (38). The scene illustrates a primitive fight or flight reflex, the one-dimensional, unlearned survival behaviour Cary had observed from his childhood, which he recalled in the preface to the novel by referring to children untouched by principles of social evolution. It is the first test of whether Charley is friend or foe, predator or prey and meanwhile, as a reader, I am a discomfited spectator and witness to the boy’s safekeeping in jeopardy.

It is the school-teacher Miss Allchin who gives Charley a shilling and the wherewithal to raise himself deftly to become host and leader to the group of children. He uses the teacher’s money and its economic worth (free acid drops) to manipulate others. In this new situation, he is ‘the man of power and (he) acts as a man of power’; he is ‘host and leader [...] always the nucleus of the swarm’ (56).<sup>82</sup> Once he has the attention of the other children he comes into his own as the spellbinder, the storyteller of gangsters and their molls living in palaces with fountains, paintings, marble statues and golden pillars, urinating and declaiming all the while. Charley, seizing every opportunity to lead, weaves his spells, which seem childlike and harmless, simultaneously resonating with the voice in Robert Frost’s poem; like the psychopath, he is irresistible and awe-inspiring:

Sometimes with two followers, sometimes with even six or even ten, raising his palaces and filling them with gunmen who combined the most desperate crimes with exquisite manners and a taste for the beautiful. (72)<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> His word ‘swarm’ here recalls the ‘bee-swarm of bullets’ with which Cary described Jimson, as the target of mass hostility. The swarm is loyal, dedicated, attached, but capable of instant attack.

<sup>83</sup> This also suggests the widely perceived contradiction of Nazi cruelty combined with a love of Old Masters and Wagner.

Always, it is Charley's creative imagination with which Cary fixes his character and prepares us for the narrative trajectory to follow:

Like others who hold power by the force of imagination he never asked himself how he would fulfil promises. He allowed his imagination to gallop away with himself and his friends; relying for the solution of all his difficulties, as they arose, on more imagination. (72)

Cary's concept of the spellbinder is someone who can hold others in thrall, controlling not only their feelings but their thoughts and ultimately their actions, to begin a war or to construct a peace – for Liz Charley is both 'wonder-worker' and 'hero' (208). Further, the concept aligns with Freud's transformative fantasy, illustrated by the child performers Kim and Laurel in *Saplings*. Ginger, the aloof yet perceptive spectator, comments on Charley's strategic power of manipulation, describing it ironically in the familiar single phrase 'the art of war' (75).<sup>84</sup> During the daring trip to Twyford in a stolen car, Charley commands Ginger 'with the air of an admiral to the chief engineer' (77). However, not all his enterprises are successful and he quickly feels the loss of ground. On one of his night wanderings after the elderly Mrs Allchin's rock garden has been taken over by A.R.P. men for the village shelter:

He feels like a man whose life has been a failure. Longing for escape and yet reluctant to die [...] He explores his old haunts like a ruined statesman visiting the scenes of his distinction. (139)

Later, exchanging views on girls and boys (boys are 'proper queer' in Lizzie's opinion) Ginger shares details of his mother's marital history summed up as 'the art of love'; 'Everybody has to learn how to do things' says Ginger and the choice of 'art' in this context is as deliberate as in 'the art of war' (105). The making of both requires imagination, skill and creative application.

There is an uneasy convergence of the children's understanding of the world as it is and their desire to make a world in which their interests and pleasures hold sway. One

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<sup>84</sup> Ginger, shown to be erudite as well as musical, could be referring to *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu (translated as 'Master Sun's Rules for Soldiers').

defence mechanism, used by the children in making their plans of love and war and apparently the opposite to performance, is a retreat into hiding – the making of a real and metaphorical sanctuary. Thus, Charley creates for his followers a place of safety; it is the ‘hole’ in the woods found by Ginger and constructed into a shelter ‘good as an ‘ouse’ (141). It becomes a daily retreat and rendezvous for the gang where allegiances are made, where ‘they share their fears, and talking to each other of danger, make it a strand in their fondness’ (143). When it twice collapses in the rain, Charley and Ginger (the artist and the pragmatist) rebuild it, claiming ownership as the stakeholders of its meaning: ‘they treat the hut exactly as devoted admirers treat some hero, hiding his faults from each other, from the world and even from himself’ (144). Drawn together in the darkness of the hut, they create a space that denies the meanness of their surroundings and eschews the adult world of boredom and wartime deprivations, which are dully repressive. Cary switches to the collective first person pronoun, implicating his readers (‘we/ours’) without warning in this passage of deictic immediacy:

Here we are alone in the world and it is a world full of affection and beauty. See this beautiful lamp, this carpet, this convenient fireplace, this sofa where two can sit side by side; these things are ours. (144)

This shift of perspective is a unique moment in the novel, one of intense subjectivity and attachment, expressed in the voice of the children’s here and now. On one plane the hut/cave of Charley’s world is as different as his drawing made in the school room – as different as is the ‘bull of blue fire’ from Farmer Wickens’ actual bull. At the same time, Mrs Allchin’s rock garden and the cave, both things of beauty, are manifestations of his influence on the material world:

But all their talk is full of repetitions, attempts to catch in a few worn words feelings as strong and deep as they are fresh. Thus they are like four dumb poets to whom the smallest experience has the effect of a revelation but who are compelled to express these powerful original feelings in mere sighs and cries. Moreover, they have not the faintest idea that there is anything remarkable in the force of their wonder, their affection, their hope, their criticism of the world, and so they try to express them, not for the sake of each other but only for themselves. (144)

In this passage, Cary establishes the depth of feeling driving the boys' impulses to create their parallel world of wonder and hope; they are boldly creative and collectively safe, together and in retreat. They are however, without the cognitive development or the language to articulate these 'powerful original feelings', expressed by 'dumb poets' as 'mere sighs and cries'. The channelling of that emergent creative power, Cary suggests, is the role of the artist; but when words fail them, action takes over, for this scene is a precursor to the smashing up of Burls House. Bromwich's critique, of an art that has real world impact, aptly describes the 'strangeness and originality' of Cary's narrative mode in this section of the novel, which is unexpectedly violent and explicitly thrilling for the children. The scene generates what Bromwich calls 'a disturbance under the surface of the events of narrated action' and it is this disturbance that most keenly engages me as a reader and investor in Charley's fate.<sup>85</sup>

Bromwich poses the question: 'Why do we want to be spectators?' to disturbing or violent scenes in life involving suffering and death (such as bullfights and auto wrecks) and by extension, scenes of human conflict. He then considers the importance of a work of art, whose subject is danger and which implicates a spectator within and beyond the text:

The apprehension from which we look at the scene (of violence/terror/war) does not belong to any participant in the drama, nor is it exactly the standpoint of our consciousness as spectators. It puts us in the place of an intelligence that would come as close as possible to the thing it fears without passing into actual danger.<sup>86</sup>

Cary had written about the need for all of us and not just children to 'realise danger and cruelty' through reading rather than direct experience, in order to test our understanding of what is safe, to learn what is permitted and to recognise what is needed to come through it. This is where we begin to tackle Bromwich's question, 'Why do we want to be spectators?' Cary's answer to the question of why we want to risk our sanity, by being spectators to

<sup>85</sup> Bromwich, *Music*, p. 3.

<sup>86</sup> Bromwich, *Music*, p. 249.

cruelty and danger, is that by doing so, we develop resources that will test us but will prepare and ultimately preserve us, for:

Children tell each other horror stories quite as savage and bloody as anything in the comics or in Grimm. It is apparently the need of the young imagination to acquaint itself with that aspect of life as well as all the rest; to realise danger, cruelty and violence as part of the grown-up world in which courage and endurance are at least as necessary as arithmetic.<sup>87</sup>

In recognising the importance of stories, Cary is alluding to their value as surrogate but safe experiences of danger, encounters which make sense of human cruelty and test whether that meaning is even knowable. He could also be reflecting on the courage and endurance necessary to build a peace after the horrors of the two world wars he had witnessed. In one of his notebooks, Cary had recorded the distillation of this idea: ‘man who seeks disaster as if to test himself’.<sup>88</sup> Charley is the ‘man’ who tells of dare-devil exploits and who initiates risky plans, which are physically dangerous, which incur beatings and for which he ends up in the hands of the police. Each one is both a test and an opportunity. Cary insists that the telling and listening, the writing and reading about danger and cruelty constitute a test of courage for authors and readers, whose instinct on occasions may be to look away. As we saw in *Doreen*, the figure of the child in peril can inculcate feelings of anxiety and safety needs in adults, who are charged with unprecedented responsibilities to keep children and all that they represent, safe.

Bromwich’s argument resonates with Cary’s novel in that spectators and readers, children as well as adults, may choose to know the horror and witness what is monstrous. It may be done for voyeuristic or sadistic pleasure, but simultaneously it tests our courage and control. For his illustration, Bromwich enlists the ‘impartial testimony’ of Frost’s poem, which ‘starts with an unnamed voice suggesting a prank to some unnamed listeners’.<sup>89</sup> Just like one of Cary’s spellbinders and dream deceivers, the speaker wants to talk the listeners

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<sup>87</sup> Cary, *Selected Essays*, p. 27, first published as ‘Horror Comics’, *The Spectator*, 18 February 1955, p. 117.

<sup>88</sup> MS Bodley, Cary, 269, p. 80.

<sup>89</sup> Bromwich, *Music*, p. 232.

who are children into ‘starting the biggest fire they can make within their power to end it’.<sup>90</sup> He uses the indirect command (‘let’s’) and the inclusive first person plural, firstly for persuasion, then coercion – ‘Oh, let’s go up the hill and scare ourselves’ and Bromwich notes that the persona, ‘speaks of making a fire as one would speak of making a painting’ with pitchy hands from work and blackened sap but also with its connotations of ‘dirty work’.<sup>91</sup> He speaks of past fires he has made in a manner synonymous with the power-seeking egoist and the artist who will show, not tell of ‘something we had forgotten’. The emphasis is on the changed topography of the mountain consumed by the fire and the town below consumed by terror. The listeners ask in fear and anticipation about something even worse which endangers them – “If it scares you, what will it do to us?” Then the answer comes:

“Scare you. But if you shrink from being scared  
What would you say to war if it should come?”

“Oh, but war’s not for children – it’s for men”

“Haven’t you heard what we have lived to learn?  
Nothing so new – something we had forgotten:  
*War is for everyone, for children too.*  
I wasn’t going to tell you and I mustn’t.  
The best way is to come uphill with me  
And have our fire and laugh and be afraid.”<sup>92</sup>

Bromwich is held by Frost’s notion that we make that which scares us – that we should not shrink from being scared and he appropriates the bonfire as his analogy for the work of art, arguing that the poem:

Brings to mind certain moments in works of art and the associated sensations they provoke, the sort of moments and sensations that make us laugh and be afraid [...] (the poet) offers it as a reminder how far in the presence of any intense and rousing spectacle, the kind that occurs in nature and in art and is sometimes called sublime – how far, in such conditions, we grown-ups turn into children much like those in the

<sup>90</sup> Bromwich, *Music*, p. 233.

<sup>91</sup> Bromwich, *Music*, p. 234.

<sup>92</sup> Robert Frost, *Mountain Interval* (New York: Henry Holt, 1920), section 19 ‘The Bonfire’.

poem. The work of art, like the fire, matters because it brings its audience close to a scene of risk.<sup>93</sup>

In the novel, Cary gives us a ‘rousing spectacle’, an unforeseen exhilarating ‘scene of risk’ in the smashing of Burl’s House, which the children approach with fear, excitement and pent-up anticipation of Charley’s farewell party or send-off. When Charley first views the interior of Burl’s House the paintings cause ‘an effervescence’ in his imagination:

He gazes at a tree like a green bomb explosion in a sky on fire with little thin flames and he feels a shock as if something has actually exploded, silently but violently, somewhere inside him. He is shocked and amused, but he does not know whether to laugh or look solemn. (155)

As Charley looks on the painting, just as Frost’s participants contemplate the scene of the fire, the safety of the frame falls away momentarily and the shock wave breaks out. The frame then re-forms, making him self-consciously aware of what is expected of him and what is permitted. Like the grown-ups-become-children of the poem, we may feel that our own judgement is rendered infantile by the feelings of envy, amusement, fascination and pathos provoked. The threshold of our safety limits as spectators are tested as Cary ‘may lean on interests difficult to disclose’.<sup>94</sup> What is certain is that Charley’s ambition and imagination will lead to disaster and we have intimations of his downfall; he will have his fire ‘and laugh and be afraid’, as will we. Knowing that their thieving days are coming to an end and to see the paintings for the last time, Charley conceives of the gang’s farewell party inside Burl’s House: ‘You won’t get no cash and Ginger won’t get no dimond necklaces, but it’s just the place for a party. Less show the cops we knows ow to make a good finish’ (266). Present at this ‘good finish’ are two characters placed either side of Charley whose ‘nerves are strung like wires’ (266). One is Morton, the embodiment of danger and the other is Liz, the embodiment of safety who is in possession of a loyalty to Charley that Mort attempts to

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<sup>93</sup> Bromwich, *Music*, p. 234.

<sup>94</sup> Bromwich, *Music*, p. 232. Here Bromwich acknowledges Hobbes’s definition of laughter as ‘sudden glory’.

destroy. Morton the mercenary, named as if an instrument of death itself, is particularly unsafe and in ‘dangerous mood’:

Mort was capable of anything. Cruelty, and boys like Mort in whom he felt a ruthless quality, always terrified Charley. His imagination gave him penetration, by intuitive feeling, into the dangers to be feared from those who delight in cruelty; their persistence, their desire always for greater cruelties, their complete lack of scruple, their enjoyment in giving pain. (216)<sup>95</sup>

Cary invokes the sadist and the psychopath in this character, reflecting on the larger human cruelties at work in war. Mort lacks both morality ('scruples') and empathy, enjoying his cruel taunting of Liz to deflect his own feelings of persecution by some of the village girls. In the cave Charley's group had discussed cruelty and the beatings administered by their parents but Cary intends a greater significance:

They begin to discuss canes, whips, sticks and varieties of beating. They discuss foreign tortures, and every now and then Liz says with wonder that she doesn't know what the world is coming to, that it gets crueler and crueler. (101)

In the safety of the cave they did not shrink from being scared; Liz's courage, her maturity of thought and high degree of empathy, especially for Charley, is frequently emphasised. Gathering before Burls House, Liz silently and obstinately joins the group, risking a beating for breaking her supervision. For these reasons and 'by some unseen emanation of character (she) has acquired a position of dignity' (267).

The children approach this scene with its many levels of risk; its multiple conflicts between the members of the gang, its risk of physical harm, of discovery and capture and of failure to make a 'good finish'. We are agitated by the thought of what a character with no scruples might enact and the unknown destruction and chaos we will be called upon by the author to witness. As the children enter the house, Charley sets up the game in which he performs master and host and lording it over them all 'it is like one of his own stories come

<sup>95</sup> In Cary's unpublished novel, *Tottenham*, he depicts the sadistic cruelty of school boys who drive an eight year old to suicide. 'They like doing it,' says Tansley at the 'trial' of the boy called Grace, who is beaten with a hockey stick (Typescript (n. p.) MS, Cary, 269).

true' (278). But the game turns on an instant into the exhilaration of destruction, with Bert as the comic catalyst at the height of danger. Bert is a native, a village boy of twelve, who looks eight and is 'always grinning' – a visual joke. In his over-sized cast-off clothes, he follows the 'vackies' 'with a gait reminiscent of a turtle in some thick liquid' (41). He is constantly in pursuit of the London boys, hopeful of friendship and yet keeping his distance. Charley avoids him or ignores him, keeping his own counsel, for 'it was as though some secret nerve warned him against contamination' (41). But when Charley becomes an outcast himself, Bert is his 'watch-dog' and then his guide during the final escape from Burls House. Inside the house, a space now rendered chaotic, Bert is comic and dangerous transgressing the boundaries of his gender and his age. Bert, dressed up in a white satin 'flounced dress in the Victorian style of 1939' and high-heeled mules appears, coloured scarlet with lipstick while 'his little grey eyes behind spectacles and the two owl circles, are tearful with laughter' (282). He is 'daubed like a clown' in a subversive mockery of the dress and ornaments gleaned from Burls' upper rooms. Bert's reckless abandonment and childish delirium reaches its peak, his lack of control now the tipping point into violence:

Bert's dance meanwhile has been growing wilder. He whirls round with arms outstretched, carrying a mule in his hand. Brought up by the wall in front of an illuminated picture, he raises the mule and smashes the glass with the heel. He then throws the mule at the canvas and falls down in shouts of laughter. (283)

Mort then targets the portrait with a bottle, a more powerful serious weapon hitting the Constable painting beside it. Charley 'gives a cry of delight. He sees what can be done with pictures, expensive pictures, to produce a definite and glorious sensation' as his violent action smashes through a canonical work of art (284). Ginger, an efficient marksman, joins in and 'opens rapid fire'; Charley, meanwhile swings on the glass chandelier and with mimetic dedication he enacts a stunt he has surely seen larger than life in the cinema, swinging to and fro until it crashes down on to the table below, shouting 'Lookatme – king of the castle' (284). We note his triumphalism and that the 'intoxication of glory has driven out for a moment the milder intoxicants of stout and gin' (284). These powerful intoxicants are the

characteristics of the invader but they also recall the voice of the fire-maker in Frost's poem. The triumphalism of the scene, which also contains Mort's cruelty to Liz, is momentary, hollow and dangerous. The children do not anticipate the fruits of an imagination unchecked by reason or morality and Mort embodies the psychopathology of cruelty. Finally, Cary closes in with the arrival of the police and appropriate punishments for the child-protagonists.

Ultimately, the scene of violence is against property and not people (like Frost's bonfire, the fire engulfs and destroys territory). Burl's House functions as a metaphor to allow us to witness violence and to think unthinkable extremes of cruelty, which can strengthen and prepare us for a real encounter. We are, nevertheless, the spellbound spectators of this scene; just as the cave was dubbed 'hero', Burl's House is villain and enemy, a storehouse of art of exquisite beauty and power, which has exposed Charley as one of his own fictitious 'gunmen with a taste for the beautiful'. If he cannot possess it, he will destroy it, another moral dimension of disturbance. Charley, the last to escape from Burl's House, hides 'in comparative safety' in the apple loft with Lizzie. She is 'a place of privilege' because she still believes in the simple possibility of a just world, like the films 'in which the good people were rewarded with happiness and the bad people were severely punished' (303). The novel now moves into a redemptive, purifying phase after the taboo of Burl's House. As if to bless and enhance Liz's goodness, her sister Su chants from the liturgy, having conscientiously learnt the Collect by heart: 'Grant us strength [...] who knowest us to be set in the midst of what is it so many and great dangers' (291).<sup>96</sup> As her repetitions punctuate the dialogue, the words she struggles to remember 'so many and great dangers' sum up the future for Charley, Liz and the nation at the outbreak of war.

Charley's final and redemptive act is to acknowledge Liz as the embodiment of true goodness and loyalty, recognising the connection in spite of his reckless disregard for

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<sup>96</sup> Cary's essential Christianity is behind the formal reference to an all-knowing, all-seeing god.

consequences and lack of responsibility. With her, he ‘has become a mature human being [...] he has lived like a grown-up – it was a good time’ (316). But Charley is quickly apprehended in the Galors’ apple loft. Remand home follows, then an escape with Lizzie and a plan to reach Southampton and to become stowaways on the first boat to ‘Ammurca’. It is the attention of a farmer who finds them asleep together in a cart-shed close to the port that sees them once again in custody, but ‘for twenty-four hours he has been once more a man’ (340). Cary intervenes to explain what is behind Charley’s revelation:

What he means is that [...] he has made the discovery which transforms the world that kindness is the dignity of living, which transforms the most grotesque gesture, the ugliest face into the expression of eternal beauty. (316)

Liz, the figure of dignity and kindness, clothed in rags from the opening scene and now pregnant, is Charley’s best hope of keeping safe but their final separation will prevent the nurturing and maturing of that kindness into human dignity and self-determination as once again the adult world intervenes to condemn them. As their brief life together is about to pass into memory or a forgotten dream, Cary uses the distance of the dispassionate observer, the young inexperienced policeman, to report Liz’s collapse as Charley is being driven away: ‘Funny thing, kid in here’s passed out—fainted’ (343). In the narrative space between what the young constable says and the pity that we surely feel at the end of the novel, there exists a sense of what is both important and true about Cary’s ‘tragedy of children’ and their thwarted lives in wartime. I endorse P. H. Newby’s observation, that the novel during this period was breaking its boundaries of subject and theme. In that case, Cary’s novel was and is a risky undertaking in its own right, unique in offering an existential representation of the imagination of the child in peril and a casualty of war.

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These novels reflect a period when it was not commonplace or deemed necessary for adults to wonder about the emotional well-being of the child – thoughtful adults, albeit with good intentions, maintain their distance. Streatfeild figures the child as resilient and defensive but

locked in an inner world, unwilling or unable to seek help from adults. Noble takes the ‘what if’ premise that the evacuated life may fill gaps in the child’s life, generating divided loyalties. Cary jeopardises the balance between danger and safety for the child, investing his evacuee with the imagination of the dreamer and maker but without a stage on which to enact his vision. Something new and ambitious was underway in the literature of the war and postwar years: Newby was clear that the depiction of childhood had become ‘an artistic end in itself [...] a symbol for existence at large’.<sup>97</sup> While the physical body is (mostly) safe, the emotional and psychological inner life of the child depicted in these novels is an unsafe terrain subjected to fear and terror, anger and frustration. A state-endorsed safety measure had put many children in harm’s way and had irrevocably changed their lives. Moreover, if the child is the symbol for existence at large, as Newby asserted, something challenging was being said in these novels about the child’s considerable ability to stir up danger, requiring a recalibration of the safety needs of the adult protector.

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<sup>97</sup> P. H. Newby, *The Novel: 1945–1950* (London: Longmans, Green and Co. for the British Council, 1951), p. 9.

## Chapter Two: Safe Home

### Introduction

All really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home [...] the imagination functions in this direction whenever the human being has found the slightest shelter: we shall see the imagination build “walls” of impalpable shadows, comfort itself with the illusion of protection - or, just the contrary, tremble behind thick walls, mistrust the staunchest ramparts [...] the sheltered being gives perceptible limits to his shelter. He experiences the house in its reality and in its virtuality, by means of thought and dreams.<sup>1</sup>

Chapter Two discusses representations of home as an archetypal place of safety. Home is our first place of belonging and attachment in the world and the traditional source of unconditional love and protection, although it may also be compromised by tensions and anxiety or become the site of fear and danger. The novels to be discussed are firstly, *House-Bound* (1942) by Winifred Peck<sup>2</sup>, in which I propose that safety in the home is analogous with order and cleanliness, building on a reading of *Purity and Danger* (1966) by Mary Douglas. Secondly, *Pied Piper* (1942) by Nevil Shute<sup>3</sup>, in which the promise of safety is contingent on returning home and where safety is served by tactics and strategies, following *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) by Michel de Certeau. Thirdly, *Hangover Square* (1941) by Patrick Hamilton<sup>4</sup> problematises Gaston Bachelard’s consoling ‘thoughts and dreams’ of home as explored in *The Poetics of Space* (1958). Each critical framework, re-evaluated below, elucidates a different perspective on the safe home, as it figures in each novel.

<sup>1</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. by Maria Jolas (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1969/1994), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Winifred Peck, *House-Bound* (London: Persephone, 1942/2007); page numbers are given in the text of 2.1.

<sup>3</sup> Nevil Shute, *Pied Piper* (London: Vintage, 1942/2009); page numbers are given in the text of 2.2.

<sup>4</sup> Patrick Hamilton, *Hangover Square* (London: Penguin, 1941/2001); page numbers are given in the text of 2.3.

These narratives figure the safety of home under physical, psychological and emotional pressure, idealised in absence and as the repository, fantasy and dream of the values for which the war is being fought. In this time of crisis, home (also invoked by the highly charged figure of the child evacuee as we have seen) is also a metonym for the family and for the nation, the place of cherished belonging, which must be protected and kept intact. Coming home means returning to complete the family or returning to that protected, desired place of safety where one feels one belongs. In these novels, safety at home is encountered in material and virtual territories, specifically reflecting civilian perceptions of Britain at war. The novelists give contested perspectives on home as a place of safety so that each work is not exclusively and straightforwardly the consoling locus of the sheltering site. Indeed, home in reality, as in fiction is ambiguous: the novelists draw on negative connotations of claustrophobia and restraint, disappointment, pain or even danger, which are not set aside in wartime.

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Home is a traditional place of safety which is under siege during this period; the longing to be at home, even if (or because) it is in an embattled state, is strongly represented in the fiction while loss of home creates feelings of vulnerability. Bachelard's 'notion of home' (presented above) suggests a number of characteristics, which define the focus of this chapter. Home is acknowledged as a material place of sheltering, ordered habitation (house) and as an idea, which is embedded in human consciousness and which fires the poetic imagination. For Bachelard, home is cherished by its occupants and captured by images of '*felicitous space*' seeking to 'determine the human value of the sorts of space that may be grasped and [...] defended against adverse forces, the space we love'.<sup>5</sup> Expectations are high within the protective boundaries of such an intimate space, which Bachelard represents actually and

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<sup>5</sup> Bachelard, *Poetics*, p. ix.

metaphorically as ‘thick walls’ and staunch ‘ramparts’, focusing on architectural elements of fortification and defence. Home is not a blank or indifferent space; it is coloured by the relationships and rituals of those who occupy it, made precious as the site of intimacy between them. Home is protective and productive, constituting the nest in which the young are bred and raised – Bachelard expressed a specific interest in the nest as an encircling, miniature place of safety, which is dangerously subverted in Hamilton’s *Hangover Square*.

Bachelard’s vision of oneiric home, described by Joan Ockman (1998) as ‘rather nostalgic and essentialist’, was published in the lingering wake of the Second World War. It is an expression of yearning, set against personal experiences of immense loss of home through material destruction, alien occupation or enforced exile.<sup>6</sup> Writing in the Harvard Design Magazine at the century’s end, Ockman’s appraisal is that Bachelard’s insistence on the ‘interrelationship between science and poetry, experiment and experience’ continues to have relevance, even ‘radical potential’, when applied to the multidimensional nature of inhabited space within and without.<sup>7</sup> Reference to Bachelard’s vision continues to inform architectural theory, while practitioners revisit his perspective on home as a manifestation of the imagination; it is this proposition, which relates directly to literature and to this chapter. Studies conducted in environmental psychology, illustrated by the work of Jeanne Moore (2000), also remain sensitive to Bachelard’s focus on sites of attachment and meaning but with increased emphasis on context and use, identifying three modes of experience: the personal home, the social home and the physical home.<sup>8</sup> This distinction helps to explain why, if the physical home has been destroyed, the personal and social experiences of home can maintain feelings and thoughts of being safe. However, for Bachelard, the physical objects (house, attic, cellar and nest) are essential to a full experience of the poetic space of home.

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<sup>6</sup> Joan Ockman, ‘The Poetics of Space by Gaston Bachelard’, *Harvard Design Magazine*, 6 (1998) <<http://www.harvarddesignmagazine.org/issues/6>> [accessed 25 January 2016] (para. 2 of 12)

<sup>7</sup> Ockman, ‘Poetics’, (para. 2 of 12).

<sup>8</sup> Jeanne Moore, ‘Placing Home in Context’, *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 20 (2000), 207–17.

An intense expression of safety at home, which is both idealised in absence and threatened in reality, can be found in the short story by Alun Lewis, ‘Lance-Jack’ (1942), which I draw on for its critical reflection on a number of the ideas set out above.<sup>9</sup> Lewis describes the attributes of traditional home as ‘friendship, love, mutual knowledge, children (and) the rooted beauty of flowers’ in a sustained, intact web of connectivity between people, place and landscape.<sup>10</sup> Slow to establish, home is a locus with significance ‘*in one place*’ and his celebration, of the comfort and refuge residing there, permeates the story.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, Lewis dwells on the overturning of all that is ‘warm, personal and loving’ during wartime, to be displaced by the ‘new way of life’ for men and women who must manage a different ‘balance of forces’ whether at home or ‘elsewhere’, transgressing boundaries of traditional safety at home:

Now that the women are being bombed in their homes while the men are untouched in their trenches and tents, perhaps there will be less hatred among the women that their men should leave them to follow something else [...] certainly the soldier’s heart leaps for leave [...] and I think of Dick and Bill and Gweno and home and watch the advent of the heron, its steady grey wing-sweep, its legs and neck outstretched and calm, circling slowly the mere which it sees as I see it, a mirror of rest, a breast for the dark and silent visitant. But it is deterred by the laughter of soldiers and girls, and goes as I am going, elsewhere.<sup>12</sup>

Home (‘mirror of rest’) and ‘elsewhere’ or not-home, appear in this passage as a set of binary oppositions, contrasting the experiences of women and men, bombed homes and safe trenches, silence and laughter, soldiers and girls. Lewis’s sense is of a levelling in the changed dynamics of gender, for he recognises the irony of the male soldier who may be relatively safe in his trench or tent during a lull, while the woman is at great risk in her home, which is now the target of the bomber. In ‘Lance-Jack’ ‘elsewhere’ is suggested as a place peopled by exiles: the man (and in Peck’s view, the woman) must ‘begin again’, inhabiting an

<sup>9</sup> Alun Lewis, ‘Lance-Jack’, in *Collected Stories*, ed. by Cary Archard (Bridgend: Seren, 1990), pp. 63–70.

<sup>10</sup> Lewis, ‘Lance-Jack’, p. 65.

<sup>11</sup> Lewis, ‘Lance-Jack’, p. 65.

<sup>12</sup> Lewis, ‘Lance-Jack’, p. 69.

alien place where ‘all that you were seems to have vanished’. Home is thus a maker of identity and singular subjectivity, a concept that will be explored in the chosen novels.<sup>13</sup>

Lewis, authoring the paradoxes and complexities of his new life in the army, challenges us by asking why a man appears to ‘prefer what is casual, rough, hazardous and incomplete to what is warm and personal and loving?’<sup>14</sup> Away from home, the soldier’s subjectivity alters and he sees home with a stranger’s eyes – the cherished place is de-familiarised by war from the perspective of the absent combatant. ‘Lance-Jack’ first appeared in Lewis’s only complete book of short stories, published in 1943 as *The Last Inspection*. His ‘Author’s Note’ conveys the urgency of writing down personal observations (‘studies of a hang-over’) about the ‘rootless life of soldiers’, which he considered his main motif and his desire that the stories ‘say what should be said: — that in England it was thus and thus, in a time that — God be thanked — is past’.<sup>15</sup> Rootlessness and exile will be discussed below but the first novel to be investigated concentrates on the ordered, domestic interior of the well-established home, seemingly invulnerable.

Informing the reading of Winifred Peck’s novel *House-Bound* (1942) is the work of the social anthropologist Mary Douglas. First formulated in *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (1966), her theory that dirt is dependent on its context and that it is ‘matter out of place’ continues to be relevant to studies that consider the cultural freight of dirt and cleanliness, contamination and purity.<sup>16</sup> One recent application of Douglas’s work is in *Dirt: The Filthy Reality of Everyday Life* (2011).<sup>17</sup> In the chapter titled ‘Dishing the Dirt: Dirt in the Home’, Rosie Cox follows Douglas in reasserting that dirt is

<sup>13</sup> Lewis, ‘Lance-Jack’, p. 64.

<sup>14</sup> Lewis, ‘Lance-Jack’, p. 65.

<sup>15</sup> Lewis, ‘Author’s Note’, in *The Last Inspection* (London: Macmillan, 1943), quoted by Archard in *Collected Stories*, p. 10.

<sup>16</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966/2002).

<sup>17</sup> Rosie Cox, ‘Dishing the Dirt: Dirt in the Home’, in *Dirt: The Filthy Reality of Everyday Life*, ed. by Nadine Monem (London: Profile, 2011), pp. 37–73.

always charged with affective significance, even though its definition may not be logical or consistent and that we may be uncertain about what is dirty and what is not. Nevertheless, she finds that ‘our reactions to dirt in the home are strong and deeply emotional’, suggesting that dealing with dirt on the body and domestic dirt ‘touches on deep emotions of love and care for family as well as fear and disgust’ so that to be clean is to keep pure what is precious and keep safe what is valued most.<sup>18</sup> I extend Douglas’s theory and Cox’s exposition to argue that in *House-Bound* the safety of home is figured as a classification of territory (the domestic interior of the house), which Rose Fairlaw, Peck’s protagonist, strives to keep clean, intact and unpolluted. The activities involved in removing dirt by means of cleaning rituals are forms of control, attempting to wrest order from chaos and to limit, psychologically at least, the dangerous incursions of war. The emotional and psychological control derived from maintaining cleanliness in the home involves imaginative thoughts of safety, which reach those who, like the Fairlaws’ adult children, may be elsewhere, not at home.

Peck focuses on domestic order with its potential to keep at bay generalised anxiety by keeping intimate places orderly and intact. In the novel, the prevailing war neurosis and physically dangerous conditions (the house is a target for the bomb) are figured by dirt in the house and on the body as unwelcome matter out of place. Dirt represents disorder, in fact and as metaphor, a practical and psychological threat to the intactness and safety of home. Moreover, the home that banishes dirt is a microcosm of the wider world, bounded by order and kept safely intact for Peck’s characters and for the reassurance of her readers. Intactness itself is a cognate of safety as established in the thesis introduction: coming from the Latin, *tactus* (touch), it is charged with notions of being whole, unimpaired and untouched by contaminants of all kinds, even bombs. Douglas’s work continues to influence wide-ranging studies in consumer research and sociology. Dion, Sabri and Guillard (2014) extend Douglas’s work to investigate ‘tidiness from the angle of symbolic pollution’ and to

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<sup>18</sup> Cox, *Dirt*, p. 65.

determine under what conditions their respondents were willing to break social and personal rules; they find that the ‘danger-beliefs associated with transgression are context dependent’.<sup>19</sup> Their focus on symbolic pollution underlines Douglas’s relevance to Peck’s novel, with its figuring of dirt and cleanliness, as does context-dependency given the specific context of war in *House-Bound*. Stankiewicz (2008) follows the concept of risk (originally proposed by Douglas and developed with Wildavsky in *Risk and Culture*, 1982), which he flips in order to investigate processes and strategies of risk-concealment, concluding that they serve the ‘social construction of the sense of security’.<sup>20</sup> This sociological study investigates social practices and global attitudes to risk and security (for instance, the trivialising of risk in the debate on climate change), which situates Douglas’s work within contemporary debates.

In 1941, it is the absence of servants at the onset of war with their hitherto invisible workings to keep a large house clean and in good order, which creates domestic crisis. Several novels of the period including *House-Bound* figure the domestic interior of home as a troubled, risk-filled territory.<sup>21</sup> It is clear that in a domestic novel such as this, home is a gendered construct; yet, while acknowledging the female bias, Gill Plain finds that there is a blurring of male and female traits in the wartime terrain of home and nation. There is a:

Metonymic relationship between the love of mother, home and country. The domestic feminine space of home is also the soil to be protected, the motherland, a territory that usually requires the guiding hand of a system of governance gendered male.<sup>22</sup>

Writing about the British male actor John Mills, Plain finds that national identity embodied and expressed as a certain kind of ‘Englishness’ conveys gender ambiguity. In *John Mills and British Cinema* (2006) she argues that by the 1940s, Mills’s cinematic presence has become ‘a

<sup>19</sup> Delphine Dion, Ouidade Sabri and Valérie Guillard, ‘Home Sweet Messy Home: Managing Symbolic Pollution’, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 41.3 (2014), 565–89.

<sup>20</sup> Piotr Stankiewicz, ‘Invisible Risk: The Social Construction of Security’, *Polish Sociological Review*, 161 (2008), 55–72.

<sup>21</sup> See my Introduction above for further examples of novels concerned with the emotional and practical survival of women on the domestic home front: Molly Panter-Downes, *One Fine Day* (1947); Jocelyn Playfair, *A House in the Country* (1944); Norah Hoult, *There Were No Windows* (1944).

<sup>22</sup> Gill Plain, *John Mills and British Cinema: Masculinity, Identity and Nation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 45.

useful hybrid encoding a variety of masculine forms', but simultaneously that his onscreen presence is also 'an embodiment of feminine vulnerability' for:

He is that which must be protected as well as that which protects. His embodiment of nation contains elements of both base and superstructure – the home for which we are fighting and the man who fights.<sup>23</sup>

I will return to Englishness and home, meanwhile the point here is that Rose Fairlaw, like Mills, is a 'hybrid' persona, a protector and female embodiment of her safe home in times of peace who draws on traits frequently perceived as masculine: a can-do pragmatism and a willingness to begin again when her regime is threatened. In *House-Bound*, preserving the domestic life of the home as pure and clean and maintaining the material integrity of the house, become synonymous with the wholeness of the family in a bounded system of family-home-nation. Peck's classification of home also establishes a metaphor for a national identity that, as Plain argues, 'can embrace the squabbling and "petty" differences that supposedly shape domestic life', enacted by the family and satirised in *House-Bound*.<sup>24</sup>

John Stanley Howard, the eponymous male protagonist of Nevil Shute's novel *Pied Piper* (1942), is a provider of safety and the rescuer of displaced children who is not so much the man who fights as the tactician who plans and solves problems, to save the weak. Written under the shadow of Operation Pied Piper and the movement of children internally displaced for safekeeping, the chapter shifts from the interiority of home as a static location to travelling home, a destination figured as the coastline of England. Howard's project, to bring the motley group of children to safety, is risky and courageous; we are safe in the knowledge that the old soldier will return (he tells his tale later in a London club) and hopeful that the group will make it to England intact. Returning 'home' through Northern France, with all that we now understand by that term, is the central preoccupation of *Pied Piper* and from necessity

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<sup>23</sup> Plain, *Mills*, p. 53.

<sup>24</sup> Plain, *Mills*, p. 58.

Howard evolves from neutral traveller to focused tactician.<sup>25</sup> The territory he must negotiate practically, emotionally and psychologically is mapped as German-occupied France, in which he and the seven children who eventually accompany him, encounter danger, known and unforeseen. Narrative tension derives from our sense of the fragile safety of the group, while feeling buoyed by Howard's safe return his London club and by the celebration of England as the locus of a safe and free future. This story of escape and return as a set of spatial practices (here gendered male) suggests the work of Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (1984) and I argue that Howard can be read as a Certeau-esque tactician.<sup>26</sup>

Certeau's 'strategies and tactics' are his most well-known concepts and yet, for Ian Buchanan (2000), they remain 'poorly understood', in part because Certeau's work is incomplete as a model, exploratory rather than definitive.<sup>27</sup> Buchanan notes criticism levelled at Certeau, that he rejected prominent models of cultural analysis like structuralism because, in the theorist's view, they tended to render everyday life inert, ignoring the operations of speakers and their situational logic. Buchanan argues that in order to grasp something 'so elusive as the content of daily life', Certeau was raising fundamental problems that are still being addressed, namely 'the difficulty of articulating the logic of culture in a way that does not assume it to be cadaverous'.<sup>28</sup> Buchanan's reappraisal is convincing; in his enterprise intended to bring Certeau's ideas into contemporary studies, he clarifies tactics as:

The approach one takes to everyday life when one is unable to take measures against its variables. Tactics are constantly in the swim of things and are as much in danger of being swept away or submerged by the flow of events as they are capable of bursting through the dykes strategy erects itself and suffusing its protected place with its own brand of subversive and incalculable energy.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Home has been encountered as Bowlby's 'secure base', the place or person of primary attachment, Bachelard's sheltering nest, Douglas's place of good order and intactness, the house and its architecture and a metaphor for family and nationhood.

<sup>26</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

<sup>27</sup> Ian Buchanan, *Michel de Certeau: Cultural Theorist* (London: Sage, 2000), p. 86.

<sup>28</sup> Buchanan, *de Certeau*, p. 88.

<sup>29</sup> Buchanan, *de Certeau*, p. 89.

A champion of Certeau's work, Buchanan demonstrates that the risk-filled tactic is precisely what Shute's protagonist, Howard employs when the variables thrown at him by the enemy cannot be limited or predicted.

By contrast, George Harvey Bone is not a safe pair of hands in Patrick Hamilton's *Hangover Square* (1941). Rather, Bone needs protection from himself as his desires coalesce around hallucinatory, misdirected notions of the safe home (gendered female) and which paradoxically fragment his mind and destroy his body. As Sara Wasson argues, the 'notion of home as a war front, literally and figuratively', was already being subverted by works that constructed the home as a place of 'alienation, hallucination, haunting and madness'.<sup>30</sup> This transformation of the home, made strange with its Gothic tendencies, will be taken up in the discussion of *Hangover Square*. Alienating psychological states agitate the mind of Bone, consumed as he is by a deluded fantasy of returning safely 'home' to the place and the idea of 'Maidenhead'. Elizabeth Bowen reflected that in fiction, 'the present can only be evaded at a cost' and that 'escape seems often to be a double-edged sword', where consolatory fantasies are fragile and 'resistance fantasies are in themselves frightening'.<sup>31</sup> In Rod Mengham's view, the stories of the Blitz in particular have the 'intensity of dreams, fantasies, hallucinations, an imaginative surplus that cannot be satisfactorily housed in a realist aesthetic'.<sup>32</sup> Further, Geoff Ward discusses forms of psychotic addiction in the fiction of the 1940s, such as that depicted by Hamilton (and by Henry Green, discussed in Chapter Four) as 'tropes of staggering home'.<sup>33</sup> Bachelard is less troubled by the subject's addiction, rather he asserts that a tendency to circularity emphasises the importance of the imagination as a nurturing place of solace, which 'can comfort itself with the illusion of protection'; so he implies a psychological and

<sup>30</sup> Sara Wasson, *Urban Gothic of the Second World War: Dark London* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 27.

<sup>31</sup> Elizabeth Bowen, *The Demon Lover* (London: Cape, 1945/1950), p. 50.

<sup>32</sup> Rod Mengham, 'British Fiction of the War', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of World War II*, ed. by Marina Mackay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 26–42 (p. 28).

<sup>33</sup> Geoff Ward, 'Lowry, Hamilton, Kavan and the Addictions of 1940s Fiction', in *Fiction of the 1940s: Stories of Survival*, ed. by Rod Mengham and N. H. Reeve (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), pp. 26–45 (p. 27).

aesthetic turn on the comforting quality of safe home, without pursuing its potential for danger.<sup>34</sup>

*Hangover Square* is a novel in which a psychotic delusion of safety is Bone's personal, spiralling crisis but in which is implicated the national crisis of the Munich pact, appeasement and the subsequent declaration of war. In this final section, I also explore the significance of rootlessness, exile, inconsolable longing and finding 'home' as a means of escape from inevitable catastrophe. Hamilton's protagonist suffers the fate of the exile as he yearns for the safety and protection of 'home' otherwise figured as 'Maidenhead', real enough as a Thames-side town about an hour from London but for Bone, an idiosyncratic embodiment of sanctuary and bliss. The sheltering nest is now undermined as deceptive and dangerous – a lure to a death. In order to explore the expressions of rootlessness and exile, I refer to 'Reflections on Exile' by Edward W. Said (2000) who claims that the 'sorrow of estrangement' is profound and transcendent.<sup>35</sup> Like Bone, exiles are 'always eccentrics who feel their difference as a kind of orphan-hood', even as they frequently exploit it, Said maintains.<sup>36</sup> In his revaluation of Said, 'Enigmas of Exile: Reflections on Edward Said' (2005), Vinay Lal brings together a number of recent perspectives on Said's preoccupation with exile.<sup>37</sup> The Marxist view, taken by Aijaz Ahmad for instance, highlights Said's own position of immense privilege, claiming that he and others like him had 'fetishised the intellectual in exile', refusing to consider the crucial element of class.<sup>38</sup> Ahmad's use of the term 'fetishised' is relevant to Hamilton's novel for its purer meaning of objectified sexual desire (exhibited in the novel by George Bone and Netta Longdon). In broader terms, Lal reminds the interpreter of Said that exile has always exercised intellectuals and poets and that

<sup>34</sup> Bachelard, *Poetics*, p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> Edward W. Said, 'Reflections on Exile', in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (London: Granta, 2001/2012), pp. 173–86 (p. 182).

<sup>36</sup> Said, 'Reflections', p. 182.

<sup>37</sup> Vinay Lal, 'Enigmas of Exile: Reflections on Edward Said', *Economic & Political Weekly*, 40.1 (2005), 30–4 (p. 32).

<sup>38</sup> Lal, 'Enigmas', p. 32.

Said saw western culture as ‘fundamentally a creation of exiles’: from the banishment of Ovid from Rome who declared “*exilium mors est*” (‘exile is death’) to Victor Hugo, whose writing was energised by fifteen years of exile on the island of Guernsey, emigrés have reflected on what it means to be at home.<sup>39</sup> Said, commenting on his memoir *Out of Place*, described the title to mean ‘not able to go back’, adding ‘I would describe my life as a series of departures and returns. But the departure is always anxious. The return always uncertain. Precarious.’<sup>40</sup> It is this tension between banishment and belonging, the personal and political, which illuminates Hamilton’s novel. George Bone is like an exile, estranged from his associates and suffering from inconsolable longing for the sheltering nest of his childhood.

All three novels engage with a range of physical deprivations, which strip away the individual’s comfort (Hobbes’ ‘contentments of life’) and safety in the place of habitation – blackout, lack of food, lack of sleep, lack of freedom, the bombed house, the wounded, unclean body and fear of capture. Home is nevertheless figured as a resilient environment, in which the reader also invests, embodied in the precisely located figures of the middle-class housewife in *House-Bound*, the aged veteran and traveller in *Pied Piper* and the schizophrenic outsider in *Hangover Square*. While Shute and Peck devise sanctuary for their protagonists in places reframed by new strategies and altered perspectives necessitated by war, Hamilton’s work bears the mark of his pessimism. His proposal of Maidenhead as Bone’s ultimate safe place is tragi-comic and there is an irony to his choice of the town, in its name and in its reputation – in the years leading up to the war, it had become a destination of fun and frolics for the London set. British Pathé has a short film from August 21<sup>st</sup>, 1933, (captioned ‘Outer London Clubs and Cabarets – The Hungaria River Club – Maidenhead, the home of River Clubs for London’s Enjoyment Brigade’) which shows carefree, out-of-

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<sup>39</sup> Lal, ‘Enigmas’, p. 32.

<sup>40</sup> Gauri Viswanathan, ed., *Power, Politics and Culture: Interviews with Edward W. Said* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), p. 456.

towners boating, swimming, dancing, gambling and drinking in style.<sup>41</sup> Bone's desperate need to belong to London's Enjoyment Brigade and his alienation from it is both absurd and tragic.

In each novel, there is also surely a sense in which the security and solace of home looks outwards to its people to keep them safe as a commitment to its continuity in one form or another; those who are elsewhere or far away may feel watched over by home. Testing the reach and resilience of home by stirring up trouble would be a peacetime indulgence; *House-Bound* is the first novel to be discussed, in which Peck works with enemies within the imagined, domestic interior of home, testing the boundaries of its walls and ramparts.

## **2.1     Dirt and Cleanliness: Maintaining Safety at Home in *House-Bound* (1942) by Winifred Peck**

Peck's protagonist, Rose Fairlaw, commands the domestic space in *House-Bound* and is loyally devoted to its preservation. In 1939, Storm Jameson was speaking to women like Rose when she wrote in the popular magazine, *Woman's Journal*, that the home must be maintained in wartime as a 'small cell of warmth and peace', responsible for sheltering the family in nest-like security.<sup>42</sup> Jameson reports how she told a friend keen to take on paid war work that the 'most honourable war work' she could undertake would consist of:

Keeping her home what she had made it for her children and her husband, a small cell of warmth and peace in the noisy thoroughfare of this world, a place from which they will go out with strong nerves and sound minds, a place to which they will look back, and from which all their lives they will draw strength.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> British Pathé, 'Outer London Clubs and Cabarets' (August 1933) <<http://www.britishpathe.com/video/outer-london-clubs-and-cabarets>> [accessed 5 April 2015]

<sup>42</sup> Storm Jameson, 'In Courage Keep Your Heart', *Woman's Journal* (1939) repr. in *Women in Wartime: The Role of Women's Magazines 1939–1945*, ed. by Jane Waller and Michael Vaughan-Rees (London: Macdonald, 1987), pp. 14–15.

<sup>43</sup> Jameson, 'Courage', p. 14.

Home is the place, traditionally maintained and overseen by the woman, held in our imaginations as ‘thoughts and dreams’ and tangible as the place in which to nurture a successful family. However, Peck’s narrative reconfigures the domestic sphere towards the end of 1941 as a territory of unspoken anxiety and conflicting loyalties. She depicts, with the urgency of the time, the disorder and dirt of war, a profound challenge to the practical and emotional survival of her protagonist. The Fairlaw family have lived for several generations in the confines of the fortress-like and rule-bound Laws House in affluent Castleburgh (Edinburgh); it signifies in name and description the ordered safekeeping and invulnerability of its residents.

Peck’s novel and Jameson’s rallying call problematise what Sara Wasson highlights as an emerging discourse of the time, in which housework ‘became a highly charged ritual, for the heroic housewife was a key figure in the martial home’.<sup>44</sup> The woman at the centre of the wartime home was an aspirational and idealised image in the propaganda, disseminated by the posters and magazine editorials of the time. The home is the last stronghold of sanity to be defended, preserved and unpolluted as far as possible by the impact of total war.<sup>45</sup> Jameson’s faith in the woman’s dedication to the home implies resistance to unimaginable change, which she knowingly understates: the conditions of war and their impact are little more than the ‘noisy thoroughfare’ of the outside world where conflict is enacted on some distant battlefield. In Jameson’s discourse, which seems located in the long shadows of the previous war, this is the responsibility of and is maintained by, the wife and mother. At the same time, acknowledging that the home is under siege, Jameson invokes the woman’s ‘valour of endurance’ and bravery in the face of the ‘endless bothers and boredoms’ of everyday life,

<sup>44</sup> Wasson, *Urban*, p. 106.

<sup>45</sup> Wartime public health campaigns served pragmatic needs: for instance, the campaign to ‘help to keep the nation fighting fit’, ‘Coughs and Sneezes Spread Diseases’; posters advertising the need for child immunisation against diphtheria and those created as a response to the increase in the cases of venereal diseases.  
<http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/PST.14163/20147/2815> [accessed 15 March 2014]

down-playing the threat to the home, while invoking the martial quality of courage.<sup>46</sup> The woman who preserves the sanctity of the home and stands at her post with pride fulfils a national service. Thus, routine homemaking and housekeeping are newly conceived as war-work, echoed in *House-Bound* when Peck speaks of ‘Home with a capital H’ (15). Both Peck and Jameson represent a nurturing, enclosed locus, a secure base recognisable from the previous chapter as Bowlby’s primary site of physical, psychological and emotional safety essential for the wellbeing and development of the family. Jameson’s language is imbued with patriotism and moral significance, resonating with Plain’s view that home has a metonymic relation to family and nation. Wasson also notes that at this time ‘one of the most powerful metaphors for a nation is that of the familial home’, to be protected and defended at all costs.<sup>47</sup>

Peck’s novel, *House-Bound* is the portrayal of a middle-class, inherited familial home, a metaphor for the nation, rendered as female and delineated further by the specifics of geography and social class. The fabric and interiority of Laws House and its daily management, by the women who leave and those who stand by their posts, are Peck’s subjects, habituated to their established rituals of order and cleanliness. They are ‘house-bound’ in ways that are both literal and metaphoric, for Peck conveys psychological insight about the contaminating impact of war on the material state of the house and the psychological and emotional safety-seeking activities of its occupants. I suggest that the unprecedented, dangerous conditions of wartime that bring such disruption to home lives are figured in the narrative by dirt and pollution, contaminating a hitherto sacred place. Peck’s deft handling of the comic and the tragic gives a satirical turn to the mimetic realism of domestic rituals, while retaining intimations of deeply-felt danger. It is the inconvenient loss of domestic servants that provides the catalyst for Rose Fairlaw’s questioning of her place in

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<sup>46</sup> Jameson, ‘Courage’, p. 14.

<sup>47</sup> Wasson, *Urban*, p. 106.

the domestic and wider world; both are perceived as polluted and disordered by war. In this context, home or rather the domestic effort and physical work required to sustain it, is specific as a metaphor for the nation in that both are predicated on invisible labours and marginalised women. In Peck's novel, the cleaning rituals enacted by the individual woman in the bounded, domestic environment (the home) are rituals designed to maintain control and generate feelings of safety, resisting disorder and danger, as introduced above.

The narrative of *House-Bound* plays out at some distance from London, which was already being devastated by bombing raids in 1941, the year of Peck's novel.<sup>48</sup> The effect of the Edinburgh setting is to establish a perception of safety in lives as yet unaffected by the Blitz and several of Peck's characters maintain a dream of safety in the old world of traditional hierarchies and conventions. The novel begins with a scene at the agency for domestic servants, from which several Castleburgh ladies are turned away, outraged and anxious when they learn that there is no help for hire. The community is thoroughly fixed in its ways, attempting to keep itself symbolically pure rather than be contaminated by enforced change. The abstract noun, 'purity' is a concept given an anthropological application by Mary Douglas in her seminal work *Purity and Danger* (1966), in which she establishes her theory that 'purity is the enemy of change, of ambiguity and compromise. Most of us indeed would feel safer if our experience would be hard-set and fixed in form'.<sup>49</sup> She also draws on a biblical concept of purity aligned with cleanliness, which she defines as the quality of being 'proper to its class, suitable and fitting'; her emphasis on classification is essential to the theory, for what is anthropologically classified and clean in turn defines what is dangerous and taboo.<sup>50</sup> In Douglas' work, purity in an environment is the opposite of dirt and contagion and in this respect, purity as cleanliness and order is apposite to Peck's narrative intent. The

<sup>48</sup> London represents the 'bombed city' and the central locus of the Blitz in the fiction of Elizabeth Bowen, Stephen Spender, Henry Green, William Sansom and Graham Greene, and of photo-journalists such as the photographer Lee Miller.

<sup>49</sup> Douglas, *Purity*, p. 200.

<sup>50</sup> Douglas, *Purity*, p. xiv.

domestic sphere of home in Peck's novel conveys a 'hard-set' fixed perspective and the regimented practices of household orderliness amongst the Fairlaw circle, which are satirised with a sharp wit, depict established rituals as absurdly compulsive. The contribution made by Douglas's concepts of purity and danger, linked to classifications of cleanliness as the threatening taboos of dirt, contamination and pollution, is significant for:

Risk and taboo [may] turn out to be equally engaged in protecting a vision of the good community, whether it is a vision of stable continuity or of sustained radical challenge.<sup>51</sup>

Douglas's 'vision of the good community' applies to the family life of the home as well as to the nation at large – risk and taboo are protective classifications that help to preserve the *status quo* as safe, domestic order. That which is classified as 'dirt' is understood as both physical and symbolic:

The attitude to rejected bits and pieces ('dirt') goes through two stages. First, they are recognisably out of place, a threat to good order [...] this is the stage at which they are dangerous, their half identity still clings to them.<sup>52</sup>

So, for Douglas, contamination and pollution are important transgressions of established boundaries rather than the consequences of failed hygiene, more psychological and symbolic than physical.<sup>53</sup> She goes as far as to claim that 'ritual conserves sanity and life', social practices and constructions of the sacred.<sup>54</sup> In her own words:

If we shun dirt, it is not because of craven fear, still less dread of holy terror [...] dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organise the environment.<sup>55</sup>

Foresighting Douglas's ideas that dirt and cleanliness 'create boundaries within which people can feel safe and in control of their environment', Peck is highly transgressive. Her protagonist breaks the habits of a lifetime and questions the value of cleaning rituals which

<sup>51</sup> Douglas, *Purity*, p. xx.

<sup>52</sup> Douglas, *Purity*, p. 197.

<sup>53</sup> Neither in Douglas's work nor in Peck's novel is 'dirt' banished in order to eradicate germs, as one might think.

<sup>54</sup> Douglas, *Purity*, p. 217. For instance, the epithet 'cleanliness is next to godliness'.

<sup>55</sup> Douglas, *Purity*, p. 2.

necessitates a breaking down of psychological boundaries.<sup>56</sup> In the 2002 Preface to *Purity and Danger*, Douglas acknowledged the need to recalibrate her original account with its insistence on dirt as a defining element in the dangerous state of disorder. She was alert to Basil Bernstein's critique and his claim that for some individuals, in some areas of their lives, mess and disorder are tolerated (far from taboo) in the interests of nurturing the creative process and its sacred end product, or because some radically different benefits are to be gained, which supersede safety.<sup>57</sup> Douglas was influenced by Bernstein's work on classification and context in family interactions, particularly by his formulation of restricted (implicit) and elaborated (explicit) speech codes as functions of the 'culture acting through social relationships in specific contexts'.<sup>58</sup> These suggestive interpretations of the cultural variables of identity and control, of impurity and pollution, chaos and mess will be taken up in the final chapter of this project in which the emotional disorder engendered by grief challenges feelings of wholeness and safety.

Peck's construction of Rose, utterly fatigued by the challenge of housework, is a study in losing control in order to gain greater strength and self-worth; she stirs up trouble to challenge routines that are no longer tenable, and emotional and psychological barriers, which are inhibiting. Faced with a lack of domestic help as her remaining two servants leave to work in munitions, Rose thinks the hitherto unthinkable, that she will manage Laws House herself. The Castleburgh establishment has a view, which is exemplified by Rose's close friend, Linda, and even more extremely by Linda's mother-in-law, dubbed 'Grannie-Don't-Cha-See' (135).<sup>59</sup> Linda has a remarkable ability to disassociate from present reality and to cling to the past with fixed habits of mind:

<sup>56</sup> Alyson Brodie, 'Dirt and Development', in *Dirt: New Geographies of Cleanliness and Contamination*, Ben Campkin and Rosie Cox, eds (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), pp. 156–167 (p. 162).

<sup>57</sup> Douglas, *Purity*, p. xviii.

<sup>58</sup> Basil Bernstein, *Class Codes and Control* (London: Routledge, 1971), pp. 173–74.

<sup>59</sup> 'Grannie-Don't-Chah-See' is the elderly matriarch, Mrs Carr-Berwick. Utterly selfish and demanding, she is the embodiment of Edwardian privilege, a product of the hierarchy of Empire made funny, monstrous and unsafe.

The last war was a thing forgotten; ‘abroad’ a picturesque place made for the British to visit: pogroms or concentration camps were as unreal to her as the Spanish Inquisition [...] There is perhaps no more popular person than the convinced, if unreasoning, optimist in a war. (9)

Linda’s solution for Rose’s predicament is that she should move her family into a hotel rather than attempt to clean and cook for the family herself. Rose responds in some despair, asking Linda if there is ‘ever a more utterly useless and helpless and unproductive sort of women in the world than people like you or me?’(19). When Rose approaches the challenge of dirt and the unclean, disorderly house she is inept in the practice of rituals, which are a mystery to her in spite of being simultaneously alert to their symbolism. When she articulates the charged resonance of ‘house-bound’, she does so with relevance to her troubled daughter, Flora.

Speaking to Major Hosmer, the American Army doctor, Rose is explicit:

‘Do you remember the very first time we met how I told you that I was going to be house-bound and you laughed at the expression? Well, it’s true of poor Flora. She’s shut away into herself, and she doesn’t even undo the black-out as I do, and try to air and clean her house from attic to basement’. (218)

It is an expression of isolation and claustrophobia manifest in the image of the dark and unclean house and here embodied by Flora, a source of contamination and danger in the novel. Thus, housekeeping for Rose with its practices involving dirt, disorder, improvisation, contamination and reorganisation, involves a set of boundary-testing rituals, the schema for an understanding of challenging familial relations, whose members are placed at risk by the vast severance of war. Again, Rose is Peck’s self-reflective mouthpiece:

More and more it seemed to her that every human being was in some sense what she herself was literally, nowadays house-bound, tethered inexorably to a collection of all the extinct memories [...] with which they had grown up, bits of mental furniture which they dusted and inspected daily. And we all have our kitchens too [...] where we hash up our motives, and warm up our own opinions of ourselves, and hoard all the goods we’ve inherited [...] and there are barriers between us all. (180)

Rose’s figurative turn of phrase resonates with Douglas who notes that ‘in chasing dirt, in papering, decorating, tidying, we are not governed by anxiety to escape disease, but we are

positively reordering our environment, making it conform to an idea'.<sup>60</sup> In wartime, the need to make the environment conform to an idea of safety and security is the most challenging pursuit, while the narrative invites us to question, dust and inspect existing habits of mind. It also questions Jameson's ideal and is consistent with Rossetti's purpose of unlearning 'pleasant ways', which prefaces this novel of domestic transgression.<sup>61</sup>

The surface tension of the novel is concerned with Rose's battle with the physical dirt and disorder of Laws House, a building of formidable structure and aptly named. The old tower, which still stands after the bomb, the basement, the kitchen, the porch or threshold, the library, the garden and its walls are all to be inspected daily. Laws House is a charged place, representing a significant material presence in the novel and the boundary of Rose's knowledge and experience. Unlike her friend Linda, Rose is primed for anxiety and does not possess an 'unconscious gift of diffusing a sense of safety and happiness about her' regardless of news about the war. Instead, Rose's 'façade of equable calm' was 'stucco, and cracking at that.'(9).The metaphor conveys her close identification with the house: indeed, Rose *is* the house and as such, it begins to take shape as her closest enemy. She must challenge the existing order, in which she herself had been nurtured 'in security and luxury', by asking what is so 'special and sacred' about her class that she and others like her refuse to manage their own homes (6). She acknowledges that she must 'unlearn the pleasant ways' of conventional household management, which now seem taboo and the first risky step is to face that unlearning with an accusatory tone.<sup>62</sup> In questioning the point of housework, she makes the case for living with dirt in a time when so much more is at stake, and by arguing that 'it makes no difference to the war if our houses are clean and polished and shiny. Ought we to be

<sup>60</sup> Douglas, *Purity*, p. 3.

<sup>61</sup> Christina Rossetti, 'A Discovery', in *The Complete Poems*, ed. by Betty Flowers (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 738. The poem is a sonnet that concludes with the lines: 'I must unlearn the pleasant ways I went - Must learn another hope, another love - And sigh indeed for home in banishment.' The first of these lines is used by Peck as the epigram to *House-Bound*.

<sup>62</sup> Douglas: 'naming a risk amounts to an accusation' (*Purity*, p. xix).

house-proud in wartime, or isn't it more patriotic to be just reasonably dirty?''(54). Then, and with a different question, Rose tests her friend, Linda:

'Wouldn't hard work be a comfort? Won't it be nice to think one will be tired enough to sleep? Won't it be nice not to be able to go out to meals any more – for I'll be far too tired and dirty – and hear people grumbling about food and petrol restriction when our sons, our sons are dying to keep them safe'. (24)

The all-consuming physical and psychological labour, involved in reclassifying work and its boundaries within the domestic home, can provide a protection against anxiety and deflect thoughts of imminent catastrophe. Habits, old and new, confine the imagination and fix the gaze of the subject as Rose observes:

How did the aristocrats of the French Revolution laugh and trifle and play cards as they awaited the guillotine? [...] They just pursued the tenor of their lives because their habits, and the unconscious inability to envisage a change of habit, were too strong for them. (86)

'Empires might rock and kingdoms fall, but habits, it appeared, remained' and yet, Rose continues, 'how absurd and fettering were the chains of habit in a world of war.'(92). There is something safe and mechanical in the 'hard-set' purity of physical labours and the distraction of mind-numbing exhaustion. In this way, Rose clings to habit as a way of controlling anxiety, even as she is confronts her house and her body, transformed by darkness, visceral dirt and contamination.

Laws House is also the domain of the last remaining servants, Jessie and Catrine, although they too are about to leave Rose's employment, like so many girls who were 'streaming away from service into the services' to go into munitions, a euphemism for 'mostly nights out' (6). It is Jessie's opinion that Laws House is 'a just awfu' wee hole', because the 'sunk windows in the front seldom saw the light of day' and it 'must have been dungeons once' (28). It has no lifts and every meal has to be 'carried up the narrow winding stone stairs' from the kitchen to the family dining room. Catrine, on the other hand 'moaned over imaginary ghosts and blackbeetles' (28). Peck depicts an edifice in which, as Rose now sees, 'she and Stuart had been free of nine or ten rooms in the upper earth, while the three

women shared the exiguous darkness of the basement' (28). Sounds and smells do not cross this threshold, separating below ground and upper earth and the servants themselves cross the threshold only according to prescribed practice.

The reader is increasingly aware of architectural stratifications that correspond to light and dark, clean and unclean, circumscribed spaces of purity (unpolluted and safe) and danger, and where thresholds signify changes of status. Furthermore, the 'dirt' associated with the servants' work is somatic, for the body is also a model, which can stand for any bounded system seen here in Catrine's rough swollen hands and Jessie's dirty nails. In such a context, Clough's motto is strikingly ironic for Rose: 'Labour and labour alone, can add to the beauty of women' (35).<sup>63</sup> As she takes on more housework under the guidance of her only daily help, Mrs Childe, Rose's own body is transformed and judged. Mrs Childe watches her pupil with 'pity for her obvious fatigue, and tolerant contempt for her inefficiency', because she had 'no strength in her wrists' when using the Vim (193). Mrs Childe brings new orders to shut up the drawing room and use the downstairs parlour, which is 'nice and cosy for two' and because 'a coal fire's a nasty, old-fashioned dirty thing' (69). The stairs require 'intense activity' because 'you can't live on top of dirt, now, can you?'(72). After three hours of reconnaissance and strategy, Mrs Childe's appearance is 'as neat and immaculate as if she were going to a lunch party whereas her poor dishevelled mistress felt she would never be clean or tidy again' (73). When Rose finished a day's housework, 'she had to wash and scrub herself almost as hard as she scrubbed the saucepans' and in a letter to her son Tom using her characteristic, protective guise of comic exaggeration, she writes that the housework will be the death of her:

I think I am well on the way to becoming one of those old women who are found dead in filthy houses which no-one had entered for months, with a mattress stuffed with banknotes. (98)

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<sup>63</sup> Rose reflects that A. C. Clough was assistant to Florence Nightingale, 'whose nails were cleaned by disinfectant!' (35).

The house is by turns a sacred then a challenging and hostile terrain for Rose; and it threatens her by crushing body and soul, for the house ‘had the upper hand of her now beyond question’ (211). Conversely, but true to her name (as noble and pure, a trainee knight), Mrs Childe is a devoted overseer of the disordered territory – Rose’s body and the house. By association, she is ‘caretaker’ then ‘guide, philosopher and friend’ to Rose (201). However:

It was the house itself which appealed mutely to (her) for order and shining cleanliness. She had an artist’s passion, as it were, for shining utensils and spotless woods and speckled floors. (194)

Mrs Childe is a leader in her field, for she is ‘a Napoleon and Machiavelli’ and full of traditional ‘Scottish efficiency’ in her deployment of cleaning rituals that begin at the top and work down with no deviation (65). Even though the rooms on the top floor are not being used ‘you can’t let them go dirty’ for dirt must be banished even from unseen, uninhabited places (69). Initially, Rose embraces her ‘new vocation’ so that she ‘wondered if she could subdue (the house) to her own control’ (29). However, she decides that she has never in her life seen anything ‘as repulsive as a house in the early morning’ and this dislike borders on moral disgust (56). The house lore she acquires is driven by a ‘sweep-settle-dust’ pattern for each room, a repetitive cycle, which seems to generate more dirt than it removes. Modern appliances are beginning to appear, but neither the Hoover nor the electric cooker, aptly called ‘New World’, save labour in reality. In fact, the Hoover is a ‘wretched thing [which] seemed to drop out a loathsome gobbet of grey fluff more often than it picked up a crumb’ (58). As far as cooking bacon was concerned, Rose ‘was alarmed indeed at the unhealthy bluish tinge which the fat was taking – like some obscure disease!’ (60). Peck invokes the field of hygiene by using the language of disgust, contamination and disease; cooking smells, dirt and cold now permeate the house and are no longer contained in the basement as boundaries break down.

Some boundaries are depicted as inviolate and sacred in the novel: the three rooms at the top of the house are untouched, charged places encapsulating the individual histories of

the children. Now adults, they are the generation whose lives are affected most directly by the war and in these rooms they are both absent and in danger, but also safely intact and present, bounded by the narrative of each room. One is a shrine to the delicate, golden boy who is Rose's stepson, Mickie; one belongs to independent Tom, the peace-maker and one to the dark and difficult Flora, the problem child. The drawing room figures as 'that more neutral ground' and there is the library from which Rose rescued her husband Stuart's, papers, which she had put 'in that oak chest in the dining-room. It has a lead lining [...] so if anything's escaped (the bomb) that would have' (287).<sup>64</sup> After the bombing, the wreck of her home brings 'suddenly to her imagination the wreck of all the young beautiful bodies in the world' so that Rose makes the sentimental connection between the destruction of the house and of young lives (289). Her thought is prefigured by an earlier scene juxtaposed with the arrival of a telegraph containing news of the death of her beloved stepson, Mickie. Having just received the news, Rose arrives to read to the 'class of cripple children', keeping a promise made to Cousin Mary who has pressing war work:

She was horrified to discover a slow ugly distaste [...] for today it seemed suddenly so monstrous that every kind of skill and artifice was employed to keep these wrecks of humanity alive, while the world was pouring out its young and healthy and beautiful by the million to death. (269)

Such resentment illuminates just how much we revert to habitual classification to shore up our boundary walls and Rose's ugly rebellion carries her through a mechanical reading of Hans Anderson. The children, described as 'wrecks of humanity', create the energised margin in which Rose finds empathy and solidarity with those who suffer or who suffer loss. Similarly, she shifts from alienation to empathy for her troubled daughter. Flora is explicitly 'the stuff of which pioneer women are made' and is enthusiastically engaged in what, in Castleburgh, is considered real war work away from the home, elsewhere (252). Her

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<sup>64</sup> Stuart, Rose's husband, had a 'gypsy encampment of books by his vast desk and the terrain (was) sacred to him'; Rose 'pitched her tent' opposite (31).

adventurous spirit is not universally endorsed but is considered transgressive and risky, involving a dangerous contest of power. Again Douglas's conceptualised schema is apposite:

The danger which is risked by boundary transgression is power. Those vulnerable margins and those attacking forces which threaten to destroy good order represent the powers inhering in the cosmos.<sup>65</sup>

War enlivens Flora; it is a time in which 'she had found herself' and the freedom to break the boundaries of patience, humility and the tedium of her everyday house-bound existence (188).

Flora's fixation with the married man, the Polish Count Guy Poliaski, is a particular taboo; her friend, Miranda, names the taboo with shocking abuse, calling him a 'horrible, bullet-headed dago' while acknowledging that Flora must have fallen for him. Flora replies that 'his country has fallen for us!' a grandiose sentiment fusing her obsession with a conservative need for atonement (190). Flora seeks out danger, apparently denying risk to herself and is seen by the American Percy Hosmer as a heroic 'figure of Victory, waving her standard on the battlements' (241). To the American, Flora's nature consists of:

Primitive powers and emotions flung into an artificial state of society which gave it no scope [...] when the blitz fell upon Eastminster again and again she knew all the joys of battle, and she drove her ambulance furiously, broke into burning houses, dug by the side of men for the wounded, and carried them tenderly into safety. (189)

Her excitement and the thrill of the war zone is seen at home as a 'very subtle form of madness', recalling Jameson, who named that thrill as insane and unsafe.<sup>66</sup> Her presence in the familial home is depicted as a contamination but when the foul smell of escaping gas alerts Rose to Flora's suicide attempt, she saves her daughter from its toxic fumes (226). For Percy Hosmer, the American Army psychiatrist, the sight of Flora homeless and in the midst of danger is a powerful aphrodisiac: 'I saw your daughter in those days of danger, and I was swept off my feet [...] by her courage and compelling personality [...] I want to help her'(239). Hosmer is eventually and conventionally Flora's refuge and newly configured

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<sup>65</sup> Douglas, *Purity*, p. 199.

<sup>66</sup> Jameson, 'Courage', p. 14.

home, free from the confines of old, imperial thinking; to her he is, and Rose again uses the home-nation analogy:

‘From a new world, who’s had no ties of possession or heredity like us [...] you’re in a big sweep of open country, breathing fresh, clean air, instead of being huddled in a little room over a fire’. (130)

Rose’s husband Stuart has ‘grave doubts as to the safety of leaving a woman alone with so loose a thinker’ as Major Hosmer who is full of ‘psycho-rubbish’ in his view. As a prototype psycho-therapist and a ‘Born Helper’, Hosmer is someone who allows Rose to talk, an intimate spiritual ally and even a father confessor (174).<sup>67</sup> He understands the dangerous risks taken by men of the last war, who survived only to see their sons fighting once again for the good, safe home and nation. Rose wonders if he represents a ‘new generation of newer, clearer, purer morality or one which was certainly, in Grannie Carr-Berwick’s eyes, going straight to the dogs?’ – is he purity or danger? (246).

The house-bound woman is centralised in this novel of the domestic home front, brought in from the margins and depicted as a character capable of reclassifying the boundaries of safety in the home. The analogy between the daily practice of housework and habits of mind becomes increasingly meaningful and significant to Rose taking on a higher ambition and eventually a spiritual dimension:

When you said that an Englishman’s house was his castle, or that a woman was house-proud, you said it with self-satisfaction. But there could be no hope surely of any world of peace till everyone flung open all their doors and windows wide and came to know each other’s ways and views. (131)

Peck has taken her through a threshold of the danger of dirt, figured by dirt on the body and in the house, where self-cleaning and cleaning rituals become safety rituals for Rose. However, and this is a dimension not considered by anthropology, Rose transcends her personal challenges experiencing a spiritual affirmation of life in the midst of death and loss.

<sup>67</sup> After Mickie’s death, Rose’s son Tom feels strongly that he would ‘hate to be nothing but a stained glass window’ and that talking keeps a person alive and is a truer memorialisation (284). Safe grieving is the topic of Chapter 4.

In an article for *Woman's Journal* (September 1943), Storm Jameson later declared that 'we women must be there when they make the peace this time' and her words resonate with Peck's plea for tolerance and forgiveness, enacted in every ritual newly conceived to banish moral pollution.<sup>68</sup> It is during an old man's funeral service that Rose meditates on the notion that she 'never could have been a mystic or saintly Mary and now (she) can never be anything but a dense, inefficient sort of Martha' (105). She then hears the familiar words: 'And Jesus said unto Martha, I am the Resurrection and the Life' and is 'stabbed awake' with the thought that:

It was not the saintly Mary or the mystic disciple, but the busy, zealous housewife who had been thought worthy of those words which still arrest mourners of every creed, or no creed at all'. (105)

Facing personal loss, she finally identifies with the biblical Martha, a marginal figure chosen by Christ to receive the spiritual message of rebirth and resurrection. For Douglas, every society has its boundaries but she asserts that 'there is energy in its margins and unstructured areas' and she continues with a comment relevant to Rose and Martha, that in pressing against those boundaries 'no experience is too lowly to be taken up in ritual [...] the more personal and intimate the source of ritual symbolism, the more telling its message'.<sup>69</sup>

After the bombing of Laws House, Rose goes to look at her neglected garden and as spring flowers bloom 'triumphantly' she decides that 'here too, as in her books, was a beauty independent of fate and time which should surely be preserved in the world', resilient nature alongside cultural heritage (261). But it is Martha who embodies an affirmation of life with a female commitment to the place both austere and sacred; it was the women:

Who dealt so persistently with satisfying the simplest needs of life [who were] really in closer touch with spiritual truths. After all, it was in an occupied country, ground down beneath the heel of a world-wide empire, that women hurried, before men, to an

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<sup>68</sup> Storm Jameson, quoted in Waller and Vaughan-Rees, eds, *Women in Wartime: The Role of Women's Magazines 1939–1945* (London: Macdonald, 1987), p. 122.

<sup>69</sup> Douglas, *Purity*, p. 131.

empty tomb and that a woman first looked up from a rock-bound tomb to see Life vindicated for ever. (285)

Peck asserts the emotional survival of the woman in the home through messy, dirty and turbulent times by transgressing and redefining the boundaries between purity and danger. By 1951, in the midst of postwar austerity, the Festival of Britain sought to remake the home as an image of shiny cleanliness, in which the debris and contamination of the war would be safely swept away.<sup>70</sup> In the next novel to be discussed, survival is mapped away from home where one can easily lose one's bearings and returning home is a dangerous project. The need to protect the child refugees in Howard's care is conveyed in each tactical step he takes through the hostile terrain of occupied France.

## 2.2

### **Reaching Home in *Pied Piper* (1942) by Nevil Shute**

When Virgil led Dante down into the darkness there were many who tore at his garments and begged him to help them get back, back home.<sup>71</sup>

Every story is a travel story – a spatial practice.<sup>72</sup>

In his influential inter-disciplinary work, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), Michel de Certeau takes his key terms of 'strategy' and 'tactic' from the field of military action. His central idea is to situate both in 'everyday life' in order to explain our acts of 'talking, reading, moving about, shopping, cooking', and to describe the navigational and creative

<sup>70</sup> Rod Mengham, 'Anthropology at Home', in *Imagined Interiors: Representing the Domestic Interior since the Renaissance*, ed. by Jeremy Aynsley and Charlotte Grant (London: V&A, 2006), pp. 244–55.

<sup>71</sup> Lewis, 'Lance-Jack', p. 67.

<sup>72</sup> Certeau, *Everyday*, p. 115.

resistance we unconsciously deploy when thus engaged.<sup>73</sup> However, I wrest them back from the everyday and observe them in Shute's field of conflict, the contested terrain of *Pied Piper* (1942). Shute's central figure, John Stanley Howard must navigate a safe passage for the seven children accompanying him through occupied France to the safety (albeit provisional and figurative) of England. Howard is not a combatant; too old for this war, he is an English civilian who undertakes a fishing trip only to find himself unexpectedly in a war zone. His journey home is by means of commonplace travel (by train, bus, on foot) and he begins with the presumption that things will turn out well, as they usually do for the Englishman abroad. This finds expression in the confidence with which Howard tells his friends, the Cavanaghs, that their children 'will be quite safe with me', confident in the success of his goal – to get back to England (39).

I propose that in his undertaking, Howard is a Certeau-esque tactician, constantly on the move in order to stay out of harm's way and to reach home, which is figured as the coastline of England. Shute's narrative charts Howard's tactical agility, which develops incrementally as his personal safety and that of the children are jeopardised. Shute's textual practice is a vehicle, the transporting device of the narrative that provides a wartime testimony of civilian resistance and survival written on and by the land itself. A key device is the naming of real locations in their meticulous relation to one another (French towns, villages, railways, roads, the topography of the coastline), and the mapping of Howard's movements towards and through them. The discourse maintains a 'Kantian orientation', as described by Kate McLoughlin, in relation to the centring personality of Howard.<sup>74</sup> In this way the text itself practises both 'the identification of places and actualization of spaces'

<sup>73</sup> Certeau, *Everyday*, p. xix.

<sup>74</sup> Kate McLoughlin, *Authoring War: The Literary Representation of War from the Iliad to Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). McLoughlin relates Kant's theory of 'ultimate ground' to the American Civil War testimonies of Ambrose Bierce (pp. 93–94). Kant posits that terms such as right, left and beyond derive their meanings solely from the body's positioning and orientation.

experientially and through movement.<sup>75</sup> Finally, the section considers what is contained in the actualisation of narrative safe home in terms of a mythologised England and America; both are safe destinations, textually constructed from cultural knowledge and metonymic signification. Both nations, one embattled and one at peace, embody safe home; this is a topic in its own right supported by studies in cultural geography, landscape and nationhood and the comment here will be, of necessity, highly selective viewed through the lens of a single novel and the unique orientation of its author.

Shute was a successful aeronautical engineer who became one of the best-selling novelists of his generation. His autobiography up to 1938 is titled *Slide-Rule* and the second part, which was never written, was to be called *Set Square*; both are named after instruments of precision that Shute would have used routinely as an engineer. In *Parallel Motion: A Biography of Nevil Shute Norway* (2011) John Anderson notes that even at the height of his popularity, Shute ‘regarded himself more as an engineer who wrote novels than as a novelist in his own right’.<sup>76</sup> His long and distinguished career as an engineer developed Shute’s strengths of planning and design, mathematical calculation and testing; practical problem-solving was a skill and a talent from early on and Shute’s experience of twenty years is embedded in the plot and characterisation of *Pied Piper*. After the evacuation of Dunkirk in 1940 and with invasion perceived as real and imminent, Shute made arrangements for his wife Frances and their small daughters to go to Canada. Anderson notes that Shute was enacting the plan he had written into his pre-war novel, *What Happened to the Corbetts* (1938) but the idea of North America as a safe haven and new home for his family, should England fall while he himself served in the Navy, is also present in *Pied Piper*.<sup>77</sup> In the novel, Howard dismisses the safety of America as Shute explores a less rational, more affecting and

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<sup>75</sup> Certeau, *Everyday*, p. 118.

<sup>76</sup> John Anderson, *Parallel Motion: A Biography of Nevil Shute Norway* (New York: The Paper Tiger, 2011), p. 1.

<sup>77</sup> Anderson, *Parallel*, p. 128.

patriotic longing for home. News of Dunkirk reaches Howard on holiday in France and ‘stirred him’ as nothing else had done so that for the first time since the start of his trip:

He began to feel a desire to return to England. He knew that if he went there would be nothing for him to do, but he wanted to be back. He wanted to be in the thick of things again, seeing the British uniforms in the streets, sharing the tension and the anxiety. (31)

Before the war, Howard had spent some time in America with his daughter and her family whom he loved but ‘not all these motives were sufficient to induce him to exchange the comfort and security of England grappling in battle to the death for the strange discomforts of the land that was at peace’ (12). This loyalty to home and nation, standing shoulder to shoulder with his fellow Englishmen in psychological if not practical solidarity, is also heartfelt for ‘he wanted very much to be in England, in a scene of greater action’ (40). Howard reasons that ‘an old soldier should be in his own country in these times’ (32) and even though the Cavanaghs are close to neutral Switzerland, returning their children home to embattled England is what they want Howard to do because in war ‘children should stay quiet in their own country’ (41). The novel is Shute’s expression of the power of a dedicated will and the human capacity for ingenious tactics to save the children and by metonymic suggestion, the nation; Howard effectively rehomes the children who represent Europe’s orphans in America. For many readers, the novel is a fantasy of rescue mapping the return of Howard and his charges to freedom and safety at home, suggestive of the grander narrative of European emigration to America.

Shute’s familiarity with calculation and planning together with his engineering orientation suggest the work of Certeau, in his exploration of strategy as a spatial practice of control enclosed by the purview of power and the in-group. However, Howard, Shute’s traveller is not a strategist but a tactician who is powerless as an Englishman in occupied France and unaware of just how vulnerable his position has become. Yet, he is perceived by the children, by himself and in my own reading, to be the engineer of safety and control, thereby problematising Certeau’s proposition of the weak tactician. As a reader, I share in the

novel's positive outlook, with its commitment to safe home and as an exercise, relevant in war and peace, in not being cynical.

In Certeau, the tactic is qualitatively different from the strategy (not a sub-set of it); lacking power, the tactician makes allies of trickery, subterfuge, disguise and sleight-of-hand or *legerdemain*. In his terms, a tactic is:

An art of the weak [...] a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus [...] Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organised by the law of a foreign power. It does not have the means to *keep to itself* [...] it is a manoeuvre 'within the enemy's field of vision' as von Bulow puts it and within enemy territory.<sup>78</sup>

So, Certeau draws on the semantic field of military action ('foreign power', 'enemy territory' and elsewhere, the term '*coup*') as a contest between unequal and opposing powers. Consequently, this last point is particularly apposite to *Pied Piper* in which the protagonist, Howard becomes a tactician employing the 'art of the weak' as he passes dangerously into enemy-held territory, where 'the net of circumstances was closing in on him, driving him where he did not want to go' (65). Certeau also associates the tactic with the Greeks' *metis*, described by Marcel Détienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant as:

A form of intelligence that is always 'immersed in practice' and which combines 'flair, sagacity, foresight, intellectual flexibility, deception, resourcefulness, vigilant watchfulness, a sense for opportunities, diverse sorts of cleverness and a great deal of acquired experience'.<sup>79</sup>

Howard is a practitioner of these arts and his journey suggests further alignment with the Greeks since Odysseus himself is the master of opportunism, the man of twists and turns. However, for Certeau, *metis* is neither epic nor heroic but is 'close to everyday tactics through its sleights of hand, its cleverness and its strategems and through the spectrum of behaviours included from know how to trickiness'.<sup>80</sup> Shute depicts Howard as the embodiment of the *metis* of ordinary life, an intelligent tactician who recalibrates risk and danger every step of

<sup>78</sup> Certeau, *Everyday*, p. 37.

<sup>79</sup> Marcel Détienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, quoted in Certeau, *Everyday*, p. 81.

<sup>80</sup> Certeau, *Everyday*, p. 81.

the way, so that safety is contingent on a constantly changing set of circumstances, both expected and unexpected.

John Stanley Howard has strong appeal as an Englishman abroad with a declared ‘safe with me’ guarantee and reliance on personal ‘know-how’ and experience. He is a man whose anxiety is lifted once his fishing rods are in safekeeping and who carries his trusted *Baedeker*, the better to navigate a perilous route through a terrain increasingly alien and incomprehensible, since it is ‘organised by the law of a foreign power’ in Certeau’s terms. Towards the end of the journey, when he is captured and his very identity is questioned, ‘Howard put down his British passport [...] in the manner of a man who plays the last card of a losing hand’ (246). The German officer with the upper hand is faintly amused by the hopeful gesture, “‘So!’” he said, “*Engländer, Winston Churchill*” mocking the nation and its wartime leader (246).

However, to begin with Howard is oblivious to both strategy and tactic.<sup>81</sup> With his veteran’s knowledge of the last war, he surmises that ‘the cockpit of Europe would take the shock of the fighting’, whittling his hazel twig ‘in peace’ (30). He feels ‘uncommonly well’ because he has a clear task ahead of him but his purview is limited, placing him at a disadvantage. As Howard leaves Sainte-Claude with the children, Shute, using his authorial privileged field of vision, tells us ‘that was the morning on which Italy declared war on the Allies, and the Germans crossed the Seine to the north of Paris’, a fact that sits in the narrative like an unexploded device (41). Shute’s characterisation of Howard is knowingly conflicted: he is a ‘subject of will’ but is displaced and weakened by travelling through an unknown, occupied territory that neither respects his will nor recognises his status. As he reassesses and corrects his plans for the journey beyond Dijon, he uses observations of his immediate

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<sup>81</sup> As an experienced fisherman, Howard is familiar with strategy and yet he does not place the latest news within that field of vision for ‘he was no great strategist and did not realise all that was involved’ (31). Yet ‘strategy’ is the single word on which the talk between the two men turns, from fishing to war.

surroundings (limited), listens to rumours and hearsay about the wider circumstances (unreliable) and relies on his ‘know-how’, patience and experience. It is what we do in our everyday lives, but with much less at stake. Howard learns how to be an exemplary tactician as he navigates a path for the children away from the sites of menace and trauma to safety, albeit provisional. He steers a course calculated to protect them from knowledge of what has been and what might be; for example, away from the grim ‘parade of death’ on the road to Montargis (95). In addition, he functions as a ‘central and centring personality’, the Kantian orientation noted by McLoughlin that ‘not only orders the terrain in terms of spatial perception but also gives it cognitive and emotional value’.<sup>82</sup> Above all, Howard is the eponymous figure of the title, fulfilling a role that invokes the traditional tactician from fairy tale, the Pied Piper, who embodies fear and mystery surrounding the loss of children.<sup>83</sup>

It is significant that Howard is weakened as a centring personality by his age; he is seventy and frequently referred to as an old man. During episodes which shape his journey, he is variously read as foolish, deaf, anti-German, an ally of France, a traitor to France, an English spy, a refugee and as a consequence of his age, physically weak with fatigue. Thus, he is ‘pied’ in his patterning of safety and risk, a mottled personality. Once news of the German advance reaches him, Howard begins to find his idleness oppressive and in the remote village of Cidoton, he feels ill-at-ease. His age had excluded him from active service – ‘he hadn’t been able to get a job to do in the war [...] they wouldn’t have him in anything’ (10). We note that his guardianship of the Cavanagh children, Ronnie and Sheila, gives him a

<sup>82</sup> McLoughlin, *Authoring*, p. 94.

<sup>83</sup> The Pied Piper of Hamelin is a figure from Germanic folklore. Marina Warner dates the tale to 1240 when the town of Hamelin was suffering from a plague of rats. In the tale, a mysterious minstrel appears, dressed in motley and playing a pipe with which he charms away the rats. When he returns to claim his fee, he is refused and so he plays his pipe again. This time, the children dance in his wake and he leads them to a mountain ‘which closed over them’. In Warner’s account, ‘only two were left to report what had taken place’, one blind and one lame, unable to keep up with the other children. Marina Warner, *No Go the Bogeyman: Scaring, Lulling and Making Mock* (London: Vintage, 2000), Introduction (Kindle edition).

dutiful, pleasurable sense of purpose and he reassures himself by saying ‘I think their mother has decided wisely’ (41).

Opening the novel, the unnamed narrator-listener comments sympathetically to the porter, as he follows Howard into the London club that is the site of the storytelling, by observing that ‘this bloody war is hard on men of his age’ (2). Howard initially strikes the narrator as a somewhat ‘Blimpish’ figure, frustrated by falling standards and interpreting the lack of attention to details in his physical environment as a matter of life and death, commenting ‘I don’t want to die on a doormat. And I don’t want to die in a lavatory either’ (1). Distinctly unlike Colonel Blimp, Howard avoids talk of the war and eschews any suggestion of a reactionary military caste, preferring reminiscences of cricket and fishing.<sup>84</sup> Beneath Howard’s equable manner, his life is dominated by personal loss and deepened by suppressed grief for his son John, a pilot who has been killed in action; he is not consoled by the memory of the last time spent with his son in the Jura region of Eastern France, yet is drawn to return. In France, grief makes him insular and situationally unaware of the consequences of military developments. Later, approaching the French coast and with the promise of escape across the Channel to safety, the resistance figure, Aristide, provides Howard with the stained clothing necessary for anonymity. In disguise as a French peasant, he wears ‘a coarse, stained flannel shirt, a pair of torn blue cotton trousers, a dirty canvas pullover that had once been rusty pink in colour and a black, floppy Breton casque’ (231). His drab and torn rags are an inversion of the colourful motley of the fairy tale Pied Piper, emphasising the dirty business of living in hiding, of capture, interrogation and escape and where his status as a British subject is no guarantee of safety. As Howard, the sailor, Fouquet and the children approach the English coast by boat, they are seen as refugees or migrants, their boat indistinguishable from the other small vessels waiting at the quay ‘full of an

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<sup>84</sup> *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, dir. by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger (Independent Producers Ltd, 1943), Carlton DVD. Colonel Blimp had been created as a cartoon character in 1934 by David Low, to satirise the kind of pig-headed officers, relics of the First World War, who were stuck in the past.

assortment of mixed nationalities, clambering ashore and into England', which is their place of sanctuary if not sustainable safety (300).

As the narrative and his journey progress, Howard becomes tactically agile and as Certeau maintains, the tactician is prepared to take advantage of unpredictable events, a bold opportunist. Certeau argues that an opportunity is created anew and seized repeatedly because it cannot be 'banked' and that 'whatever it wins it does not keep' so that the group's progress towards England and home is always precarious, drawing on meagre resources.<sup>85</sup> The tactician must master the 'art of making do' (*bricolage*), which highlights the quality of safety as contingent on current, constantly changing conditions; Howard's growing tactical awareness enables him to recalibrate and assess risk or to weigh losses and acquisitions. Some possessions are lost (Rose's precious new coat and hat) while others are shed through expediency (blankets) and some treasures are hidden for safekeeping (fishing rods, whistles, chocolate). Howard judges that 'the loss of a suitcase was not an unmixed disaster for a man with a weak heart in time of war' (54). One acquisition is a perambulator, 'a filthy object still and grossly expensive, but it solved a great many of his problems', becoming a vehicle for their few possessions or for a young child, should it come to that (100). His journey begins with the two Cavanagh children (Ronnie and Sheila) but he acquires five more (*La petite Rose*, Pierre, the silent child, Willem, the Dutch boy, the Jewish boy, Marjan and the German girl, Anna). Other acquisitions are the wooden whistles that Howard the piper makes by hand from hazel branches and which distract the children. In their minds, 'a whistle was the panacea for all ills, the cure for diseases of the spirit' (102). He has, it seems, the power to heal with his safe hands and to dispel anxiety and the dis-ease of their plight.

Tactics are served in turn by the practice of textual juxtaposition and by Shute's use of the conditional to convey the shifting circumstances of possibility, probability, obligation

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<sup>85</sup> Certeau, *Everyday*, p. xix.

and opportunity. As the group (here comprised of Howard and four children) makes its way to Montargis on foot, Howard's tactical choices are few. The strange pied group is viewed with suspicion by two women alone in a nearby farm but they are given soup; Howard pays for shelter for the night in a hayloft, where he reflects 'here was a pretty kettle of fish, indeed. It had been a mistake ever to have left Joigny, but it had not seemed so at the time. He should have gone straight back to Dijon' (108). Shute's modal verb 'should' have gone back with its implied self-recrimination gives way to the reassurance of 'could hardly get past Paris' (the German Army) and subsequently, his forward planning expressed by 'would' (*would* reach Montargis, *would* hand over the boy in grey, *would* be a bus to Pithiviers). Such weighing up of possibilities in his mind prevents sleep as Howard is only too aware of the provisional nature of the journey ahead. And there are other complications compromising their safety: the Jewish boy, Marjan (the sixth child to join the group) must conceal his hatred of the Germans who have killed his mother because, as Howard explains, there are conditions which must be met:

I do not know *if* I shall take you [...] we *may* meet Germans on the way from this place to the coast; we *may* have to mix with them, eat at their canteens perhaps. *If* you show that you hate them, they *may* arrest us all. I do not know *if* it is safe to take you, *if* it is fair to Rose and Ronnie and Sheila and Willem and to little Pierre. (228, *my italics*)

This moment prefigures a later reference to its being unsafe to take vengeful Marjan to America, where there will be a levelling of the homeless and the displaced from many nations, judged only by their willingness to make a new start.<sup>86</sup> Howard is now an able tactician asserting himself as the place from which threats can be managed using concealment, disguise and deception – whatever it takes to advance their progress towards England and to protect them on the journey. Tactically, it reveals Howard's foresight in

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<sup>86</sup> The last child to join Howard's group is Anna, the niece of the German Major Diessen; the Nazi executioner seizes an opportunity to save a child of the family.

visualising the risky consequences of Marjan's hatred and the old man's sagacity in confronting the boy with this dilemma.

Shute's construct of the topography of Northern France is textually detailed and accurate; for Howard and his group, it is also a territory of unbounded hostility. He is aware that an opportunity missed or the potential for exposure should one of the children speak in English could be catastrophic. Just as we understood that the control of dirt in the house and on the body engenders thoughts of safety so Howard's tactical manoeuvres allow critical if small measures of safety, negotiating risk and heading off danger by deploying diverse tactics. With each town or village, new bearings of safety are taken: each place is identified by name, a distinct location and configuration of positions that has its exact correspondence illustrated by the maps of free and occupied regions. Figures 1 and 2 below represent two stages of Howard's journey during which sympathetic and knowledgeable French nationals sometimes assist. The Resistance worker, Arvers explains that:

Lannilis is full of Germans. That is four miles from the coast, and the places on the coast itself, L'Abervrach and Portsall and places of that sort, are very lightly held or even not occupied at all. (229)

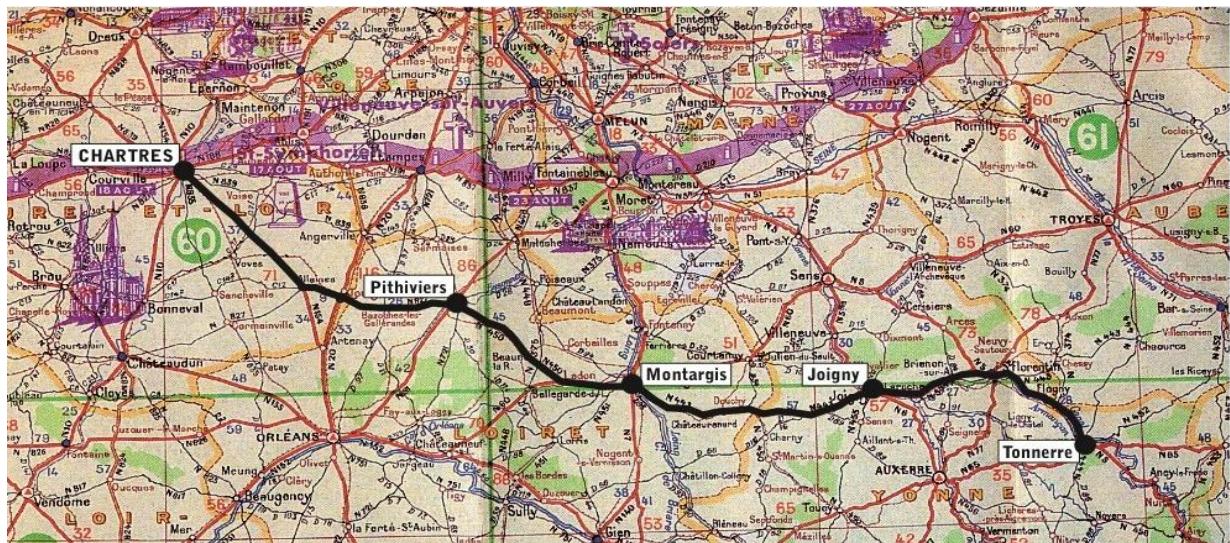


Fig.1: Howard's direction of travel towards Chartres. The shaded band represents the southern extent of Nazi-occupied France.

Source: Michelin Map 105, 'La Voie de la Liberte', reprinted from the 1947 map of 1944–45.

Where crowds gather at a train station, Howard's group is almost invisible, affording a certain safety in the midst of a *mélée*. Certeau finds the train itself a compelling locus of both stillness and high speed transportation; he calls the carriage a 'module of imprisonment' incarcerating the traveller who is still and in motion simultaneously.<sup>87</sup> The window of the carriage or porthole is the 'transparent caesura' allowing the passenger to view, from a safe vantage point, the immobile landscape speeding past. Certeau's conceptualised account of train travel is of some value here, although Shute's interest is in how Howard navigates disruption and deploys his knowledge in the service of safety. In contrast to Certeau's rationalised cell, the train that Howard and the three children board at Dijon is disorderly, the station a place of great confusion. With Howard as the incarcerated passenger, Shute takes his gaze through the 'transparent caesura' of the carriage window to register a disturbing juxtaposition. From Tonnerre to Joigny the train moves slowly stopping for long periods and:

During one of these pauses, a large flight of aeroplanes passed by the window, flying very high; the old man was shocked to hear the noise of gunfire, and to see a few white puffs of smoke burst in the cloudless sky far, far below them. (82)

The pilot and air gunner in the plane occupy a 'more abstract' position, a place paradoxically separated from the landscape, viewed from which to target with tactical determination those on the ground; it represents a moment freighted with imminent catastrophe in the relation between the powerful and the non-powerful during that charged 'pause'. Howard's upward gaze with strained eyes takes us through the inert porthole, the safety frame that distances and protects. He sinks back into his seat 'full of doubts and fears'; the moment anticipates the attack on the road when the plane flies so low over the exposed group that Howard can see the face of the air gunner in the rear cockpit 'laughing as he fired' (90). The space between them at this moment is both intimate and lethal and in such proximity to the enemy, home seems very far away.

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<sup>87</sup> Certeau, *Everyday*, p. 111.

In contrast, the empty platform at Joigny is ‘unnatural, ominous’ with all trains apparently going away from Paris and Howard reads this emptiness with focused attention as a sign that the capital may already be occupied. The train goes no further than Joigny, where everyone has to disembark and Howard must revise and make do (84). On the crowded bus to Montargis, the vehicle is barely holding its ground on the damaged French roads and the space surrounding the vehicle is fully represented with mimetic realism; thousands of French nationals are devising their own tactics:

The road was full of traffic, all heading to the west. Old battered motor cars, lorries, mule carts, donkey-carts, all were loaded to disintegration point with people making for Montargis. These wound in and out among the crowds of people pushing hand-carts, perambulators, wheelbarrows even, all loaded with their goods. It was incredible to Howard; it seemed as though the whole countryside were in flight before the armies. The women working in the fields looked up from time to time in pauses of their work to stare at the strange cavalcade upon the highway [...] the work in hand was more important than the strange tides that flowed upon the road. (87)

When the bus finally breaks down with a flat tyre, Howard’s registers the unfamiliar and unsettling terrain. As far as he can see the road is ‘thronged with vehicles, all moving the same way [...] a thing he had never seen before, a population in migration’ (88). It is a space orientated by him, shaped by his gaze and actuated as a flight from danger on a vast scale.

Counter-intuitively, Howard decides to walk into German-held Angerville ‘to disaster, to internment, probably to his death’ (136). However, his vigilance and trickery protect them all with an urgency of focus and fear that lends ‘speed to the old man’s thoughts’ (145). In particular, he decides to conceal his own nationality, since it is now unsafe to be English (he is now ‘Norwegian’) and that of the children who constitute a risk in their own right. Rose spots ‘naughty’ Ronnie oblivious to the danger, ‘his little head just sticking out of a steel hatch at the top of the gun-turret as he chattered eagerly to the German soldier with him [...] it was a pretty little picture of fraternisation’ (147). Nothing and no-one must ‘impel him to break into English’, which would be an instant betrayal of them all. ‘He must be got away immediately’, thinks Howard, alert and vigilant.

Through the spatial practices employed in and represented by the narrative, the author and his protagonist ‘impose discursive order on the chaos of conflict’.<sup>88</sup> And yet throughout, Howard embodies with total clarity the goal of the returning soldier, of the refugee and the dispossessed – to reach the safe destinations of England or America, or put another way ‘to get these children out of Europe’ (229). An affecting example of the power of England as ‘home’ occurs towards the end of the novel, during Howard’s meeting with the resistance figure Charenton. Facing execution, the young man asks one thing of Howard, one gesture which would not endanger the old man:

‘There’s a place up the river that we used to walk to - a pub by a weir pool, a very old grey stone house beside a little bridge. There is the sound of running water all the time, and fish swimming in the clear pool, and flowers, flowers everywhere [...] Go there and drink a pint for me’. (266)

The young man’s memory of a sensory idyll situated close to Oriel, his Oxford college and his request that recalls Christ’s ‘do this in remembrance of me’, express his allegiance and attachment to his particular idea of England.



Fig.2: From Rennes to L'Aber-Wrac for a safe passage across the English Channel.

<sup>88</sup> McLoughlin, *Authoring*, p. 7.

After the journey by train, full of ‘fears and subterfuges’ from Chartres to Rennes, the group travels to the far west to avoid regions heavily occupied by the German Army. They are apprehended in an *estaminet* within sight of the sea and the quai at L’Aber-Wrac. Source: Michelin Map 150 as above.

The German officer, Major Diessen is secretly listening to the conversation of the two prisoners. It is almost sacrilegious that Diessen thinks Charenton’s request is a coded message of espionage rather than the gesture of remembrance and transcendent connection between a man and the land that has shaped him. Howard is made to witness the young man’s execution, standing next to Diessen at the window above the walled garden where the shooting takes place – this too is sacrilegious. The garden is a barrier against the bestial, a walled sanctuary, which is represented here as the site of enemy brutality and blindness to the principle of a greater good. Diessen assumes the cloak of Pontius Pilate with modern mind games added when he tells Howard ‘I did not want to kill him [...] you left me with no other course’ (274). Shute’s chosen place for Charenton’s sacrifice is a garden of mature fruit trees, which heightens our sense of outrage; Howard argues for his reprieve tactically and beyond the immediate horizon, saying ‘a man like that should be allowed to live, to work for the world when this is all over’(270). Charenton’s death is a loss to all humanity and it is a moment when Howard’s field of vision extends beyond the present conflict to the world that the children will inherit ‘when this is all over’– tactical intelligence with compassion will be needed in the service of a safer world (229).

As they approach the ‘thin blue line of land’ that is England, Howard has already decided that this homeland is not their final destination. He resolves to send the children to America and indeed they all go together, all seven. America is figured as a nation willing to open its doors to those from all nations who are made homeless or orphaned by the war in Europe. America is compassionate nation, he reflects and ‘they are a generous people [...] there would be many people in America willing to provide for them. Americans are like that.’ (212). This group of English, French, Dutch and German exiles will be welcomed and sheltered – of that, Howard asserts, there is no doubt. When the group is finally in the boat

with Fouquet the young fisherman heading north across the English Channel, the boy Pierre can only think of America; Fouquet is teaching him how to be a helmsman, the better to steer his way to the safe land of peace and plenty:

‘To the right’ he says, ‘and look always at your star [...] that is the way to America, under those stars. There is so much food there that you can give some to a dog and have him for your friend’. (298)

Shute’s novel reflects supreme confidence in ‘the art of the weak’; the tactical intelligence deployed by Howard makes him an incarnation of David against representatives of the occupying Goliath presence of the German Army. It is a confidence that the safety of home and nation can survive against considerable odds – an uplifting story of survival conveying that anything is possible when intelligence and strength of will combine. Howard, a quietly heroic and pied piper, takes charge of the children who may lose everything precious to them (including their lives), bringing them to temporary safety in England, then on to America where they can begin again in a different, but safer home.

The final section of this chapter considers a novel of dramatic contrast to Shute’s positivity, one that challenges the reader’s equilibrium with its darkly comic tone; home exists in the thoughts and dreams of Hamilton’s protagonist in *Hangover Square* as a fantasy of rescue that entraps him by treachery and betrayal.

### **2.3 A Fantasy of ‘utter safety’: *Hangover Square* (1941) by Patrick Hamilton**

Maidenhead! Tonight! Peace! A thrill ran through him such as he had never quite felt before. Maidenhead tonight - away from everything-the whole bloody thing which had been going on too bloody long! Maidenhead, peace, the river, an inn, a quiet glass of beer, and safety, utter safety... (183)

George Harvey Bone, Hamilton’s protagonist and the subject of this daydream, yearns for the place that in his mind always equates to ‘peace’ and ‘safety’. Even the *idea* of getting to

Maidenhead causes in him a physical sensation, thrilling him as he conjures an image of return to the bliss of childhood, a place of safety that is the object of his longing and belonging. Maidenhead is Bone's fantasy of escape from 'the whole bloody thing', which takes him from 'darkest Earl's Court' to Brighton and back, in thwarted pursuit of 'utter safety' and release from his fatal addiction, intimacy with Netta Longdon. Bone is fixated on Netta; she is his dangerous object of desire so that he is held in thrall by her beauty and her sexual aura, masking all that is treacherous and sordid in the state of England. Bone is her flatterer and appeaser, before becoming her killer.

Bone's relationship with Netta is conflicted and tortuous and I will return to her and to her close association in the novel with the net of fascism. He variously defines himself in Netta's terms as a child, a ghost, 'the stooge, the silly hanger-on, the errand-boy of her set' and an outsider who is frequently 'left out in the cold' (117). Bone is at best an appendage to Netta and the Earl's Court set; he is also a wayfarer and a wanderer, rootless and homeless. Indeed, the notion of true home is lodged in his imagination as an asexual daydream of Maidenhead, pure and unsullied (the name is after all a synonym for virginity), an illusory place of peace and safety with the fragile link to a brief but blissful time spent with his now dead sister, Ellen. In this section, I argue that Bone's predicament is comparable to the alienation of the exile who must seek a replacement for lost home to compensate for feelings of rootlessness. I will discuss the significance of rootlessness, exile and yearning for safety, synonymous with home in *Hangover Square*, with reference to Edward W. Said's essay 'Reflections on Exile'. In this work, Said establishes the state of exile as the 'unhealable rift' created when an individual is excluded from his or her native place, the rift between 'the self and its true home' with the consequent 'sorrow of estrangement'.<sup>89</sup> The exile (both voluntary and involuntary) feels profoundly out of place and is consequently driven by the ambitious, compensating and safety-inducing fantasies of being sheltered anew or of returning home,

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<sup>89</sup> Said, 'Reflections', p. 173.

literally and metaphorically. This reading of Hamilton's novel also returns to Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* and his exploration of home, which shapes human memories and dreams; his safety nests and nets of real and imagined existence signify the ambiguity of home (sheltering or claustrophobic) and more broadly, the endeavours of the authors whose narrative space can itself represent a safe locus.

Said elucidates the conditions of exile, in fact and in literature, by identifying a 'new set of affiliations' and compensating loyalties, which the exile substitutes for 'true home' in his 'urgent need to reconstitute' his broken, bifurcated life.<sup>90</sup> Thus, Bone in his state of profound alienation even from within the locale of London's Earl's Court that he inhabits, can be read as exiled. As Said asserts 'exile is a solitude experienced outside the group'; he maintains that it is 'a jealous state' where '*nothing* is secure'.<sup>91</sup> It is also and this is Bone's existence 'the perilous territory of not-belonging'.<sup>92</sup> For Bone is excluded from the society and milieu to which he is superficially attached and in restitution for his loss, he conjures the self-affirming dream, which rewards him with feelings of wellbeing, happiness and safety. He is a figure of inconsolable longing in which his safety and his peace of mind will only be found in a construct of the imagination, the dream of Maidenhead – his idiosyncratic safety net. But Hamilton's narrative is one of profound disillusionment and cynicism, a tragedy of its time; Bone's compensatory actions are solipsistic and the risks too high. His plans end in violence, wherein the fantasy of escape cannot be upheld, even (or especially) in Bone's fractured consciousness.

*Hangover Square* is widely discussed as a narrative of national jeopardy framing Bone's personal crisis. The story begins on Christmas Day, 1938 and ends with the declaration of war on 3 September 1939, a precisely-staged plot that runs parallel to the tense

<sup>90</sup> Said, 'Reflections', p. 177.

<sup>91</sup> Said, 'Reflections', p. 178.

<sup>92</sup> Said, 'Reflections', p. 177.

period after the Munich Agreement up to the outbreak of war, full of premonition and anxiety but commingled with Hamilton's benefit of hindsight, his knowledge of the waiting, the boredom and the bombing raids with their potential to destroy homes.<sup>93</sup> In 1939, Hamilton himself was living in Henley-on-Thames, in 'cloistered calm' with his wife Lois but was travelling frequently into London where, as Andrew Sinclair has noted, 'artistic London coalesced round the pubs and drinking clubs of Fitzrovia, Soho and Chelsea [...] a metropolitan rootlessness of culture'.<sup>94</sup> In London, Hamilton plunged himself back into the 'rackete world of literary and drinking London that he loved' with the seductive 'old call of the lodging house'.<sup>95</sup> Nigel Jones, Hamilton's biographer, records that in July, 1939 the novelist described the tense lull as an 'incessant air of crisis' because, like Green's firemen, 'one (was) just waiting from weekend to weekend for something to happen'.<sup>96</sup> In January, 1941, when the air raids had begun, Hamilton reported a visit to London to his brother, Bruce:

I went up to the front line [...] last week, and was made a little sick by the wreckage - Oxford Street Lewis' gone, Peter Robinson with huge chunks of white pillars lying in Oxford Circus (as though Samson had been having a go at it).<sup>97</sup>

His casual reference to Samson echoes Hamilton's chapter inter-titles for *Hangover Square*; each one begins with a quotation from Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, pointedly, ironically, referencing the figure of a strong blind man, living in exile and betrayed by a woman who slays his tormentors and kills himself in a final act of despair, revenge and retribution. Bone's personal war ends the novel with what Hamilton calls 'his crude epitaph', the elliptical headlines of a sensational daily:

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SLAYS TWO  
FOUND GASSED

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<sup>93</sup> The Munich Agreement of 30 September 1938 was a settlement reached by Germany, Great Britain, France and Italy that permitted the German annexation of Sudetenland in western Czechoslovakia. It was seen by many as a betrayal of Czechoslovakia.

<sup>94</sup> Andrew Sinclair, *War Like a Wasp: The Lost Decade of the Forties* (London: Faber, 2009), p. 286.

<sup>95</sup> Sinclair, *Wasp*, p. 286.

<sup>96</sup> Nigel Jones, *Through a Glass Darkly: The Life of Patrick Hamilton* (London: Black Spring Press, 1991/2008), p. 235.

<sup>97</sup> Jones, *Glass*, p. 260.

## THINKS OF CAT (281)

Hamilton prefaces this moment of black comedy with Bone's inner vision, real to him, of perfect peace and 'cloistered calm', generated by thoughts of Ellen, in which dying is like returning home:

Was like that time, years and years ago, when he was a little boy before he went to school, when he had that operation for adenoids, and his sister Ellen was allowed in to hold his hand [...] He put out his hand to see if Ellen's hand was still there. Yes, he felt it there – amidst all the whirls and tunnels and shafts. 'All right,' she said, as she said in those old days. 'It's all right. Don't be frightened, George. It's all right'. (279)

Sinclair sees Hamilton as an 'alcoholic genius' who depicts Fitzrovia as the 'no man's land of the homeless and the opportunist'.<sup>98</sup> And according to J.B. Priestley, Hamilton has 'a suspicion of society from which its chief characters are exiled. It is a deep feeling that there are no real homes for his homeless people to discover'.<sup>99</sup> What links these observations is the frequency with which the image of the estranged writer and his rootless protagonists occur, an apt critical frame for *Hangover Square*. Elsewhere, Gill Plain finds the novel 'quasi-allegorical [...] a conflation of death and desire'; she also finds its narrative voice characterised by a 'pervasive misogyny', alluding especially to Hamilton's monstrous creation, Netta.<sup>100</sup> The novel is the 'most complexly problematic' of the works that engage with what Leo Mellor has designated 'the prolonged 1939'.<sup>101</sup> He notes its nihilism, for there is no redemptive self-knowledge for George Harvey Bone and his recourse to a utopian ideal fails to prevent him from descent into the circles of hell, which is his fate. Although the novel was written in retrospect, Mellor also finds its political parallels with the British mood and events of 1938–1939 neatly implied.<sup>102</sup> Thus, Bone's long disgrace, which is the trajectory of

<sup>98</sup> Sinclair, *Wasp*, p. 241.

<sup>99</sup> J. B. Priestley, Introduction to the Penguin edition of *Hangover Square*, p. 9.

<sup>100</sup> Gill Plain, *Literature of the 1940s: War, Postwar and 'Peace'* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), pp. 83–84.

<sup>101</sup> Leo Mellor, *Reading the Ruins: Modernism, Bombsites and British Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 40.

<sup>102</sup> Bone commits his double murder of the 'fascists' Netta and Peter at the exact moment appeasement ends, war is declared and announced on the radio (274). Gill Plain compares the double murder to the 'lancing of a political and sexual boil' in an attempt to purge the body of a toxic accumulation (Plain, *Literature*, p. 84).

the novel, is a personal tragedy describing the serial humiliations meted out to him by the object of his hopeless desire, Netta Longdon and her circle. In the political context, it is also analogous to the shame of Munich with its policy of appeasement in response to European and British Fascism. In a letter to his brother Bruce, Hamilton asks ‘Can Chamberlain betray Danzig? I don’t see *how* he can, but he has such power and resources as a traitor...I wonder what they’ll find written on Chamberlain’s heart when he dies!’,<sup>103</sup> A profound sense of betrayal and distrust, out of step with the government’s policy of appeasement, is reflected in Hamilton’s novel and in the forms of disgust and alienation embodied by his protagonist, Bone who:

Didn’t know much about politics [...] but he knew that Munich was a phoney business [...] Shame, that was all he had felt, shame which he couldn’t analyse [...] he was so ashamed he could hardly look at the pictures...All grinning, shaking hands, frock-coats, top-hats, uniforms, car-rides, cheers - it was like a sort of super-fascist wedding. (32)

It was a significant mood of the time: in her essay ‘Voices of the Munich Pact’, McLoughlin discusses the opening of Duff Cooper’s resignation speech to the House of Commons, which resonated with Bone’s emotional isolation and moral detachment from the cheering crowds, greeting Chamberlain and his entourage.<sup>104</sup> Cooper declared that ‘there is no greater feeling of loneliness than to be in a crowd of happy, cheering people and to feel that there is no occasion for oneself for gaiety or for cheering’.<sup>105</sup>

Hamilton’s sense of a wider betrayal and conspiratorial double-dealing against the values of his nation home permeate *Hangover Square*. Its complexity also lies in Bone’s duality and the often absurd logic with which he makes plans to realise a kind of ecstasy, by getting close to Netta or by getting to Maidenhead (both delusions of belonging that deal him

<sup>103</sup> Jones, *Glass*, p. 236. Danzig was under the protection of the League of Nations until 1939, when it was taken by Nazi Germany.

<sup>104</sup> Duff Cooper resigned as First Lord of the Admiralty having been undermined by the Munich Agreement. He has advocated the mobilisation of the British fleet.

<sup>105</sup> Kate McLoughlin, ‘Voices of the Munich Pact’, *Critical Inquiry*, 34.3 (2008), 543–62 (pp. 557–58). Cooper’s plea for ‘plain-speaking’ rather than ‘sweet reasonableness’ in the government’s dealings with ‘Herr Hitler’ is discussed in detail in this essay.

a false hand). On the one hand there is his ‘reality’, dominated by self-loathing and the circularity of ‘Netta, drinks and smokes – drinks, smokes and Netta. Or a war’, the alternative darkly isolated by punctuation and constituting no more than an interruption to his tedious, monotonous existence (31). On the other, there are his ‘dead’ moods, states in which he is ‘out’ of the real world in a quasi-safe zone of oblivion (15). These are accounted for by Hamilton as Bone’s schizophrenia, which causes him to wander about ‘like an automaton’ and ‘mentally deaf’ to the world – he represents the precise opposite of John Howard’s situational alertness and tactical opportunism (25). When the shutter comes down on his brain, Bone is ‘a dead person, another person, a person who wasn’t you’, who might do things of which he had no memory (25). The world, this country of his, is ‘a silent film without music’; there are no sensations, there is no pleasure or pain, just ‘emphatically...something to be done’ (actions not words) and an obsession with his ‘dreary, numbed, dead self’ (17). To iterate the novel’s political undertow, it is the prevalence in the narrative of Bone’s dead zone that leads Leo Mellor to interpret him as a figure for England – a particular aspect of English inertia, boredom and willingness to deny the imminence of war with Germany; Bone is the ‘morality-shedding’ somnambulist, sleepwalking into war and fixating on an idealised past.<sup>106</sup> Thus, he is a protagonist, whose mind is a complex prism of amnesia, paranoia, fleeting moments of *déjà vu*, dream-states and deadness.

Such unattractive forms of self-assertion find their place in Said’s schema of the exiled individual, together with its inverse, a tendency to ‘sit on the side-lines nursing a wound’; Bone veers between the two.<sup>107</sup> The ‘something to be done’ alluded to above is the killing of Netta, followed by Bone’s return to ‘utter safety’ in Maidenhead. This town is where he will find safety and peace and be in some sense reunited with his dead sister, Ellen – one of the few people who ‘actively’ liked him (56). Just as safety is contingent on being

<sup>106</sup> Mellor, *Ruins*, p. 45.

<sup>107</sup> Said, ‘Reflections’, p. 184.

protected from danger, so George Harvey Bone believes in Maidenhead because it is ‘away’, a place of absence and immunity from his agents of torment, away from the need to court risk, away from shame, for ‘there would be no Netta, and no policemen, and no killing and sordidness’ (183). Nestling in Bone’s imagination, the idea of Maidenhead can solve all the problems of his rootlessness and his uncertain past, tormented present and precarious future. As archaic for virginity, ‘maidenhead’ conveys the state of intactness and unsullied wholeness embodying the memory of his dead sister and the promise of bliss, atomised in a comforting litany of escapism:

Maidenhead, where he had been with poor Ellen, the river in the sun, in the shade of the trees, his hand in the water over the side of the boat, the sun on the ripples of the water reflected quaveringly on the side of the boat, his white flannels, tea in a basket, the gramophone, the dank smell at evening, the red sunset, sleep! Tonight! (183)

The passage invites Bachelard’s ‘topoanalysis’ defined as the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives’ for ‘in the theatre of the past that is constituted by memory, the stage setting maintains the characters in their dominant roles’.<sup>108</sup> The constituents of Bone’s memory, a feeling of wellbeing with its distillation of ‘poor Ellen’ central to his dream of utopia, hardly vary in their detail through several iterations. As Bachelard posits, ‘memories are motionless, and the more securely they are fixed in space, the sounder they are’.<sup>109</sup> Thus it is for Bone, who never sounds so confident, so sure of anything in his world than when he articulates his dream of Maidenhead, his oneiric home. In Maidenhead there would be ‘no cunning and no sordidness anymore; only peace, the bright, watery, quavering reflection of the ripples on the side of the boat’ (185). Bone’s utopia, as a real provincial town of the English Home Counties, has a sense of the absurd and the ridiculous that renders it comic, up to a point; on that tipping point is Hamilton’s fine balance between elation and

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<sup>108</sup> Bachelard, *Poetics*, p. 8.

<sup>109</sup> Bachelard, *Poetics*, p. 9.

despair.<sup>110</sup> To make further use of Bachelard's notion of home and intimacy, he speaks of the 'dynamics of retreat' for not only do we come back, but we dream of coming back and 'this sign of return marks an infinite number of daydreams', which the skilful writer renews:

One must have lost the house that stood for happiness. So there is an *alas* in this song of tenderness. If we return to the old home as to a nest, it is because memories are dreams, because the home of other days has become a great image of lost intimacy.<sup>111</sup>

It is a process that explains why we have compassion for Bone's predicament and why we see his demise as tragic, for in it lies in our recognition of the 'image of lost intimacy', fixed in all memories involving loss and separation. The fantasy of safety in Maidenhead represents a return for Bone 'as to a nest', to a childhood shared with his sister, (like two fledglings) with whom intimacy was private, pure and unconditional. His current existence, a territory of disgrace and sordidness in the public gaze, is 'the whole bloody thing' that is going on too long and must end. However, in Bone's waking life the dual seductions of alcohol and more significantly, Netta, intrude on his clarity of purpose, contaminating his dream.

Netta, the *femme fatale* of this *noir* narrative, is both the net and nest of his fixated desire, his longing and belonging. She proves to be a false 'home' and although he yearns for intimacy with her, to be sheltered in her aura, she is unattainable and cruel, the antithesis of the female provider. She is both the 'mercenary slut in Earl's Court' and 'violets and primroses in an April rain' (227) and in both incarnations, she is 'the holy and terrible one', with the power to stupefy him (144). Bone's compulsion to kill Netta belongs to his 'dead' zone from the start, driving his dreaming and scheming:

He must get to Maidenhead and be peaceful and contented again [...] because he had been happy there with his sister, Ellen. They had had a splendid fortnight and she had

<sup>110</sup> 'You couldn't arrive in the middle of the night at Maidenhead without any clothes. The idea was preposterous.' Getting to Maidenhead has very specific conditions (Bone must kill Netta, but not when it is cold, must arrive in the dark) and he invests considerable mental energy on whether his safety zone begins on the train heading to the town. Bone congratulates himself that 'he knew the rules all right' (191) asserting his cleverness.

<sup>111</sup> Bachelard, *Poetics*, p. 100.

died a year or so later. He would go on the river again and be at peace [...] but first he had to kill Netta. (18)

In other words, his metropolitan wanderings in ‘darkest Earl’s Court’, through ‘all the bleak scenery of his long disgrace and disaster’, would be unequivocally at an end (214). Absurdly, comically and out of any moral context, ‘he had got to kill her and then he would go to Maidenhead. He would be happy in Maidenhead [...] at peace with himself.’(166). But Hamilton can switch Bone back and forth and ‘back in life’ the pleasures of Netta are powerfully enumerated through revealing associations and playful infantile variations on her name:

It was loaded, overloaded with voluptuous yet subtle intimations of her personality. Netta. The tangled net of her hair—the dark net—the brunette. The net in which he was caught—netted. Nettles. The wicked poison-nettles from which had been brewed the potion which was in his blood. Stinging nettles. She stung and wounded him with words from her red mouth. Nets. Fishing-nets. Mermaid’s nets. Bewitchment. Syrens—the unearthly beauty of the sea. Nets. Nest. To nestle. To nestle against her. Rest. Breast. In her net. Netta. (27)

Netta has a deadly potential: like the Sirens or mermaids of the *Odyssey*, she is a powerful obstacle to the protagonist’s return to Maidenhead with the layers of meaning it has accrued. As a ‘mermaid’ (a maid of the sea), she bewitches Bone with her ‘unearthly beauty’ so that when caught in her net, he loses sight of his true home and is diverted from his destiny and desire. And ‘mermaid’ shares the letters m, a, i, d with Maidenhead, linking the net and the nest in a deadly opposition of Hamilton’s making, the former disguised as the latter. In Bachelard, the nest is a ‘primal image’ of shelter and belonging, one of several images that bring out the ‘primitiveness in us’.<sup>112</sup> The ‘human being likes to withdraw into his corner and it gives him physical pleasure to do so’ but importantly, there is a ‘paradox of sensibility’ because:

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<sup>112</sup> Bachelard, *Poetics*, p. 91.

A nest is a precarious thing and yet it sets us to daydreaming of security [...] we relive the instinct of the bird, taking pleasure in accentuating the mimetic features of the green nest in green leaves.<sup>113</sup>

Netta as a nest is the lure, a false promise of intimacy closing in as the net of suspended enchantment, not safety. The sequence of images move by associations and sounds, from ensnarement and bewitchment to physical pleasure and security, turning on one letter displaced to create the shift from nets to nest. She is simultaneously the irresistible object of Bone's fatal desire and his place of perfect succour, repose and belonging, a sublimation of home. Hamilton's depiction of the net of desire is forensic in its detail; the physical reality of Netta's dangerous beauty manifests as an aura, a magnetic field or 'definite sphere of sexual attraction, a halo' that extends to a radius of about 'two feet away from her body which was its centre and its source' (41). If Bone kept out of range, he 'was secure from its effects' but once within the circle 'this appalling area', his physical longing takes on a qualitative and 'frightful' increase (41). He would be safer away from her and her heartless fascism but he is paralysed and suspended by its force, rendered impotent and emasculated (another anxiety of the exiled individual). Worse still, there is a second halo that 'cast its entralling, uncanny influence' on the entirety of Earl's Court (59). This 'earthly paradise she created merely by existing' in the locale is Bone's daily torment because it is 'a paradise made a thousand times more agonisingly interesting and desirable by the fact that he was permanently excluded from it' (59).

Bone's exquisite agony and his outsider-ness are thus paradoxically bounded. The internal territory of his despair is fed by Bone's narcissistic masochism, a destructive form of self-assertion. In his state of psycho-sexual exile, the telephone rituals are his cathexis, a way of being 'admitted' and 'let in' to Netta's paradise, especially because he had 'been definitely

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<sup>113</sup> Bachelard, *Poetics*, p. 103.

invited to phone her'.<sup>114</sup> Excited by this newly acquired power, he could be ‘mystically transported to the unknown paradise’ becoming synonymous with the ringing bell beside her bed (60). Calling from the telephone booth in the train station, he is disembodied and transformed:

There were a few other people locked and lit up in glass, like waxed fruit, or Crown jewels [...] he went in and became like them – a different sort of person in a different sort of world – a muffled, urgent, anxious, private, ghostly world, composed not of human beings but of voices, disembodied communications. (60)

Resistance to Netta is impossible and he is magnetically drawn to her aura and to the ‘unknown paradise’ of her presence in the London flat (60). Her response to the request to ‘come away’ is statement rather than question: ‘Aren’t all places the same, my dear Bone?’ which is a death blow to his dream of being with her in a cottage in the country (225). Hamilton seals her character as a deadly and false lure, treacherous, seductive, immoral and cruel by giving her an association with fascism that is not based on ideology (her thoughts are ‘atrophied’) but on its fetishized trappings:

She liked the uniforms, the guns, the breeches, the boots, the swastikas, the shirts. She was, probably sexually stimulated by these things in the same way as she might have been sexually stimulated by a bull-fight [...] This feeling for violence and brutality, for the pageant and panorama of fascism on the Continent, formed her principal disinterested aesthetic pleasure. (129)

What is more, she is happy about Munich because ‘the thing which she was supposed to dislike and laugh at, but to which she was so drawn in reality, was allowed to proceed with renewed power upon its way’ (130). Here Netta is an embodiment of compliant, inert betrayal and Bone is closer to his murderous resolve. In a letter to his brother Bruce, cited by Jones, Hamilton commented:

<sup>114</sup> Cathexis is the investment of psychic energy, a term from Sigmund Freud’s theory of drives in which the individual seeks out activities relating to a primal need. In *Literature in the First Media Age: Britain between the Wars* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), pp. 38–85, David Trotter interprets Hamilton’s use of the telephone in this scene as cathexis. He notes that ‘the feeling of disengagement induced by telephony’ is like a psychotic episode in that both induce a ‘feeling of power, a dangerous intoxication’, evident in Hamilton’s description of Bone (61).

England is very unpleasant, more and more fascisised – what with A.R.P., territorials, militiamen, and advertisements of uniform makers in the papers. Also one is almost expecting an air raid any moment – and if there's no air raid there's worse – another betrayal'.<sup>115</sup>

Hamilton's dislike of mass demonstrations of nationalism, even in wartime, was akin to disgust and a personal betrayal of his ideals. By the time he was writing *Hangover Square*, the peace with dishonour, widely felt after the Munich Agreement, had ended and Britain was at war. Hamilton represents the dis-ease of the nation during this critical period together with his personal feelings of alienation, which were out of kilter with those whose job it was to safeguard home. So, the novel presents a dilemma, raised by Said when he asks 'how then does one surmount the loneliness of exile without falling into the encompassing and thumping language of national pride, collective sentiments, group passions?', when nationalism and exile are, he claims, 'two conflicting varieties of paranoia'.<sup>116</sup> Alert to this double jeopardy, Said continues by invoking the words of Simone Weil; she too acknowledges that 'to be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognised need of the human soul' while asserting that most remedies are 'almost as dangerous as what they purportedly remedy' (183). Of all Weil's remedies to rootlessness, 'the state – or more accurately statism – is one of the most insidious, since worship of the state tends to supplant all other human bonds'; however, her words should be qualified by the rich and protective home-family-nation matrix expressed in the novels discussed above by Peck and Shute.<sup>117</sup>

Bone is beset by paranoia. Indeed, the ultimate remedy for his state of exile and profound loneliness is not to continue his affiliation to Netta and her 'filthy gang' including the overt fascist, Peter, but to pursue his plan of 'divine simplicity' (188). The 'sheer genius' and the 'uncanny cleverness' of his plan elate him; in it, he kills both, for 'Peter and Netta were one' and their continued existence is 'keeping him from Maidenhead', which without

<sup>115</sup> Jones, *Glass*, p. 236.

<sup>116</sup> Said, 'Reflections', p. 177.

<sup>117</sup> Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties Towards Mankind* trans. by Arthur Wills (London: Routledge, 1952/2002), p. 41.

Netta will be untainted by money, alcohol, police or any other ‘sordidness’(184). With Shakespearean resonances beyond his personal crisis:

His plan was all he had to stick to, in a confused, meaningless, planless world [...] It was a strange world and there were more things in it than were dreamed of in your philosophy, Horatio’. (185)

In Maidenhead there will be immunity and asylum from the national disaster of war, sanctuary for the exile, the place where Bone is mysteriously impervious to the torments of his private life. But first, he must kill Netta. Following the murder of Netta and her lover, the ‘practical’ fascist, Peter, Bone completes his ‘duty’ by netting the murder scene in a criss-cross of threading, a final closing of the circle, a way to control the chaos and to deliver the perpetrators, nest-like and cocooned to the police: ‘it was all threaded together. All the threads were gathered up. The net was complete [...] all complete and fitting in at last’ (275). The comic absurdity of the scene, darkly intercut with Chamberlain’s radio declaration of war, is followed by the tragedy of Bone’s ‘mistake’ in believing in Maidenhead, which ‘had let him down, like Netta’ and like the nation’s politicians (279). Bone himself has been beset by inertia and procrastination (obfuscated by his drinking and his ‘dead moods’) and as he tests his alternative ‘reality’ dangers abound – ‘How was Maidenhead going to solve things exactly?’ (278). His escapist ideal is about to be revealed to himself as an illusion for ‘it was just a town [...] it wasn’t and never could be the peace’ and the revelation suggests a final displacement acquiring the characteristics of death itself (270). With nihilistic logic, Bone reasons that ‘as there was no Maidenhead, there was no anywhere, and he had got rid of Netta and Peter, and now of course he must get rid of himself ’(279). Having reached the endgame, we may conclude that while Bone is at the mercy of his dead zones, he may have a wilful blindness when it comes to things he should know and could have known all along – that the home he was addicted to as the source of solace and safety did not exist in reality and that sexual desire made him blind to treachery. His fantasy of safety has fed a misguided optimism (Munich) allowing ignorance to prevail; cut off from reality, Bone may feel safer but has simply allowed the problem to grow to crisis point. Hamilton’s novel seems to be a warning

that the illusion of safety at home (appeasement and wilful blindness to reality) is no defence against hostile forces.

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These novels come together to spatialise safety as the place named as home, which is also metonymic for family and the ideals of the British nation for which the war is being fought. Home is widely construed as actual and symbolic to encompass the domestic terrain of Laws House, the coastline of England and the fantasy of Maidenhead, an illusory home conjured both as paradise and as a lure to a death. *House-Bound* confirms that by taking one's thoughts and practices beyond the rule-bound confines of home, one comes to value and affirm a different texture to home-life that supersedes previous habits. Shute's preoccupation is with the tactical intelligence needed to out-manoeuvre the enemy, returning home to a provisional safety associated with freedom in England. By contrast, emotional and practical survival is problematised by Hamilton in the figure of his protagonist, Bone and the false fantasy of the exile, whose interior longing is for a home that is ultimately illusory. In this group, longings for and about home are inextricably bound to the need for safety, intensified by the severance of war, or derailed by the fatal allure of danger.

In the next chapter, I will discuss representations of safe talk and the wartime imperatives that render talk unsafe for the civilian and the combatant. This goes to the very heart of the writers' practices and their ambitions specific to this period, to 'say what should be said' in the words of Alun Lewis.

## Chapter Three: Safe Talk

### Introduction

‘He Talked, They Died’<sup>1</sup>

Between chinas, nothing is sacred: questions can be asked on any subject: photographs, even letters, are often shared [...] as time passes, confidences become deeper and more complex until, in the end, the men put into words thoughts and ideas which under normal circumstances they wouldn’t be prepared to entrust even to their wives [...] chinas learn to read the signs of each other’s moods and how to deal with them.<sup>2</sup>

Chapter Three focuses on talk, which is both safe and unsafe in literary representations of this period. On the one hand, talk, often in the form of storytelling, is depicted as curative and therapeutic for the integrity of a wounded, traumatised subject. On the other, the communicative value of talk sits uneasily in a historical and fictional context of anxiety and suspicion, surrounding unsafe, even treacherous talk. The government sought to persuade the public that it needed to protect itself from treachery within, by means of propaganda such as the ‘Careless Talk Costs Lives’ campaign; this intervention, and others like it, raised awareness of the currency of talk during and after a war in which intelligence played a critical part. However, lines of demarcation between safe and unsafe talk were drawn and redrawn throughout the decade: confusion and uncertainty surround what is permitted, safe and curative about talk in the novels of the postwar in particular. I use the verb ‘to talk’ to mean to ‘converse or communicate’ in words, as well as to express ‘ideas or feelings’, in which it is

<sup>1</sup> ‘He Talked, They Died!’ poster after Abram Games, 1943, National Army Museum, London <<https://www.nam.ac.uk/online-collection/detail.php?acc=2013-07-2-7>> [accessed 9 July 2016]; the image accompanying this micro-narrative links the mouth of a perpetrator to a photograph of dead servicemen.

<sup>2</sup> Jack Aistrop, *Pretend I am a Stranger* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1949), p. 92. The term ‘china’ derives from cockney rhyming slang, china plate/mate; page numbers are given in 3.1.

synonymous with speaking. I use the latter to refer to the mode or channel of communication.<sup>3</sup> The meanings are closely aligned but I maintain a distinction between intention and meaning (talk) and mode (speech) in discussing how the novelists depict safe talk, weighed against that which is unsafe and forbidden, finding that the one is inextricably bound to the other.

This chapter argues that the selected novels and stories exploit the reciprocal relationship of safe and unsafe talk, mimetically represented in the narratives themselves and underpinned by the authors' determination to publish and to be read. Editors, such as Jack Aistrop and Reginald Moore, drawn to expressions of private compulsions and public duty, explicitly declared a sense of responsibility to their authors to protect freedom of expression in wartime. Novelists were exceptionally placed to explore manifestations of trauma, the wound inflicted on the body and on the mind, about which there were gathering fears and inhibitions surrounding *when* to talk and *how* to talk. The vigorous and continuing debate on trauma is acknowledged here and the question of how the wound is represented in literature will be considered, as will the concept of the unspeakable combat experience of the individual. The chapter argues that the pragmatics of wholeness and safety are infinitely bound to talking, writing, listening and reading.

The first two novels, *Pretend I am a Stranger* (1949) by Jack Aistrop and *Mine Own Executioner* by Nigel Balchin (1945)<sup>4</sup>, share a preoccupation with psychic wounding in the aftermath of combat. My readings are framed and informed by the clinical observations presented by Judith Herman in *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence* (1997)<sup>5</sup> and

<sup>3</sup> Talk, (verb) meaning 'to speak in order to give information or express ideas or feelings; converse or communicate by spoken words', *OED*, 3<sup>rd</sup>. ed. Stephenson, p.1814. Speak (verb), p. 1712.

<sup>4</sup> Nigel Balchin, *Mine Own Executioner* (London: Reprint Society, 1943/1947), page numbers are given in 3.2.

<sup>5</sup> Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

Arthur W. Frank in *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness and Ethics* (2013).<sup>6</sup> Herman and Frank, experienced practitioners in the complexities of recovery from trauma, engage with developments in the psycho-analytical method known as the ‘talking cure’ and emphasise the therapeutic properties of storytelling in particular. They also expand the place of the storyteller (real and fictional) within a community, validating the role of the empathetic listener, the trusted therapist and by extension, the reader, all of whom may interconnect as part of the curative process. The third literary work discussed is *Tell It to a Stranger: Stories from the 1940s* (1947) by Elizabeth Berridge, in which she dramatises the pressing need for the continuation of human interaction in extraordinary times; her characters grapple with social and personal expectations and the insufficiency of everyday talk in wartime conditions, often under the particular pressure of separation, isolation and safety compromised by technical devices such as the wax disc and the telephone.<sup>7</sup>

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The talking therapy and its role in healing the psychic wound is widely known from the pioneering work of Sigmund Freud (documented in the case of ‘Anna O’), which was later applied to the traumatised combatant by W. H. R. Rivers, Medical Officer at the Craiglockhart War Hospital, Edinburgh.<sup>8</sup> Rivers’s paper ‘The Repression of War Experience’, delivered to the Section of Psychiatry in 1917 and published the following year in *The Lancet*, outlined his understanding that talking about painful and violent experiences ameliorated some of the flashbacks and terrors that afflicted wounded soldiers. He defined repression as playing ‘a prominent’ and ‘necessary part in the preparation for war’ but that brief and incomplete training in dissociation caused widespread war-neuroses.<sup>9</sup> Repression, Rivers claimed, was a necessary adaptive process that gave the individual resilience to stay calm and

<sup>6</sup> Arthur W. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body Illness and Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995/2013).

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Berridge, *Tell it to a Stranger* (London: Persephone, 1947/2000); page numbers are given in 3.3.

<sup>8</sup> W. H. R. Rivers, ‘The Repression of War Experience’, *The Lancet*, 191.4927 (February 1918), 173–77.

<sup>9</sup> Rivers, ‘Repression’, p. 174

control fear, faced with violent events; where such adaptation failed, neurosis or psychosis occurred. Much of the advice given to the casualties he saw in 1917 had been that all conversation about the war should be strictly forbidden. The wounded should banish thoughts of war and replace them, in their waking hours, with pleasant thoughts of landscape and home – perceived as a significant provider of solace and comfort for some individuals as discussed in Chapter Two. Rivers deduced that the men who suffered from terrifying dreams did so because memories, suppressed during the day surfaced with intensity, causing terror at night. He claimed that ‘in such cases the greatest relief is afforded by the mere communication of these troubles to another’ and that the soldier’s subsequent ability to reconnect to his environment was improved after talk, inculcating feelings of safety and trust.<sup>10</sup> This is the essential healing relationship between the individual sufferer, a listener and a community that is at the heart of therapeutic talk as practised today. But for soldiers trained in the behaviour of dissociation and silent withholding, permitted to disclose only name, rank and serial number, sharing private fears through talk was and is anathema. Talking could be adversely associated with feelings of shame, weakness and betrayal, psychological convictions that are difficult for the individual to overcome, even when talk is presented as part of a healing process.

Mindful of the original formulation of the ‘talking cure’ by Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud in the nineteenth century, developed by Rivers *et al* in the twentieth, John Launer finds that in the twenty-first century most professionals believe that talking works, because:

It provides people with a means of creating a coherent narrative from disconnected symptoms, events, memories and thoughts in the context of a relationship with someone compassionate and attentive.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Rivers, ‘Repression’, p. 174.

<sup>11</sup> John Launer, ‘Anna O and the “talking cure”’, *OJM* (2005), pp. 465–66  
<http://qjmed.oxfordjournals.org/content/by/section/98/6/465> [accessed 20 September 2013]

Herman's work is exemplary in this approach: she draws together the substantial body of experience from research and clinical work, which establishes the continuing importance of the talking therapy as restorative to the psychological integrity of the wounded subject.

Herman concurs with Rivers that there is a commonality of post-trauma experience, the first stage of which is repression:

The ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness. Certain violations of the social compact are too terrible to utter aloud: this is the meaning of the word *unspeakable* [...] remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims.<sup>12</sup>

Her definition of 'unspeakable' as that which is 'too terrible to utter aloud' highlights why the wounded subject feels so endangered – the telling can feel like a re-enactment of the trauma or atrocity during which pain or shame is experienced again and in addition, the teller acquires the stigma of the victim.<sup>13</sup> She describes the 'common pathway' to recovery by highlighting the significance of memory and the telling of events to an empathetic listener. The reintegration of the individual requires three stages, of which the establishment of safety (physical and psychological) is the first: 'the fundamental stages of recovery are establishing safety, reconstructing the trauma story and restoring the connection between survivors and their community'.<sup>14</sup> As viewed by Herman, there is the strongest possible link between talking, in order to articulate and make sense of the trauma story, and the use of storytelling, connecting individuals to each other and to a community. Here is the close correlation between Herman's three stages for the real survivor of trauma and the authoring of a trauma story, connecting to and between listeners and readers. For Frank, who aligns with Herman, 'the wounded storyteller is anyone who has suffered and lived to tell the tale', a phrase which affirms that trauma is representable in fact and a compelling subject for the author of fiction.<sup>15</sup> The call for coherent stories to express illness and wellness and to heal a wound on the body-

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<sup>12</sup> Herman, *Trauma*, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Herman, *Trauma*, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Herman, *Trauma*, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Frank, *Wounded*, p. xi.

self (body and mind) is central to Frank's *The Wounded Storyteller* (2013).<sup>16</sup> Frank observes what is exploited narratively by authors, that 'testimony [...] does not simply affect those who receive it; testimony *implicates* others' in the 'reciprocity of witnessing' which, in his view, activates an ethical relationship between 'communicative bodies'.<sup>17</sup> Steven Marcus is helpful here because he takes up a point, made by Freud in a footnote, that a sufferer can know and not know his/her wound: 'he knows [his traumas] in that he has not forgotten them, and he does not know them in that he is unaware of their significance', which is to be unaware of their ultimate threat to wholeness and integrity. Marcus's foregrounding of this point bridges Herman, Frank and Cathy Caruth (introduced below) when he asserts that without talk 'the trauma, instead of being forgotten, is deprived of its affective cathexis' or the appropriate investment of psychic energy.<sup>18</sup>

There are those who are unconvinced by the curative property of talk. In *Remembering Trauma* (2005) Richard McNally disputes the interpretation of a commonality of post-trauma experience and discredits the efficacy of the talking therapy. Effectively, he denies that survivors of trauma repress their wounding experiences and gives much attention to the politics of trauma and abuse and to the behaviour widely labelled 'false memory syndrome', which he claims comes directly from the suggestiveness of the talking cure.<sup>19</sup> McNally dislikes the prominence of psychoanalysis and highlights the danger of false memory. However, his argument does not concern itself with storytelling nor indeed with its contribution to the cathartic effect of narrative fiction.

A literary perspective on the voice (the instrument of talk) that nevertheless countermands the pre-eminence of talk in the therapeutic story of a wound is best demonstrated by Cathy Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*

<sup>16</sup> Frank, *Wounded*, p. 143.

<sup>17</sup> Frank, *Wounded*, p. 143.

<sup>18</sup> Steven Marcus, *Freud and the Culture of Psycho-Analysis: Studies in the Transition from Victorian Humanism to Modernity* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987) p. 135.

<sup>19</sup> Richard J. McNally, *Remembering Trauma* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 1–2.

(1996).<sup>20</sup> In this work, Caruth might seem to ‘close off the possibility of conveying traumatic experience in literature’ while exhibiting a tendency to the ‘traumatic sublime’, for she does not favour trying to heal trauma (restore integrity) through therapy or (written) narrativisation as this may ‘interfere with its sanctity’ (Ward, 2009).<sup>21</sup> However, in his novel, Aistrop asserts that ‘nothing is sacred’ between comrades preparing the reader for narrative opening up rather than closing down (92). One of Caruth’s most vociferous critics, Ruth Leys, finds that ‘Caruth holds that massive trauma precludes all representation because the ordinary mechanisms of consciousness and memory are temporarily destroyed’, implying that trauma is both unspeakable and unrepresentable.<sup>22</sup> Yet, in the conclusion to *Trauma: A Genealogy* (2000), Leys sums up real world implications by asking if trauma theory is at all useful and by asserting that therapists (like authors and readers) will always be pragmatic and not attempt an exact fit between theory and practice. Elsewhere, Caruth reclaims the story and its linguistic turn by changing the question:

Is the trauma the encounter with death, or the on-going experience of having survived it? At the core of these stories, I would suggest, is a kind of double telling, the oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival.<sup>23</sup>

The unbearable nature of survival could accurately describe the theme of Balchin’s novel, *Mine Own Executioner*, embodied in the protagonist-therapist Felix Milne and his patient Adam Lucian. The novels of Aistrop and Balchin have striking plot similarities in their centring of the psychic wound and in the attempted restoration of damaged, repressed characters through curative talk. Forms of ‘double telling’ (Caruth’s ‘crisis of death/crisis of life’) come to prominence in both narratives, which nevertheless resolve very differently. Caruth asserts that approaching the unspeakable is terrible, yet difficult to resist when ‘the

<sup>20</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

<sup>21</sup> Lewis Ward, ‘A New Century of Trauma’, *Alluvium*, 1.7 (2012) <<https://www.alluvium-journal.org/2012/12/09/a-new-century-of-trauma>> [accessed 15 February 2016]

<sup>22</sup> Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 266.

<sup>23</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed*, p. 7.

moving and sorrowful voice that cries out (is) a voice that is paradoxically released through the wound’ – and that the form it takes is narrative.<sup>24</sup> Her most interesting work involves a stylistic analysis applied to recurring words or figures used by the storyteller to reveal the story’s rhetorical and deep impact.<sup>25</sup> Two of her key figures of ‘some forgotten wound’ are figures of ‘departure’ including ‘falling’ (the falling body has a place in the climax of Balchin’s novel) and ‘burning’ (the burning child occurs in one of Elizabeth Berridge’s stories).<sup>26</sup>

Thus, for the wounded subject, talk may be at its most curative in narrative form and yet the subject encounters what Steven Marcus refers to as narrative insufficiency, in which cohesion and coherence only take shape as the talk progresses. In his essays on Freud’s significance in the modern world, Marcus paraphrases Freud’s claim that ‘in the course of a successful treatment, this incoherence, incompleteness, and fragmentariness are progressively transmuted’, linking the coherent and complete story to mental health and wellbeing as Herman and Frank would later affirm.<sup>27</sup> Marcus is illuminating because he makes clear the link between the story content and its mode of representation:

It is a story, or a fiction, not only because it has a narrative structure but also because the narrative account has been rendered in language, in conscious speech, and no longer exists in the deformed language of symptoms, the untranslated speech of the body.<sup>28</sup>

At its most curative, talk (here called ‘conscious speech’) requires an empathetic, attentive listener and interrogator, one who is open and willing to validate the integrity of the story and the storyteller. Herman explains the active role of the therapist, who ‘creates a protected space where survivors can speak their truth’ so that talk ‘is an act of liberation’; bearing witness to the account ‘even within the confines of that sanctuary is an act of solidarity’, where ‘moral

<sup>24</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed*, p. 15.

<sup>25</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed*, p. 18.

<sup>26</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed*, p. 5.

<sup>27</sup> Marcus, *Freud*, p. 61.

<sup>28</sup> Marcus, *Freud*, p. 62.

neutrality is not an option'.<sup>29</sup> Herman suggests that listeners and readers who inhabit the protected space of the novel or story may need to recalibrate their ethical barometers so that their judgements adjust to the (possibly dangerous) knowledge of taboo subjects.

Inextricably bound up with the freedom to represent the suffering storyteller is the propaganda, the public discourse that warned civilians against ‘careless talk’ (indiscriminate conversations) as a real threat to life and morale. Members of the Services were trained to be silent, even when in the company of their closest family or friends, encoded in law as the Official Secrets Acts (1911–1939), with which civilians were also threatened. A poster image from 1940 depicts the giant figure of Hitler swinging on telegraph wires; his eyes are closed but his especially enlarged ears are keenly bent to the ground. The slogan reads: ‘You Never Know Who’s on the Wires!’ above a second warning, ‘Be Careful What You Say’.<sup>30</sup> It is one of several hundred items produced for the Ministry of Information’s ‘Careless Talk Costs Lives’ campaign, which included government broadcasts and films as well as posters. Its image of telegraph wires represents the dangers of the telephone in particular that could allow access to private conversations and facilitate the work of the spy. Such talk could speedily and unintentionally deliver official (details of planned missions) and unofficial (attitudes and morale) secrets into the hands of enemy agents. In a dual-pronged approach, a parallel campaign focused on exploiting the powerful wireless technology of BBC Radio; the government took control of the BBC Home Service for propaganda purposes of information (state-censored) and persuasion.<sup>31</sup> Back in the poster, the careless, unsafe talk emanates from ‘you’ down below, suggesting that anyone could be guilty: the British public needed to be informed and educated as to the dangerous consequences of talking about the progress of the

<sup>29</sup> Herman, *Trauma*, p. 247.

<sup>30</sup> Anon., ‘You never know who’s on the wires!’, poster, The National Archives, Kew <<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C3454445>> [accessed 9 July 2016]

<sup>31</sup> Ministry of Information guidance took two forms: one covered the security of Defence Forces, the other the morale of the nation. Scripts had to be stamped by both before being broadcast by the Home Service; no weather forecasts were broadcast as they were considered to be information useful to the enemy about conditions for bombing.

war, which they may not even recognise as ‘careless’, ‘loose’, and ‘thoughtless’, adjectives that are applied to talk across the campaign materials. The message, intended to instil self-censorship, is that any talk could be unsafe and might lead to avoidable loss of life, thereby posing a significant threat to the nation’s safety and security.

The ‘Careless Talk’ campaign, one of Ministry of Information’s more ambitious and imaginative, had its origins in a memorandum written by Winston Churchill on 13 November 1939. From the British Cabinet papers, the memorandum reveals acute government awareness of ‘the enemy within’, representing unseen and unidentifiable threats to the safety of combatants and non-combatants alike. In the memorandum, Churchill issues an instruction to place ‘the following notice in all telephone kiosks in all towns [...] WARNING: Thousands of lives were lost in the last war because valuable information was given away to the enemy through careless talk. BE ON YOUR GUARD.’<sup>32</sup> With its black border and red sovereign crown, it was the sober forerunner of Hitler swinging on the wires. A Home Intelligence Report from six months’ later, Saturday, 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 1940, finds that ‘as railway carriages appear to be fruitful sources of gossip it is suggested that all railway companies should be encouraged to display anti-gossip posters in their carriages’.<sup>33</sup> Censorship of gossip, especially the quashing of defeatist talk was considered a priority, as if talking about a successful invasion could contribute to its happening (self-fulfilling) and ‘keeping mum’ (idiomatic for keeping silent) on any war-related topic was the only safe strategy. Although the feedback from the public confirmed that most people saw the sense behind the ‘Careless Talk’ campaign, in the week beginning July 15<sup>th</sup> 1940, Home Intelligence reported much public resentment about the ‘Silent Column’ campaign, considered a step too far with its war-zone civilian courts. Coinciding with a wave of prosecutions (fines and short prison

<sup>32</sup> British Cabinet Papers, 13 November 1939 <<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/CAB67/2/38>> [accessed 15 March 2014]

<sup>33</sup> Paul Addison and Jeremy A. Crang, eds, *Listening to Britain: Home Intelligence Reports from May to September, 1940* (London: Vintage, 2011), p. 146.

sentences) of members of the public for spreading ‘alarm and despondency’ by word of mouth, it looked ominously like a deliberate attack on free speech. ‘Many people think that grumbling is in the British tradition’, Home Intelligence warned and Churchill called a halt to the campaign realising it as counter-productive, an ill-judged initiative.<sup>34</sup>

The campaigns (whether sustained or aborted) generated anxiety about talking on the telephone, on the train, in the pub or club and created a degree of heightened sensitivity in the public consciousness that almost any topic, however innocuous it might seem, could be of value to enemy agents operating undetected. Those in the Armed Forces were made acutely aware of their responsibility to maintain a safe code of silence in signing the Official Secrets Act (updated and extended in 1939) but were still seen as vulnerable to the seductions of the duplicitous or dim-witted woman. Harold Forster’s ‘careless talk’ poster depicts the central figure of a woman (styled somewhere between a *femme fatale* and the Daily Mirror’s comic strip and Forces’ pin-up, ‘Jane’) with three officers, an RAF man, a Navy man and an Army man in close proximity to her and in relaxed conversation.<sup>35</sup> The slogan, ‘Keep mum, she’s not so dumb!’ alerts the viewer to the woman’s alluring pose, direct stare and scarlet lips (she knows exactly what she is doing in eliciting and gleaning valuable information). This poster, much quoted and reproduced, also reveals the contradictory nature of British propaganda’s representation of women, which veers between the clichéd sexual stereotypes and expressions of female endeavour and integrity. The ‘dumb blonde’ (a familiar stereotype) is ‘not so dumb’ suggesting that the woman not only understands the significance of what she hears but also that she will exploit it. The more desirable the woman, the more unsafe her talk; Hamilton exploits this figuring of desire and danger in Netta from *Hangover Square* as shown in the previous chapter and Aistrop depicts Bill tormenting himself with suspicion about Mary Trefusis.

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<sup>34</sup> Addison and Crang, *Listening*, p. 230.

<sup>35</sup> Harold Forster, ‘Keep Mum – She’s not so Dumb!’ PST.4095, IWM Collection, London.

The successful poster campaigns sought to avoid earlier mistakes (they had been found by Mass-Observation to be out of touch and ineffectual) and by 1942 they contained catchy slogans colloquially expressed. The posters of the *Punch* cartoonist ‘Fougasse’ (Cyril Kenneth Bird, 1887–1965) instantly connected to the public using humour as their key weapon. Bird offered his services for free to the Ministry of Information believing that humour could unite the British people and foster collective safeguards where speaking in public places was concerned. From posters to silk handkerchiefs, the comic vignettes show Nazis, including Hitler and Goering, lurking in luggage racks, as regular train passengers or underneath tea tables listening in on British conversations. With the caption ‘Don’t forget, walls have ears!’ one poster shows two women talking in front of an expanse of wallpaper patterned from thumbnail portraits of Hitler.<sup>36</sup> Joseph Lee also used humour to impart a serious message in his ‘Smiling Through’ series for the London Evening News. ‘Warning Notices’ features a pub scene in which one man, oblivious to the notice on the pub wall, passes on information about the weather to another, as the other customers look on and listen with alarm. The warning notice is partly covered suggesting that its message is either not reaching civilians or is being deliberately ignored. The text says: ‘Don’t help the enemy! Careless talk (ma)y give away (offici)al secrets’.<sup>37</sup>

Whilst ordinary people were being encouraged to see themselves and others as potential traitors (by helping the enemy) and were being coaxed and persuaded by humour not to discuss the war, the message for those in the Armed Forces was frequently and brutally direct. Abram Games (1914–1996) designed many British wartime propaganda and information posters over the course of his military service with the Royal Engineers. In 1942 he was appointed Official War Poster Artist and among his posters are a series of strongly graphic representations unequivocal in showing the possible (inevitable) consequences of

<sup>36</sup> Fougasse, ‘Don’t forget, walls have ears!’ <<https://www.cartoons.ac.uk/search/mue03wx>> [accessed 15 February 2014]

<sup>37</sup> Joseph Lee, ‘Warning Notices’ (1939) <<https://www.cartoons.ac.uk/JL1598>> [accessed 15 February 2014]

‘careless talk’ amongst the Forces. One poster carries the slogan ‘He Talked, They Died’ over an image that links the mouth of the perpetrator to a photograph of a dead serviceman.<sup>38</sup> Another has the declarative ‘Talk in Here Kills out There’, depicting a hospital patient sitting up in bed and talking. The head of a German soldier forms the foot of the bed suggesting that enemy agents can be listening anywhere.<sup>39</sup> There were also short films made for this campaign, collaborations in which the Ministry of Information harnessed the inventiveness and expertise of artists already established in British cinema. One short film called ‘Dangerous Comment’, intended for operational personnel in the Armed Forces, was made by Roland Culver at Ealing Studios with high production values for persuasive realism and a cast of fifteen, including a certain Ian Fleming.<sup>40</sup> Its central story has an RAF pilot disappointed at being passed over and left behind so that another can lead a raid. Depressed and frustrated, he tells his girlfriend including details of when and where the raid is to take place. He then receives the call that he is to lead the raid after all and his girlfriend, now fearful for his safety, anxiously tells another girl. The second girl mentions the forthcoming raid to friends in a bar, in the hearing of the bartender who is a spy. He passes his knowledge on to his contact who duly tips off the Luftwaffe. Luckily, disaster is averted and the raid aborted within minutes of the planes reaching their target. Compressed into eleven minutes, the film is dramatic and convincing. Its plot represents the chain of indiscretion that delivers secret information into enemy hands and warns that no-one – not even lovers, friends or family – can be trusted to keep information safe. It is in the nature of propaganda that its messages need to be clear, direct and oft-repeated to be effective but the sustained and stylish artistic effort over several years deployed to intensify the ‘Careless Talk’ campaign also reveals the

<sup>38</sup> Abram Games, ‘He Talked, They Died’, poster, 1943, National Army Museum, London <<https://www.nam.ac.uk/online-collection/139551>> See also ‘Talk Kills’, poster, 1942, National Army Museum, London <[www.nam.ac.uk/online-collection/139762](https://www.nam.ac.uk/online-collection/139762)> [accessed 10 February 2014]

<sup>39</sup> Abram Games, ‘Talk in Here Kills out There’, poster, 1944, National Army Museum, London <<https://www.nam.ac.uk/online-collection/139564>> [accessed 10 February 2014]

<sup>40</sup> *Dangerous Comment*, dir. Roland Culver (MGM/Ealing Studios, 1940) <<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/UKY-250>> [accessed 12 April 2014]

government's concern that collective safety and security could be undone by the loose and casual talk of a few individuals.

Psycho-analysis and the evolution of the 'talking cure' have undergone more than a century of empirical work to secure its place in sustaining the psychological and emotional wellbeing of the individual. Talking and the sharing of stories (to put it broadly) contribute to the anticipation and prevention of crisis (in the treatment of depression) as well as to post-trauma therapy. This chapter investigates fictional representations of talk, which open up some of the fault-lines between safety and lack of safety in a culture of secrecy and silence. Curative talk can facilitate healing for the sufferer (as individual and as the nation) in a protected narrative space within the fiction and as the text itself. The narrative depictions of trauma and anxiety operate at several levels in these stories, making coherence and order out of unsafe, unspeakable chaos. Productive talk is also made difficult or impossible by the prevailing culture of secrecy and surveillance so that the manifestations of safety in this group of texts are as elastic, shifting and provisional as previously seen, contingent on the precariousness of lives in wartime. If talk turns fate into experience, the writing of fiction turns experience into the literary artefact; fiction gives voice to that experience emerging as a striking assertion of individual and group integrity, a correlative of psychological safety.

### **3.1      'Double telling' in *Pretend I am a Stranger* (1949) by Jack Aistrop**

Some people consider it bad taste, if not defeatist, to criticise conditions in war-time. Our attitude is that so long as we in Britain [...] remain human in spite of being numbered, docketed, uniformed and in most ways deprived of personality, we should express ourselves when, how and as bluntly as we please. If the time comes when even this is officially disallowed, then fighting, suffering and sacrifice will have been all in vain.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Jack Aistrop and Reginald Moore, eds, *Bugle Blast: A Second Anthology from the Services* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1944), Foreword.

Bodies tell stories, and stories enact imaginations of how to be different bodies – young or old bodies, fit or ill bodies.<sup>42</sup>

There are more than thirty contributions in the wartime publication *Bugle Blast*: poems and stories from men and women in the Services who were prepared to express themselves ‘bluntly’ in their efforts to pin down that which remains human in a war and worth the fight, even though it may initially feel psychologically unsafe. For its editors, Jack Aistrop and Reginald Moore, the anthology presented the reading community with individual voices speaking out from the midst of the dehumanising apparatus of war with a determined ‘bugle blast’. It included in their number Alun Lewis, Julian Maclaren-Ross, Paul Scott and Aistrop himself. Such voices should be heard as a matter of principle, the editors declared, not censored or misunderstood as threatening or labelled as seditious, as if they were as unconsidered and careless as the talk that ‘costs lives’.

Such a fierce defence of free speech and the special privilege accorded to literature (permitted to break unwritten codes of silence) is calculated to pre-empt the anxiety surrounding its reception. *Bugle Blast* stands for why totalitarian attitudes (in the sense of overbearing state control) should be challenged. If literary freedom is ‘disallowed’ then the writers and publishers are subjected to the very censorship they are fighting against. Aistrop and Moore eschewed safe writing as a kind of literary panacea against the agitations of war, refusing to be cowed by the propaganda surrounding freedom of subject and expression. These editors championed creative work of quality and integrity, penned by those who had experienced combat first-hand even if that meant offending public attitudes, flouting authority or unsettling the consolatory bias of readers. Aistrop would adhere to these principles when he came to write his own novels and stories. In the meantime, he and Moore saw themselves as gatekeepers and protectors of the freedom of their writers, many of whom were comrades

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<sup>42</sup> Frank, *Wounded*, p. 201.

and friends drawn together to ‘talk of intimate ambitions’ both personal and collective.<sup>43</sup> And from this position, Aistrop came to a resolution of his own, which he expressed in a letter to John Lehmann. He wrote that once the war was over, he would ‘turn from feature journalism to more worthwhile pursuits’ and that never again would he ‘ghost for the famous or the infamous’.<sup>44</sup>

Aistrop had received the Tom-Gallon award for his short story ‘Death in the Midst of What?’ (1945) and was a writer of popular plays such as ‘Backstage with Joe’ (1946). Remaining at the centre of ethical, political and aesthetic debates, Aistrop continued his publishing activities after the war, editing the *Triad* series of anthologies in which a democratisation of writing from across the social classes took prominence alongside its war and peace related topics. The first issue (in 1946) curated diverse voices: a collection of London stories by James Gordon, poems by Elizabeth Berridge and a novella by Gwyn Thomas set amongst the villages and collieries of South Wales.<sup>45</sup> *Triad*’s aim was to ‘provide an outlet for material, which does not come under any of the standard limits’ of form and subject; in *Triad* and in *Bugle Blast* Aistrop was vociferous in his support of new writing of quality and was dedicated to bringing it to the reading public.

Making the transition from ghost-writer to author of his own subject, Aistrop chose to explore themes of curative talk, repressive silence and therapeutic writing for his protagonist, the veteran and accidental novelist, Bill Maclarens. The following reading of *Pretend I am a Stranger* proposes that Aistrop’s novel suggests a form of ‘double-telling’, Caruth’s narrative space between death and life, trauma and survival. Bill can be read as a ‘wounded storyteller’ in Frank’s terms but Aistrop has multiple stories to tell so that Bill’s

<sup>43</sup> Christopher Hilliard: *To Exercise Our Talents: The Democratisation of Writing in Britain* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 205. Hilliard notes that Aistrop knew and was friends with Maclarens-Ross (is the name a coincidence?) and Alun Lewis. They met in a Royal Engineers camp in the south of England where Lewis was in charge of brigade education and Aistrop was running the camp magazine.

<sup>44</sup> Hilliard, *Exercise*, p. 198. Hilliard quotes from a letter of 1941 from Aistrop to John Lehmann.

<sup>45</sup> Jack Aistrop, ed., *Triad One* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1946), p. 5.

trauma story is withheld, and then contested. However, in storytelling he grasps at safety and survival to achieve a reinvented and reintegrated ‘body-self’.<sup>46</sup> The integrity of Bill’s narrative offers a pathway to intactness of mind as well as body but the novel poses the question: what is the cost to the communicable self, posed by war and restitution?

Firstly and in a traditional linear manner, Aistrop meticulously establishes Bill Maclarens roots, a working class childhood in the King’s Cross district of London between the wars. Bill’s beginnings convey an unsafe, precarious existence; early scenes show him living in dread of his illiterate violent father and ‘terrified’ of his mean, spiteful Aunt Ada – both are subject to drunken outbursts of physical violence. Shy by nature and fearful from experience, he stays safe by being watchful, silent and keeping out of harm’s way. By the age of eight, Bill runs ‘with a gang of other eight-year-olds’, fellow gleaners whose survival and refuge is on the streets of back-to-back terraced houses. Amongst the gang members, he has a unique position by dint of his surprising eloquence and sincerity, a wise way with words they call his ‘old madam’ (19). The gang uses him as an instrument of persuasion, sending him to apologise to policemen, which secures their freedom to roam unchecked another day. Bill, having grown up with thrashings, has ‘a healthy respect for a whole skin’ (19); keeping silent or only talking when he had to keeps him physically safe and on occasions protects others, prefiguring the later crisis.

At the heart of the King’s Cross district is the community of the Caledonian Market, an old cattle market that had turned to accommodate stalls of every class and type, selling merchandise from broken kettles to diamond rings. In the market at dusk, when the other children are scavenging around the food stalls, Bill, drawn to knowledge and stories, searches for ‘discarded books’ and comes to believe that ‘anything printed’ is ‘true’ (17). There are no boundaries between fact and fiction for him but this does not matter; books give him access to

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<sup>46</sup> Frank, *Wounded*, p. 170.

compelling pictures of curious, exciting worlds other than his own. The books he salvages are often missing their last pages so that ‘nine times out of ten’ he has to ‘invent endings himself’ (18). Aistrop’s early emphasis on multiple versions and unknown endings prepares us for Bill’s remaking of his identity and the double-telling that oscillates between death/betrayal and survival/life. Books make him timid in his father’s eyes but from reading stories, his eloquence burgeons and in his interior writing life, he takes risks and approaches danger.

As a boy, Bill chooses silence as a positive strategy of protection (he was often labelled by others as ‘mute’). Later as a soldier, these habits of mind and voice, this self-closure will be pitted against the rules of disclosure –‘Number, rank, name. That was all a soldier had to disclose.’ (109). Bill suffers extreme anxiety about what more he may have said when, captured by German soldiers in Normandy, he is interrogated for information about the location of his unit. He faints under torture, battered by relentless questioning and after his survival and escape from a scene of hell, Bill experiences a post-trauma amnesia (partially feigned) and associated aphasia, a failure of expression deriving from ‘feelings which are not classifiable, emotions for which no language has words’ (147). His inability to speak about the event at the heart of the novel induces terror and withdrawal, so much so that he abandons the identity of traumatised, unsafe Bill Maclaren (the traitor) and assumes a new safer identity of Bill Connor. However, as Judith Herman asserts, the effect of combat ‘is not like the writing on a slate that can be erased, leaving the slate as it was before’, that is to say, clean and intact.<sup>47</sup> Bill’s recovery will be fraught with dangers and setbacks presenting fragments of a contested story, which itself is closely guarded by the shield of Bill’s false identity. Herman recognises that in the case of a single acute trauma ‘establishing safety begins with control of the body and moves outward toward self-protection’.<sup>48</sup> Bill attempts to wipe his slate clean by becoming someone else in the belief that he will never have to speak about his

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<sup>47</sup> Herman, *Trauma*, p. 26.

<sup>48</sup> Herman, *Trauma*, p. 166.

imagined act of betrayal and its consequences, the thought of which repeatedly fills him with terror. His psychological safety is maintained by his misguided reliance on silent repression.

In acknowledgement of the work of the earlier psychotherapists on repression, Herman notes that ‘the focus of the ‘talking cure’ for combat neurosis (in the Second World War) was on the recovery and cathartic reliving of traumatic memories, with all their attendant emotions of terror, rage and grief’.<sup>49</sup> Close congruities exist between the theoretical models based on case histories and the development and scope of Aistrop’s novel, depicting the stages of Bill’s recovery. Herman’s summation is that:

In the course of a successful recovery, it should be possible to recognise a gradual shift from unpredictable danger to reliable safety, from dissociated trauma to acknowledged memory, and from stigmatised isolation to restored social connection.<sup>50</sup>

The stages described by Herman constitute the crucial shift, from silence to speaking about the unspeakable. In the novel, Aistrop complicates Bill’s state of ‘dissociated trauma’ by giving him partial amnesia. After his escape from the chateau in Normandy, with no known identity and unable to utter a sound, Bill is shipped back to England, to a country house hospital where he comes under the care of Doctor Gringauer, an exponent of the cathartic and curative talking therapy. Although the doctor’s Austrian accent initially causes him nothing but terror, the therapy begins with the vocalisation of simple, inert words. Bill is disconnected from his ‘treacherous voice’ and with the terror still deep within his mind, the words constantly come out ‘wrong’ or do not come at all (117) for ‘it seemed as if something had jammed in his brain, some sort of automatic combination which had stuck on the idea that whatever he did, he must not talk’(115). Above all else, he must conceal his identity by pretending that he has forgotten even the name, rank and number he is permitted to say. During therapy, Bill’s fragmented memories cannot so easily be suppressed and he relives the

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<sup>49</sup> Herman: *Trauma*, p. 25.

<sup>50</sup> Herman, *Trauma*, p. 155.

interrogation and his escape, drifting in and out of consciousness. Moved into a smaller, less public space, O'Connor Ward is a ‘good place to be’ with the jovial Toby and Chippy Woods (118). The banter between them is diverting, undemanding, happening in a different dimension from the trauma memory and ‘for the first time for months’ Bill laughs and his laughter comes out ‘naturally and sound(s) fine in all their ears’, wordlessly and safely connecting him to the two men (119). But when the talking treatment is resumed, Gringauer uses a word association game and with it comes wordless distress (‘screaming, tears and harsh sobs’) so that he has to be given an injection to calm him (121).<sup>51</sup> Chippy’s name causes a sudden abreaction, an unbidden reliving of the trauma with its imagined betrayal, vocalised by the fragments ‘Wood...Bodies. Wood...Dead’ (121). He utters a string of single words that disrupt the discourse but ensures that we make the anaphoric reference back to Bill’s escape and the scene of carnage: the broken bodies of German and Canadian soldiers, of civilian men, women and children. Bill’s suffering (synonymous with the wound) takes place when a ‘state of severe distress [...] threatens the intactness of person’; Frank acknowledges that Cassell and Kleinman formulated this new conceptualisation of suffering, which rejects the ‘historical dualism of mind and body’ in the single concept of the body-self.<sup>52</sup> For Frank, a condition of suffering is also its social nature – ‘people tell uniquely personal stories, but they neither make up these stories by themselves, nor do they tell them only to themselves. Bodies and selves are culturally elaborated’ in ‘distinctive, local worlds’.<sup>53</sup> For example, in Aistrop’s novel what Bill’s voice cannot utter, his imagination embellishes with the language effects of a vividly remembered war novel or movie:

His unit bombed to hell because he had talked. He lay and embroidered other pictures: the German officer telephoning the information to airfields and artillery

<sup>51</sup> Probably a barbiturate: sodium amyital was typically used in the Second World War to aid the retrieval and voicing of repressed memories.

<sup>52</sup> Frank, *Wounded*, p. 169. Frank acknowledges from the outset that the figure of the wounded storyteller appears in classical texts, citing the seer, Tiresias, whose blindness gives him narrative power (Frank, *Wounded*, p. xix).

<sup>53</sup> Frank, *Wounded*, p. 170.

sites, guns opening up, shells dropping unexpectedly among the tanks. It fascinated him: he thought of nothing else. (122)

Just as he had done as a boy, Bill completes the story with his own dedicated and now incriminating ending, although his fascination with its unravelling remains dissociated from his participation (if indeed he had instigated such a train of events). The point is that he *could* have been responsible and this *could* have been how events unfolded in the confused conditions of combat and his partial amnesia. In Frank's framework, Bill is submerged in a story that for him has been culturally determined (the traitor who talks and kills) and that he cannot change. The stakes are overwhelming and Bill rehearses the story in his mind repeating the betrayal and trauma almost against his will.

Regaining consciousness after the drug-induced sleep, Bill shakes 'the last effects of the drug from his mind' so that he can once again 'speak normally'; but he has relived the interrogation while unconscious and comes to 'convinced that he had told the German officer the location of the unit' (124). He still cannot talk *about* the perceived betrayal, believing that the only safe strategy is the one he has learnt, silence. He gives himself a new name but as Connor he carries the same memories and suffers the same psychological wounding as Maclarens so that ultimately, he feels no safer. Bill knows his trauma in both senses – he knows it as a memory and he knows its significance for his present and future. Before joining up, Bill had read in books about the fate of the 'lucky ones' who returned from the last war and he reflected on those names on his school's roll of honour who had not returned 'who had made the supreme sacrifice', feeling instead that 'they had been sacrificed' (87). This linguistic turn challenges the official narrative of heroic sacrifice. Furthermore, love of comrade rather than sacrificial love of country provides the single consolation that Bill infers from any stories of exceptional courage that were being circulated. He had seen some of the lucky ones for himself, realising that their psychological trauma expressed itself in aberrations of the body, 'strange behaviours' that 'bore witness to the wounding' noting that:

No scars were visible to denote the arid spots, the cauterised nerves. Only the strange behaviours bore witness to the wounding, sudden outbursts of irritability, of pettiness, suspicion, selfishness [...] the remoteness and quest for solitude, sexlessness, oversexedness: the hundred and one crazy destructive things that could happen to a man. (88)

Aistrop emphasises the isolation of these men in spite of their being in the company of others; their strange behaviours come to them unbidden, as manifestations of unspeakable traumas. Struck by the evidence of such ‘destructive things that could happen to a man’, Bill was so anxious and afraid that he had looked for ways to avoid the Army. Aistrop develops Bill’s attempts to suppress his fear with distractions: the fear-and-desire impulse leads him to cheap pornography and ‘violent love-making’ with Jessie, as if he is living on borrowed time (81). And, Aistrop’s authorial intervention is itself a mechanism of safety, in that it mediates Bill’s unwillingness to fight, emphasising that his was a common experience, identical to that of hundreds of thousands of other, reluctant soldiers (87). Bill’s falling into the hands of the enemy, from which he will emerge as less than a whole person with psychological ‘dead spots’ and a fragmented memory, vindicates Aistrop’s warning.

When Bill Connor slips back into London in 1946 equipped with his new name, he is ‘mentally wounded’ and fearful of the community in which he finds himself. Aistrop emphasises that Bill was ‘hiding because he was a battle casualty. Because mentally he was wounded and afraid that whoever he met might start probing into the damaged area’ (129). Once again, silence is a strategy that seems to protect him but as the Maclarens-Connor conflict intensifies so do Bill’s feelings of guilt and fear of discovery. His reassuring fantasy of things turning out well in a dissociated future is reminiscent of Hamilton’s protagonist in exile in *Hangover Square*; both characters express feeling safe as being in the flow of the mainstream:

Everything was put off until a mythical tomorrow which was to be the day on which all the loose ends would be tied, the day he would guide his canoe from the backwaters into the main stream and paddle along with all the others. (128)

And also in the manner of George Harvey Bone, Bill's mind had a 'quick-action shutter which closed whenever a crisis developed', avoiding communicative talk that might reveal his shame to himself and others (128). This anxiety is conveyed by the author's explanations and interventions but eventually both Aistrop and Nigel Balchin, as will be shown, mimetically dramatise the fragmented attempts of their traumatised protagonists to retrieve and acknowledge their suffering – the ultimate point of both novels. To achieve this, the resistant, unwilling storyteller needs a collaborator in order to facilitate what Frank calls 'co-constructed storytelling' and the rebuilding of his 'broken narrative'.<sup>54</sup> In Aistrop's novel, Dr Gringauer tries to be that collaborator (rejected by Bill) as does Mary Trefusis, 'widow' of Johnnie and the object of a transfer of emotional attachment on Bill's part. Bill rejects them, asking himself:

How can one describe, in words, feelings which are not classifiable, emotions for which no language has words? How, afterwards, can one pin down the new, immediately forgotten, stirring caused by an escape or an action or a shared danger? To a stranger? (147)

In spite of such self-doubt, an unacknowledged impulse leads Bill to Soho and to Regent Passage where his 'china' and wartime comrade, Johnnie Trefusis had lived with his wife, Mary before the war. Johnnie's name breaks through the surface narrative as if suddenly released from his memory unbidden, with the hissing of an air compressor and 'coincident with the formation of the word' in Bill's mind (144). The moment pulls Bill irresistibly towards Mary who, with Gringauer, forms a triangle of potential therapeutic communication. Both want Bill to speak about what happened and to give his testimony; both are willing, through storytelling, to witness his wounding but resisting their approaches to him, he fears for his own safety:

Gringauer had asked for his confidence. Gringauer had wanted to help: Bill had known that but had withheld his trust because he had felt himself to be in personal

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<sup>54</sup> Frank, *Wounded*, p. 201.

danger [...] Mary wanted to rummage in the small back rooms of his mind for different reasons: she was trying to find out if the place was haunted. (232)<sup>55</sup>

When Mary visits Gringauer, she hopes to learn about the past that haunts Bill creating an impermeable barrier between them and giving him terrible nightmares. But Gringauer's experience as a psychotherapist makes him sceptical towards Mary and he co-authors a story giving her a central role but framed as an accusation. In his view, she is treating Bill's trauma as 'a game. A mystery. A treasure hunt' and she is typical of many wives and lovers who 'do not want imperfect or incomplete possessions' (237). Gringauer spells out the dangers:

You will gradually complete a picture of him. And when every last detail is in, you will feel proud and you will say to him, 'Come and look—a surprise' and when he looks, what happens? He experiences a shock, after which he might do any one of many things. (237)<sup>56</sup>

Despite Mary's plea that she could 'bring him to life', Gringauer treats her as he would a patient, a wounded storyteller in her own right (which she is) rejecting her optimism that she can 'save' Bill by hearing his story from a third party – Gringauer (235). Bill must be the teller of his tale and equally he must be willing to listen to Mary's own story, in order for either of them to contemplate a safer future. As Aistrop explains:

It moved him to realise that both he and Mary had been holding themselves responsible for betraying Trefusis [...] in helping her he had helped himself: he had realised that his own fears – his belief that he had given away the unit location probably causing loss of life, might be just as false. (175)

Throughout, Aistrop maintains the sense that Bill can be talked out of fear and pain, brought to a psychological and emotional place of safety into which others can be drawn:

There had been times, so many of them, when he would have given anything to have someone to talk him out of his own fears that he stayed with her a long time, talking and making her smile.(192)

<sup>55</sup> Nigel Balchin had published his popular novel, *The Small Back Room* (1943), in which the materiality of the back room, where scientific puzzles are worked out in the safe hands of human agents, is also a metaphor for the recesses of the troubled mind.

<sup>56</sup> This is one of many parallels between Aistrop's novel and Balchin's plot, centred on Adam Lucian.

Prior to this easier conversation between him and Mary, Bill turns again to writing, something he had not attempted since before the war but which suggests a response to Frank's question 'what story do you wish to tell of yourself?'<sup>57</sup>

Bill's novel within the novel is therapeutic, even though the first version features a thinly disguised Maclaren and Trefusis, their relationship idealised in narrative:

Trefusis began to emerge as a knight in shining armour: Maclaren, of course, came out in colours worse than life [...] it was a novel filled with perversity and psychopathic overtones and yet it contained passages of the most extraordinary beauty and insight. (136)

Frank insists that behind the question of 'which story?' is the sense of a life to aspire to, confidence in an imagined story of the future drawn in colours equal to life. Bill's novel within the novel is a blend of perverse guilt and the shame of betrayal but these unsafe feelings are nevertheless safely represented and framed as a story. Bill writes the novel, after which he is 'tired and empty'; it 'came over the transom like a grenade' suggesting its interruptive power as Johnnie's name had done (138). The writing has dramatic appeal making it suitable for publication but:

Its importance to Bill lay in the fact that it had been the means of removing the scum from the restless surfaces of his mental reservoirs. It also removed the corpse of Maclaren. (138)

The novel has performed an exorcism, a mental purgative, which is purifying, restorative and cathartic; and it comes after a period of intense withdrawal and isolation overlaid by masochism as Bill reasons that 'he had caused deaths' and that consequently his punishment was loneliness and 'sexlessness' (135). The act of writing usurps this self-loathing ('crisis of death' now shifts to 'crisis of survival' in Caruth's terms) and displaces the 'priority position of his fears' so that 'his mind (is) been afforded a space of time in which to patch up some of the damage' (138). If the curative effect of writing needed further confirmation 'his mind (is) filled with his book, his perception dulled by that and the feeling of security that [comes]

<sup>57</sup> Frank, *Wounded*, p. 204.

from having a place he could call his own' even though it is not a permanent, secure place (195). This place of one's own, a life on the page that is the act of writing, enables Aistrop self-consciously to draw parallels between his own novel and Bill's artefact within it. The publication of Bill's first novel, *And Bid Me Enter*, also provides Mary with a permitted topic of conversation between them. When she asks him why he picked the title, he explains that it comes from a poem written by a young Belgian who was released from a death camp but who never made it home. Bill had read the poem in a book published by the Belgian Red Cross and so the writer-publisher-reader triangle is productively remade within the novel. Bill remembers the last lines:

Give me a week or a month,  
Even a year before I come home.  
Pity my despair  
And when I come do not think me  
Changed. Do not remark it.  
Pretend I am a Stranger  
Seen for the first time.  
Give me your hand  
And bid me enter. (260)

Since these lines contain the titles of both Bill's book and Aistrop's novel, we understand that Bill's healing and reintegration will take time but that his trauma can be a story from the past, which he and others may know (in the sense of both memory and significance) and with which he can safely anticipate a future. Aistrop finally brings the 'Connor story' to a conclusion, although he comments elsewhere that stories like Connor's 'cannot be halted at a given point', the point at which the wounded storyteller is declared cured (270). The conclusion to his own novel sees the Maclarens story surface once again to create feelings of disintegration in Bill, his mind 'filled with sharp fragments' (310).

Bill now has the confidence to channel such disturbance into action: he goes to see Frankie Miller, a survivor of the assault that haunts Bill; and it is from him that he learns that Trefusis is alive. The story of his comrade's death has been made and remade, culturally elaborated and circulated by others so that to acknowledge it to be false incurs danger,

requiring the making of an entirely different story; besides, ‘talk’s one thing, proof’s another’ (318). In the character of Bill, Aistrop tells this story of childhood fear and war trauma and self-censorship about which talk has never been permitted. Feeling safe is profoundly unfamiliar to Bill and is acknowledged by Aistrop as unattainable until Bill can co-construct, in talk, an imagined future not indelibly blighted by the wounds of the past. As shown in the previous chapter, safety and the integrity of the self are inextricably bound to belonging and feeling at home, which in this novel, Bill creates for himself and for the first time:

He could not put into words the new sensations which were forming in him: they were complex and concerned Mary and the home they had made together – his job and the work he was to do: together they added up and produced an unfamiliar feeling, one which he could not define but which instinctively he knew for what it was. It was the fulfilment of the congenital desire to belong. He believed that at last, he had come home. And been bidden enter. (287)

Writing is also the place where the ideas and experiences of the author live; the open end, Aistrop’s concluding image of the open door or threshold, is a narrative space which permits a safer point of departure, a new beginning possible in the aftermath of war in which psychological safety, in its many manifestations, would be a hidden casualty, but for the work of the novel.

### **3.2            Crises of survival in *Mine Own Executioner* (1945) by Nigel Balchin**

‘Don’t worry about your mind. It’s your voice I want. Just start talking and keep talking.’ (88)

These are the words of Felix Milne, the troubled analyst at the centre of Nigel Balchin’s novel *Mine Own Executioner* (1945) to his patient, the ‘war case’ Adam Lucian. Milne is urging him to become a collaborator in the word association exchanges designed to break Lucian’s silence. Talking is the key to Lucian’s recovering (from) his past and it is a weighty past holding terrible secrets of violence, shame and guilt. By suggesting that one can disconnect

the mind from controlling the voice in uncensored talk, Milne believes that Lucian's almost involuntary utterances during therapy, safely framed as game, will allow him to speak of a trauma hitherto suppressed and repressed, the roots of which may have 'happened when he was a small kid' (51). Balchin's novel depicts a childhood wound, reopened and deepened by war, suggesting Caruth's crisis of life – the unbearable nature of survival that fails to imagine a safe, sustainable future. Far from inert, Lucian is recognisable as a 'war-case', a 'delayed fuse job', as 'going hay-wire', 'schizo' and the visceral 'all shot to pieces' with its image of corporeal and psychological disintegration. Lucian is a figure of despair and self-loathing who asks 'what the hell's the use of being alive?'(57). As Lucian's therapist, Milne is schooled in broadly Freudian teachings on the existence of the ego, the id, the super-ego and in the concepts of repression and the Oedipus complex. In respect of trauma, Freud's indispensable writings and their application to real world situations were well known to Balchin, who represents Milne and his colleagues in a professional struggle to get psychoanalysis recognised as a valuable curative method.

Balchin's novel suggests Caruth's position on the traumatic experience, which is 'unclaimed': instead of the conscious mind suppressing its wounding, the trauma remains in the sub-conscious, manifest as a singular 'moving and sorrowful *voice*' that cries out 'through the wound'.<sup>58</sup> For Caruth, trauma is always:

The story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available, This truth, in its delayed appearance and in its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language.<sup>59</sup>

Her emphasis is on the unknown and unacknowledged dimension of trauma, which is the subject of Balchin's novel. Freud was exercised by the 'repetition compulsion', unbidden and 'unwished-for' flashbacks and dreams associated with the experience of trauma and Caruth

<sup>58</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed*, p. 2.

<sup>59</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed*, p. 4.

identifies ‘the enigma of the otherness of a human voice that cries out from the wound’.<sup>60</sup> This section proposes that it is exactly the ‘otherness’ of Lucian’s voice during his flashbacks and the wound’s ‘belated address’ that Balchin represents, giving it a textual disturbance and making it a plot determinant for Lucian’s final actions, which have fatal consequences. At the heart of Balchin’s fiction and Caruth’s theory is the mechanism of the human voice and its revelatory power: Felix Milne, reflective and humane as he is, is ultimately defeated by Lucian’s ‘case’ because his patient’s mind is a place of extreme danger and his voice presents Milne with nothing more than ‘emotional guess-work’ (248). Milne knows early on that this man has all but given up on life with little interest in saving himself; as Lucian’s therapist, he must judge his words carefully, because ‘the trouble is that if you blow a fire that’s burnt as low as that, you may blow it out’, sensing Lucian’s psychotic and increasingly dangerous state (92).

In the novel, Milne is one of Balchin’s team of practitioners who practise the talking therapy as an established and often successful treatment for psychical conflict and for those specifically traumatised by the experience of war.<sup>61</sup> Balchin’s novel, its publication and the timing of its action, sits at the threshold of postwar experience, with a National Health Service still two years into the future. His characters articulate with a backward glance ‘one of the worst aspects of war [...] the tragedies it leaves behind’, which haunt the living, unaware that their mental wounds will not heal unaided (223). Balchin’s ‘war case’ is Adam Lucian, the figure of trauma whose fate will call Milne’s words and actions into question, scrutinising the ethics and judgement of the therapist. We have some way to go before we hear Lucian’s story in his own voice, for it is Mrs Lucian, Mollie who first comes into Milne’s apparently secure consulting room with her account of her husband’s violent

<sup>60</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed*, p. 3.

<sup>61</sup> In America William C. Menninger published *Psychiatry in a Troubled World* (1948), which charts the history and use of Army psychiatry in the Second World War and then proceeds, in the second part, to deal with what can be learned from the war experience, proposing that in peacetime, mental health can be safeguarded by being instituted into social policy.

behaviour since returning from incarceration and torture in Burma. She hopes that he can be saved from himself, for he is haunted by ‘the unwitting re-enactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind’, Caruth’s definition of Freud’s ‘traumatic neurosis’.<sup>62</sup> Noting the significance of Mollie’s voice as the first teller of the ‘story of a wound’, Plain observes how in the fiction of this period, the ‘woman becomes the symbol through which male crisis is articulated’, as she not only absorbs and voices the male suffering but takes action to comprehend it and to confront its dangers.<sup>63</sup> This is as true for Balchin’s novel (*Mollie Lucian and Patricia*, Milne’s wife) as it is for Aistrop’s and the character of Mary Trefusis, although Balchin is remarkable for devoting long sections of his novel to Lucian’s own halting retelling whilst in therapy. Balchin’s representation of the language of male suffering and unclaimed trauma is delivered unflinchingly and framed within the thriller genre.

This novel is the third of a wartime trilogy, which established Balchin’s reputation for a particular kind of popular fiction critically admired for its ‘highly refined formula of naturalistic conflict taking place within a thriller plot’, as confirmed by Clive James.<sup>64</sup> Referencing Balchin’s publishing notes at Collins, James notes that the first of the trilogy, *Darkness Falls from the Air* (1942) sold 14,000 hardback copies, to be followed by *The Small Back Room* (1943), which sold 34,000 copies in hardback. Continuing this success, Balchin published *Mine Own Executioner* (1945), which generated impressive sales – 54,000 copies in hardback alone. The formula served Balchin well: the novels deliver the thriller elements of plot framed by masculinised perspectives. Equally, ‘he dealt in realities, the art of the possible’ says James, describing Balchin in terms used by those who knew him as analytical, strategic and a supreme logician.<sup>65</sup> In his fiction, especially in *Mine Own Executioner*, he creates an altogether messier set of possibilities and neat answers remain elusive. James notes

<sup>62</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed*, p. 2.

<sup>63</sup> Gill Plain, *Literature of the 1940s: War, Postwar and ‘Peace’* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 189.

<sup>64</sup> Clive James, ‘The Effective Intelligence of Nigel Balchin’ in *At the Pillars of Hercules* (London: Picador, 1998), pp.139–156 (p. 142).

<sup>65</sup> James, ‘Effective’, p. 141.

that Balchin's non-literary experience before and during the war years (as scientific advisor to the National Institute of Industrial Psychology, a member of the Army Council, then a consultant at the Ministry of Food) runs parallel to his literary activities. He had a talent for absorbing the details of new fields and was a first rate 'critical path analyst', who quickly took the lead in behind-the-scenes problem solving, developing back room 'hush-hush' work, itself an apt metaphor for the taboo of mental instability subject to the labours of therapeutic analysis.<sup>66</sup>

Balchin dramatises Milne's attempts to comprehend and treat Lucian's psychosis in the context of the talking therapy as an emergent institutional practice, still insecure about its professional status. This is complicated by a personal crisis that consumes Milne, although for him it is his marriage that is at stake. Milne's emotional turmoil colours the backdrop of conversations, during which sceptics and naysayers reduce the entire theory and practice of psychoanalysis and curative permitted talk to bunkum. These 'noises off' intrude into the surface of the novel in dialogue where voices are raised, in volume and intensity, to undermine Milne's role as a helper-healer, while highlighting his own inability to articulate or remedy the faults in his marriage. The debate surrounding therapeutic talk is explicitly voiced by Balchin's characters, contrasting with its position on the side-lines of Aistrop's novel: the practitioners who are Milne's colleagues and mentors defend their work with extended exchanges of special pleading. The elder statesman of orthodox medicine, Sir George Freethorne, visits the Clinic and makes a speech, in which he manages to compliment the team's 'faith and energy' while concluding that their work has everything to prove: 'restrain your wild men', 'put your house in order' and 'get rid of the charlatan and the dilettante' (135). Above all, he says, you must provide objective evidence. Garsten, Milne's closest ally, applauds the rigour, for their reputation (and funding) would be safe and sustainable if built on real science. Milne himself is not a qualified medical doctor and

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<sup>66</sup> James, 'Effective', p. 141.

eschews that title, which limits him but enables him to avoid the ‘white coat’ phobia of some patients and allows him a certain freedom to experiment. Sometimes, even for him, the work itself is simply not worthy, causing him to doubt its restorative value; although Milne is devoted to solving the psychological problems of his patients, in peacetime these are depressingly mundane. Nevertheless, Balchin establishes him as a man with a sense of vocation and a disciple-like belief in psychoanalysis, which he practises based on an act of faith: ‘I feel about this stuff [...] rather as I do about religion’, he says (9). His commitment to therapeutic talk is juxtaposed with feelings of frustration during his routine work of listening to wealthy, upper-class women complain about their bad marriages. The therapy session has degraded to little more than a psychological placebo and is actively burdensome for him, with psychological transference on the part of the patient inducing unsafe and unwelcome hero-worship.

While Aistrop’s novel offers us an open, hopeful resolution, Balchin delivers a dark, nihilistic conclusion described by Plain as an expression of the ‘impossibility of post-war reintegration’.<sup>67</sup> In Balchin, the curative power of talk is contested by its equally potent capacity to do ‘more harm than good’ because the consequences of the story of a trauma can be actively dangerous for the teller (35). Balchin also delivers the thriller climax with its Hitchcockian finale, featuring Lucian and Milne clinging to a ledge on the exterior of a high building (the coroner’s inquest on the deaths of Lucian and his wife is a coda to the main narrative arc). Talking is never neutral or inconsequential in these novels and Nigel Balchin is a writer both subtle and dramatic in constructing his characters’ precarious states. Here trauma sits like an unexploded device, made manifest by Lucian’s Luger automatic pistol (so closely associated with Nazi Germany), which he uses to threaten others before killing himself.

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<sup>67</sup> Plain, *Literature of the 1940s*, p. 188.

Central to the matrix of possibilities surrounding Lucian's unpredictability is the helper-healer, Milne, a man of faith in his methodology, a man of considerable competence and integrity who communicates his enthusiasm for his work in everyday metaphors. In his view, repressed trauma eventually raises 'a sort of mental blister' on the body-self but therapeutic talk cannot lance the boil without chemical assistance (50). Milne believes he can heal Lucian by offering himself, as a compassionate but neutral listener in the safe and private space of his consulting room and as the administrator of a known psycho-active drug, a 'truth serum' (sodium pentothal) that will get him to 'talk about what had happened' in Burma (109). Milne will 'worry over what to believe later', raising the therapist's dilemma of 'false memory syndrome' or deliberate manipulation of the truth; both can endanger or misdirect the curative efficacy of the therapy (139). Balchin represents Lucian's case in dramatically parallel interrogations: in Burma, Lucian was in mortal and psychological danger, as a prisoner of the Japanese and victim of torture, with its own logic – 'not talking is the same as being hurt, and talking is the same as not being hurt' (148). However, as a patient in the apparent safety of Milne's consulting room, talking hurts him so profoundly that Lucian breaks down for a second time in a state of physical and psychological disintegration.

Initially, Lucian suggests Frank's 'embodied presence', that of a silent, maimed veteran.<sup>68</sup> As Frank proposes, 'bodies are realised – not just represented but created in the stories they tell [...] this is true even when the body and its story is authored by a creative agent'.<sup>69</sup>

So, Lucian's wounded body is observed by Milne who registers 'a big man with a slight limp [...] kicking a stone aimlessly', which he keeps on the pavement and puts in his pocket or replaces with another if it goes down the drain (55). The pebble is a small, hard, impenetrable thing, a solid compression of memories and emotions Lucian carries within him

<sup>68</sup> Frank, *Wounded*, p. 144.

<sup>69</sup> Frank, *Wounded*, p. 52. According to Steven Marcus, the author is both creator and 'directly one of the characters in the action, and in the end suffers in a way that is comparable to the suffering of others', thereby indicating the possibility of pathos and catharsis for the author and his audience, who suffer in relative safety (Marcus, *Freud*, p. 53).

while simultaneously pushing it away. Is he one of the ‘Few’ asks Milne’s colleague – ‘No, one of the many’ is Milne’s reply, referring to survivors who, although they have returned, are ‘half-absent’ (104). Lucian’s mind is a time-bomb, lodged within a listless body and as Mollie, his wife tells Milne, ‘He’s taken to sitting quite quiet for a long time; and if you speak to him it’s as though he isn’t there [...] the engine won’t even start’(44/45). In therapy, Lucian’s body on Milne’s couch is prone, arms crossed, deliberately in the corpse position; he responds to unclaimed trauma with silence and withdrawal, so that ‘mentally speaking’ he turns his back on Milne (68). At times, literal absence mirrors his psychological absence: Lucian is often hours late for his session and on one occasion when he finally shows up, it is with a stolen, gold cigarette case that he presents to Milne as a gift (99). It is of course the ‘wrong case’, a diversion tactic but nevertheless a symbolic, wordless gesture to connect Lucian to Milne, as is his taking and using of Milne’s ash plant walking stick (91).

In Milne’s room, Lucian comes to embody safe and dangerous talk simultaneously. The psychoactive drug, together with Milne’s questions and commands, triggers Lucian’s abreaction as he relives the events from his past and is back in the cockpit of his Spitfire: ‘ “She’s on fire!” said Lucian in a queer high-pitched voice. “Christ, she’s on fire. Christ, she’s on fire.” His hands suddenly thrust convulsively forward.’ (141). ‘Convulsive’, ‘shuddering’ and ‘quivering’ convey the force of Lucian’s wounded voice but more than this, the text itself judders, characterised by fast paced, short utterances followed by silences; his low, calm voice is juxtaposed with high-pitched tones and Lucian’s story is frequently interrupted by breaks, by sobs and whimpering, all linguistic symptoms of the storyteller’s trauma. In this way, Lucian begins to tell Milne his trauma story (he knows what happened) but his wounded self, sensing the extreme danger to come, panics him into going no further so that ‘there (is) a long silence broken only by Lucian’s rapid breathing [...] “I’m O.K. But I feel damn sick [...] Oh, Christ—!”’ (142). He talks ‘brokenly’ veering between bouts of terror and calm, between scrambled fragments and coherent, chronological sequencing of events as he falls into the hands of Japanese soldiers who are his torturers (144/5). Stalling, he .

stops talking as self-defence in the presence of Milne and in anticipation of a confession of the worst of all crimes – he talked, betraying his fellow pilots and helping the enemy. He relives Burma; being interrogated and switching to a third person, dissociated viewpoint, he tells Milne ‘I can’t tell about it if he’d passed out, can I?’ (144). The pretence that ‘he was dead’ is an attempt to finish the talk, to cut it short and leave the deepest part of the wound safely unopened but Milne knows that there is more to tell. The texture of Lucian’s story of days of interrogation and torture is itself halting and interrupted in mimetic realism. Balchin deploys adjectives of uncontrolled motion to describe Lucian’s body (“shuddering”, ‘quivering’, ‘rigid’, ‘stiffened’), which are threaded through the text to represent somatic shock, and adverbs for how his talk is voiced, ‘brokenly’, ‘convulsively’, ‘hysterically’(144/145). After the intensity of this account, Lucian becomes quieter, sobbing and whispering but with terror in his eyes, ‘name, rank and number—finish. They were always telling us that. Whatever they do to you. Name, rank and number—finish. After that, don’t say anything’ (145). ‘Broken’ is the key to Lucian’s storytelling throughout this scene – the torture continues until he finally breaks his silence ‘I told them everything I knew and what I didn’t know I made up [...] about locations, about ‘planes, about training—’ (147). In Milne’s consulting room, Lucian collapses, sobbing and Milne is satisfied that he has broken through Lucian’s wall of silence; the therapist is pleased with the outcome, applying his textbook learning:

‘Having taken it out and looked at it, you can see that it’s all in the past, and that there’s nothing to be frightened about or ashamed of or anything. The whole thing’s just a story now...’ (149).

Lucian’s trauma is a ‘good story’, his escape ‘a pretty story’ and finally, ‘just a story’ with no lasting danger; but when he acknowledges his feelings of profound shame and guilt, Lucian rejects ironic understatement, calling it a ‘bloody disgraceful business’ and adding that in Japanese culture ‘a man who lets himself be captured and then talks, like I did [...] is the lowest thing that crawled’ (150). Lucian veers between the two modes, in which talk conceals and reveals: on the one hand, he underplays the trauma, attempting to defuse its explosive

danger with euphemistic understatement – ‘I had a rather sticky time in the war’ (56). On the other hand, both storyteller and listener are challenged with responding to unspeakable events, resisting the impulse to ‘look away’ when the physical horror is at its most intense.

Ultimately, in Frank’s terms, the teller must tell ‘a good story’ and the listener expects ‘narrative truth’.<sup>70</sup> Confession in literature constitutes a good story and since its goal is absolution and salvation, whether in sacred or secular terms, confession can be a form of safe speaking, a purifying act; it plays its part in Balchin’s novel. The novel’s epigraph, printed ahead of the Prologue and containing Balchin’s title, evokes misdeeds, confession, deception and self-knowledge; it is taken from Donne’s ‘*Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*’:

There are too many Examples of men that have been their own executioners, and have made hard shrift to bee so; some have always had poyson about them, in a hollow ring upon their fingers, and some in their Pen that they use to write with[...] I do nothing upon my selfe, and yet am mine owne Executioner.<sup>71</sup>

‘Hard shrift’ refers to the short period of time devoted to confession followed (in Donne’s Christian terms) by penance and absolution; Lucian’s crisis of survival is brought to an end when he becomes his own executioner. Milne is explicitly a ‘father confessor’ and for his lover, Barbara, the ‘shameless minx’ with a ‘sex complex’, he is ‘a very nice person to tell your sins to’, partly because he is unshockable (22). Even Mollie Lucian ends her story of her fallen husband, ‘the boy Adam’, with ‘there’s my true confession’, adding that he is the one who has something ‘to get out of his system’ (45). In this context of confession, talk may be the means to achieve spiritual safety and expiation or perhaps Balchin intends an ironic comment on those in psychoanalysis who overstate its powers. Milne considers leaving the practice saying that ‘this job needs God, and I’m not God’ (251).

<sup>70</sup> Frank, *Wounded*, p. 62.

<sup>71</sup> John Donne, ‘*Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*’, Meditation XII (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). Donne’s ‘*Devotions*’ are reflections, written after his own serious illness, that cover death, rebirth and the Elizabethan concept of sickness as a visitation from God reflecting internal sinfulness. Balchin also makes reference in the novel to the Oxford Group, dubbed ‘conchies’ which was a movement based on self-examination and confession. They formulated a number of slogans one of which was ‘come clean’.

In spite of the dis-composition and incoherence in the story of the wound delivered by a faltering and broken voice, Frank insists that the listener must hear the story fully because:

One of our most difficult duties as human beings is to listen to the voices of those who suffer. The voices of the ill are easy to ignore, because these voices are often faltering in tone and mixed in message, particularly in their spoken form [...] listening is hard, a moral act.<sup>72</sup>

He focuses on how the listener responds to the knowledge of another's suffering that has now passed to him or her. Balchin embeds Lucian's story in his portrayal of Milne, who not an obvious figure of sympathy; he is a flawed yet dedicated man of competence whose own marriage is in trouble, who is emotionally insensitive, who self-deceives and whose desires run to 'shop-girl tastes in sex' (172). It is significant that Milne is with his lover, Barbara, on the night of the final, fatal events, a decision driven by illicit sexual desire resulting in what he later sees as his own personal act of betrayal (of his wife and his patient). Milne is unable to talk honestly to his wife, Patricia, about the state of their marriage and for Garston, his colleague well practised in special pleading, the Biblical reference provides an apt reflection: 'He saved others, Himself, he cannot save' (173).<sup>73</sup> Milne and Lucian together co-construct the line from Tennyson's dramatic monologue, *Oenone*, that relates to the judgement of Paris; it is pointedly about self-knowledge, a prerequisite of sanity and salvation but one of three human qualities in the Tennyson text that Milne completes: 'self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control [...] these three alone lead life to sovereign power', a line freighted with significance for both men for whom mastery of the self is a mystery (87).

To turn once again to Marcus's examination (following Freud) of 'narrative insufficiency', the analyst has to be prepared for a storyteller who may be disingenuous, display amnesia or paramnesia and employ various other means of dis-composition before he

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<sup>72</sup> Frank, *Wounded*, p. 25.

<sup>73</sup> Matthew 27. 42 (Herod describes the crucified Christ).

or she tells a complete and coherent story.<sup>74</sup> Balchin, as the creative agent, layers his novel formally for clarity of interpretation but embedded within his text is the sufferer's story, haltingly told using the ploy of amnesia (feigned). Thus, Balchin simultaneously represents Lucian's disintegration in the broken disorderliness of his stories, which are neither 'smooth' nor 'exact' but unstable and confused.<sup>75</sup> Lucian tells one story of the strangling of Mollie in the third person, a dissociated denial of culpability in a mix of past and present tense: 'He looked pretty good. He looks glorious naked [...] grand and magnificent and strong' (102). There is also a correspondence here to Frank's concept of auto-mythologizing, the voice that channels the force of the dominating body, 'I saw all this...watched it' and as he recounts the story, he sweats and his body shakes 'convulsively' in a somatic spasm (102).

The listener, witness to the trauma story, may also become a participant in the process; it is a danger for the analyst, who should remain safely objective. But as Lucian's suffering passes to Milne (he now experiences the headaches) there is no-one to whom Milne can tell his story. In the formal manner of the *noir* thriller or the more sensational finale of a piece of pulp fiction, he is depicted as the figure about to fall, suffering extreme vertigo as he clings to the outside of a building. Milne is 'safe enough if he (does) not move, but if he moved he would fall' (220). The image provides a motif for Milne during the inquest into the deaths of Mollie and Lucian: he is psychologically and professionally in limbo, unable to influence Lucian's actions. The novel's ending, with a detailed exposition set in the tense courtroom, presents Milne feeling as if he is on trial, even though the coroner's 'comfortable' verdict is that he 'acted like a brave man and did his best for his patient'; he adds the very public warning that expert intervention in such cases is the only way to prevent a tragedy, the 'only safe way' (243). Milne feels that the truth has been hushed up, flattening a complex case, in which he failed to heal his patient, to act on covert signals in Lucian's behaviour and

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<sup>74</sup> Marcus, *Freud*, p. 61.

<sup>75</sup> Marcus, *Freud*, p. 60.

to keep Mrs Lucian safe; the talking cure is not a smooth or exact science and the full story of a wound may never be known by a stranger.

In James's view, the success of *Mine Own Executioner* was 'more than just a last flare of the wartime reconciliation between Fiction and the Reading Public'; he praises the way Balchin manages layered ironies in this intelligently wrought thriller.<sup>76</sup> The genre gives the author licence to depict Lucian's mental state as a formally structured puzzle, but the novel also has an unsettling, mimetic realism particularly in its depiction of Lucian's crisis of survival. James is intrigued by Balchin's emotional reticence in the portrayal of Milne, as if this is the author's personal taboo because 'the fundamentally interesting thing in Balchin's creative psychology' is that 'instead of being fully exploratory, his novels are therapeutic'. And the therapy leads to no cure—all it does is continue', and continue it does.<sup>77</sup> It is as though Balchin, the man of logic and supreme competence in life, distrusted his fictional depiction of a complex, flawed emotional life such as Milne's. There is creative safety for an author in staying with what he knows he does best; his success in merging psychological realism with the thriller genre is evident from the popularity and sales of his wartime trilogy. Ultimately, the talking is curative and Balchin ends by confirming that it will continue to be so: Milne is back with his young patient, Charlie Oakes who suffers from bed-wetting (caused by fear of his violent father) and whom Milne has always treated with 'skill and integrity' and almost cured (251). Milne's greeting to Charlie is 'How's life?', restoring the balance between safety and danger, which has been so dramatically and painfully weighted to the latter. Milne's confidence and commitment to healing is reassured.

The final section of this chapter considers the short fiction published in 1947 by Elizabeth Berridge. In her stories, talk is deployed to strengthen and test psychological and

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<sup>76</sup> James, 'Intelligence', p. 141.

<sup>77</sup> James, 'Intelligence', p. 145.

emotional safety in often fraught relationships, at the boundaries of love, loyalty and trust, while facing up to their correlatives and near opposites – rejection, deception and suspicion.

### **3.3 Safety and connectivity in *Tell It to a Stranger: Stories from the 1940s* (1947) by Elizabeth Berridge**

We believed that if you accepted the fact that you might die, you felt quite safe, almost liberated.<sup>78</sup>

Literature [...] it is often claimed, is one place where you can hear the voices of others without going mad.<sup>79</sup>

These short stories by Elizabeth Berridge, collected and published in 1947, are significant for their compactness and rapid response to specific conditions of the war and postwar. Berridge was a new writer in the 1940s and she benefited from the constituency of certain informal networks of creative individuals, many of whom had been in the services and who continued as the editors and publishers of literary magazines and anthologies. One group, which included Jack Aistrop and Reginald Moore, allowed writers to exchange their work and to find suitable publication in their magazines. The material and social benefits of the creative network were indispensable for Berridge during a particularly difficult period for literary output, when publishers were constrained by paper shortages and when aggressive propaganda discouraged speaking out in all its forms. The phenomenon of the writers' network is not unique to this time but was under specific pressure: there was government anxiety about unpoliced channels of communication (as shown in the chapter introduction) with particular sensitivity to dissident voices. Those writers for whom war was a creative

<sup>78</sup> Elizabeth Berridge, *Tell It to a Stranger: Stories from the 1940s* (London: Persephone, 1947/2000), Afterword, p. 169.

<sup>79</sup> Lyndsey Stonebridge, *The Writing of Anxiety: Imagining Wartime in Mid-Century British Culture* (London: Palgrave, 2007), p. 124.

imperative valued their literary integrity and were determined to exercise both, with the protection and financial support of a group of ambitious individuals. I propose that the network and its publications, containing Berridge's earliest short stories, provided a new writer with a constituency of safety (liberated as she was by being resigned to the proximity of physical danger) that could withstand the exigencies of war. Conversations in Berridge's stories can summon in her characters feelings of self-esteem and self-approbation that sustain psychological safety. Simultaneously, they engender suspicion, deception and secrecy in figures compromised by the heightened awareness of security and the anxiety that is the backdrop to permitted and forbidden talk.

Feelings of safety that are generated by connecting to others derive from a fulfilment of the need to belong and to be valued by a group, however large or small, from the professional organisation to the social unit of the family. For Maslow, 'belonging' is a deficiency need which, like physical safety, is a powerful determinant of human behaviour when absent or threatened.<sup>80</sup> In Berridge's fiction, maintaining that sense of belonging, through the connecting networks of literature and in narrated, human interactions, may be contingent on physiological risk depending on the strength of the group and its expectations.<sup>81</sup> In the venue of her writing, as in life, Berridge assumes that there are few guarantees of physical safety in wartime; but she depicts safety and danger in unexpected ways, such as when apparently safe talk results in an unsafe, fatal event (in the story called 'Lullaby' for example). The significance of the writer's freedom to exercise self-expression and literary creativity (Maslow's 'self-actualisation' is placed towards the apex of his hierarchy of human needs) often involves unsafe depictions and underpins Berridge's fiction. It is a significance

<sup>80</sup> A. H. Maslow, 'A Theory of Human Motivation', *Psychological Review*, 50 (1943), 370–96. According to Maslow, an absence of feelings of 'belonging', also directly related to Bowlby's attachment needs, can result in strong, negative feelings of loneliness, depression and social anxiety.

<sup>81</sup> Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs' continues to be used as a model for human well-being, motivation and development; it has also been applied to the evolution of nations as a predictor of citizens' expected quality of life. See M. R. Hagerty, 'Testing Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: National Quality of Life across Time', *Social Indicators Research* (1999), 249–71.

recognised by Storm Jameson when she writes that ‘the life of the spirit is as much threatened as the life of the body, and its death is the greater disaster’.<sup>82</sup> Berridge’s focus is the ‘life of the spirit’, which she exercised in creative risk-taking. In particular, she depicts characters who struggle to communicate their inner states, suffer bewilderment or engage in wilful misdirection – situated at the precarious boundaries between safe and dangerous talk. The following readings are also informed by Bromwich’s ‘scene of risk’ introduced earlier, which centres on the safety and danger vicariously experienced by a hypothetical reader.

Elizabeth Berridge was living and working in London from 1939 until she was evacuated to Huntingdonshire early in 1941, with her first child and her first published story due at the same time. Her introduction to a literary circle began with a meeting with Reginald Moore in 1939: seeking refuge from a ‘sharp summer storm’, she sheltered from the rain in the Victory Bookshop in London of which he was the proprietor (166). The duality of the moment is confirmed: a felicitous meeting in this literary realm provided her with a figurative, as well as literal, refuge from the storm clouds that continued to gather outside, heralding the declaration of war. She wrote of her immediate affinity with this thrilling place of books, a place of physical and spiritual safety where (as she notes) she could freely shake out her wet hair. She ordered a book, to engage the ‘tall young man behind the counter’ in ‘an earnest conversation about the coming war, about pacifism, about books’ and the world took ‘a side-step away’, conveying the transporting power of the intellectual and emotional connection (166). Moore subsequently became her husband, editor and publisher; it was his literary ambition to found a magazine for contemporary writing and this was realised in 1941 in the form of *Modern Reading No.1*, which contained Berridge’s first published story. The magazine became a series of fifteen and was followed by *Selected Writing* (1943) and then *The Windmill* (1944). Retrospectively, Berridge’s stories, which she continued to write throughout the decade, can also be seen as part of a larger ‘democratisation of writing’, an

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<sup>82</sup> Storm Jameson, *The Journal of Mary Hervey Russell* (London: Macmillan, 1945), p. 123.

opening up of connected opportunities described by Christopher Hilliard in his survey of the literary scene, *To Exercise Our Talents: The Democratisation of Writing in Britain* (2006).

For Hilliard:

This chain of connections and contacts is an example of the way the war brought promising writers into contact with working class writers, junior members of the literary establishment (like John Lehmann and Cyril Connolly) and younger people making their debuts as editors of publications such as *English Story, Modern Reading, Bugle Blast* and *Writing Today* (such as Woodrow Wyatt, Jack Aistrop and Reginald Moore).<sup>83</sup>

The ‘chain of connections’ fostered creative exchange between authors who were largely unknown, except to each other and to a loyal, if small readership (in contrast to the established authors already enjoying healthy book sales, like Henry Green, Nigel Balchin and Patrick Hamilton). From within the strength and security of the group, individuals voiced their shared aim to write unflinchingly about contemporary lives, emboldened to undertake creative and editorial risks. Wyatt, Aistrop, Moore and Berridge are among a group of writers whose names recur in wartime magazines and anthologies throughout the decade. They secured their publications in spite of paper shortages by printing the editions in neutral Ireland and they entered into conversations about editorial control and complacency, evident from the contemporary preference for safe or consolatory subject matter and genres. For instance, Hilliard reports that Berridge supported Pamela Hansford Johnson’s polemic in the pages of the journal, *Writer*, which had been instrumental in building up a network of writers’ groups in the 1920s.<sup>84</sup> Johnson attacked the vapidity of fiction in women’s magazines and the frequent rejection of sensible stories set in the modern world but rejected by editors, in favour of implausible, escapist stories, which diverted readers away from discomforting, contemporary ideas into protective, compensatory fantasy. Hilliard maintains that such criticism of editorial judgement would have had ‘no place in the *Writer* before the war’

<sup>83</sup> Christopher Hilliard, *To Exercise Our Talents: The Democratisation of Writing in Britain* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 165.

<sup>84</sup> Elizabeth Berridge, letter to *Writer*, August 1948, quoted in Hilliard, *Talents*, pp. 40-41.

highlighting the challenging dynamic nurtured by these individuals.<sup>85</sup> In her own work, Berridge illustrates the writer's instinct for risky eavesdropping on plausible and imagined conversations when, as Plain notes, she is stimulated and intrigued 'by the difficulties of communication and the failure of speech' to maintain ordinary relationships subject to the extraordinary conditions of war. Her characters strive to observe normality, routine and order which, as shown earlier, are frequent constituents of psychological safety.<sup>86</sup> Berridge's work is not typical of the wartime 'contemporary writing [that] retreats from the present day' as Elizabeth Bowen observes; rather, she is a writer acclimatised to the voices of her own time.<sup>87</sup>

Both Berridge and Moore 'had been brought up in safe London suburbs, in safe London families', so that it was a 'challenge' to stay in London at the start of the war in which she nevertheless felt at 'the heart of things and at the edge of danger', a phrase which iterates that threat can be a creative stimulant (166). Moore was 'convinced that writers had a major part to play in the war' asking if 'we ever know the precise nature of what we have gone through until our writers recreate it for us?' (167). For Moore, the form of the short story in the hands of Berridge, and others whom he published in the first two numbers of *Selected Writing*, was a particularly good fit, a venue of creative daring and risk in the face of death as a commonplace:

Its tautness, its poignancy, its quality of swift revelation, was the very medium necessary to writing if we were to dare to convey the essentials of so loud and scrambling an age as ours [...] with death suddenly as common as a stroll to the pillar-box'.<sup>88</sup>

Berridge's writing life began 'in the hot growly summer of 1939', in which recalls her intimations of menace (165). Bearing witness to living 'at the edge of danger', sheltering in

<sup>85</sup> Hilliard, *Exercise*, p. 269.

<sup>86</sup> Plain, *Literature of the 1940s*, pp. 51–53.

<sup>87</sup> Elizabeth Bowen, 'The Bend Back', in *The Mulberry Tree: The Writings of Elizabeth Bowen*, ed. by Hermione Lee (London: Vintage, 1999), p. 54.

<sup>88</sup> Reginald Moore, ed., *Selected Writing: Winter 1944* (London: Nicholson & Watson London, 1944), Foreword.

London during an air raid yields certain vivid images but it is the soundscape which is arresting:

People came up from the East End to find deep shelters. We saw them queueing up for places outside Dickins & Jones in late afternoons [...] sitting in trains, we were wafted through the sound-proof underworld of the Tube, passing Henry Moore bodies swaddled in old blankets, pressed up against the curved walls. Outside the train, on the platforms, the noise reverberated from hollow spaces like the din in a swimming pool. We did not believe in safety in numbers and avoided deep shelters after a tricky episode in Holborn. (168)

She does not elaborate on the ‘tricky episode’ but the phrase suggests a scene of disorderly panic or the distress of close confinement that paradoxically rendered the shelter unsafe, the opposite of scenes from deep shelters and London’s Underground, which have been memorialised into stillness, safety and order by Henry Moore’s *Shelter Drawings*.<sup>89</sup> It seems as though Berridge and Moore preferred to hear what was happening above ground, to listen for sounds of particular significance and to channel what Elizabeth Bowen describes as ‘new bare alert senses, with their own savage warnings and notations’.<sup>90</sup> It felt safer and induced less anxiety to apprehend the danger at close quarters rather than being artificially locked down in a sound-proofed shelter, with its incomprehensible ‘din’ of human voices echoing through the tunnels, regularly drowned out by the sound of moving trains. Such ‘loud and scrambling’ essentials emphasise the situation of the writer who is doubly privileged in the textual representation of both safe and unsafe voices, where and why they are heard. One group of stories came out of Berridge’s personal experience of being first in London and then evacuated to the country to await the birth of her first child; she records that just before she left, ‘the firebomb raids on the City (London) had destroyed eight Wren churches and badly damaged the Guildhall. Yet out of this time came ‘Snowstorm’ (168).<sup>91</sup> The stories illustrate Plain’s observation that Berridge’s compact narratives detail ‘the painful, often inarticulable,

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<sup>89</sup> Henry Moore, *London’s War: The Shelter Drawings of Henry Moore*, ed. by Julian Andrews (Lund Humphries: London, 2002).

<sup>90</sup> Bowen, *Mulberry*, p. 99.

<sup>91</sup> ‘Snowstorm’ was originally titled ‘The Hard and the Human’ and published in Woodrow Wyatt’s *English Story: 4th Series* (London: Collins, 1943).

cost of survival', in which her characters are constantly weighing up the risks and benefits to be gained in each precisely rendered encounter, within local often parochial constituencies.<sup>92</sup> The Red Cross volunteers, the landed gentry, the guesthouse residents, the patients and staff of a maternity hospital all have their communicative codes of language that cement hierarchies and enact the values of the group: 'Don't worry' says the doctor to a new arrival at the maternity hospital, 'I'll see you through' (23). Berridge brings undercurrents of anxiety into the dialogue to unsettle and disturb the confidence of such a voice, in which the promise of 'seeing you through' reverberates with a hollow ring for the doctor and her patient. In her stories, human connections fail or can turn on a word into alienation, for Berridge understands that the complex, anxious interplay of meaning and intention can misdirect the human voice. Verbal exchanges, intended to reinforce a sense of belonging, operate at the sharp, risky edge of communication, which at revelatory moments, engage her characters in explicitly dangerous talk. In fiction as in life, Berridge blurs the edges of safe talk: her vocabulary is drawn from the continuum of emotion and attitude when the voice expresses shame, guilt, embarrassment, unease, anxiety, hope and despair. 'Reproach' is one of her most frequently used words as is 'exhilaration', recalling her wartime experiences at 'the heart of things and at the edge of danger' (166).

Berridge's fiction is also interested in the mechanical reproduction and transmission of the human voice (the wax disc, the radio and the telephone) with its capacity to transcend face-to-face immediacy (often impossible to maintain given wartime separations of all kinds) and to fill, substitute or distort the break in connection left by a literal absence. Telephony and recording entail a particular space-time compression in the transmission of the human voice that generates pleasure, wonderment and suspicion. David Trotter gives a thought-provoking assessment of the impact of new technology between the wars in his recent study *Literature in*

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<sup>92</sup> Plain, *Literature of the 1940s*, p. 24.

*the First Media Age: Britain between the Wars* (2013).<sup>93</sup> Trotter's main thesis is that 'communications technology is an attitude before it is a machine or a set of codes', adding that 'the combination of new media with new materials gave writers the chance to reimagine both how lives might be lived and how texts might be written'.<sup>94</sup> Although he does not extend his argument beyond 1939, I suggest that Berridge was drawn to this idea of the absent human voice replaced by prosthetic enhancement, an external device that, like the telephone, transmits the voice of the missing person. The disembodied voice has the power to represent more than itself; it conjures for each listener a complete human presence and it fills a gap, catching the listener's attention and sustaining expectation through the connecting voice. For Trotter, the writer of fiction can exploit the 'slack in the connective systems' on which the writer's imagination can work productively.<sup>95</sup> It is a phrase that could be applied to the telephone call in Berridge's story, *Snowstorm* (1), to the recorded and prosthetically enhanced voice in *Lullaby* (61) and even to the idea of the messenger in *Tell It to a Stranger* (53) taking news from the dangerous war zone to a community of listeners safe in anticipatory pleasure, ready to be roused by a tale of horror and violence.

In 'Snowstorm', the narrative viewpoint is that of the doctor in charge of a country house hospital for pregnant women. They are evacuated from London to the countryside to take shelter from the war but also to endure 'pain and a new experience, to be borne alone'; it constitutes a double exposure to strangeness and disconnection (2). One girl, Theresa Jenkins, stands apart as 'arrogant', the embodiment of disdain for this network of medical competence and security conveyed by the authoritative voices of its staff. Theresa does not want to be there; resentment is in the tenor of this girl's voice, which the doctor notes as 'astounding' in

<sup>93</sup> David Trotter, *Literature in the First Media Age: Britain between the Wars* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013). Trotter cites an entry in the 'Vienna Diary' (1934) of Naomi Mitchison on telephoning her husband from Vienna. She wrote: 'It was, in a way, unpleasant to be so apparently near and yet unable to speak plainly of urgent things for fear of overhearing' (p. 42). The clearer the voice, the greater was the possibility of dangerous eavesdropping and interception.

<sup>94</sup> Trotter, *Literature*, p. 1.

<sup>95</sup> Trotter, *Literature*, p. 273.

its clarity and confidence ‘like her own voice, decisive, entirely under control’ (12). It was ‘as if here she was on the doctor’s ground and could claim equality’ (4). When the doctor attempts to discuss procedure and to offer reassurances for a safe delivery, Theresa’s silent demeanour conveys hostility and rejection, which she confirms with ‘I expect I shall find out for myself, thanks [...] as if she were turning away an itinerant salesman’ (8). Berridge builds the doctor’s public humiliation and private crisis of self-esteem into sharp focus with the introduction of the long-distance telephone caller from a remote, secret world. Trotter, following Barthes, notes that a telephone call exemplifies the ‘cardinal function’ in narrative fiction, the hinge point or risky moment when the protagonist is obliged to choose between mutually exclusive courses of action articulated by the human voice.<sup>96</sup> Alternative choices may well come down to consideration of safe versus unsafe. Theresa receives the call shortly after her arrival and its impact is enacted upon the pregnant woman and on the doctor who ‘could hear nothing of the voice at the other end of the line’ (12). As she watches Theresa and sees how her colour changes, we understand that she would breach professional ethics to intercept the call – eavesdropping on another’s life to satisfy an insufficiency in her own. We understand too that there is probably a choice to be made, as:

Snaking over the countryside went the wire connecting Theresa’s life with Rowley Hall. Somewhere out in the snow, in a city, a man was sitting or maybe standing, one leg up on a chair watching his cigarette spiral in smoke as he spoke into the receiver. (12)

Berridge exploits the slack in the connective system as we speculate on what may or may not have been said by the speaker and the likely part he has played in Theresa’s current situation; all this is summoned into being by the doctor’s spying. Suspecting dangerous, coercive words the doctor unexpectedly experiences ‘a sense of suffocation’ and is stifled by her hospital responsibilities. Simultaneously, her inner voice calls out with rebellious intent that she would ‘*give it all up for a telephone call from a city*’, a longed-for connection to elsewhere from her

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<sup>96</sup> Trotter, *Literature*, p. 52.

world of bureaucracy with its written rules and safety procedures (12). Then, the line is dead ‘and the snow-wastes lay impassable’ so that the doctor is isolated once again in her institution (12). The call has wrought a change; perhaps the weight of the decision to be made has created a weakness in Theresa because the doctor senses that it is ‘her moment’, knows that she could ‘spin a web of words’ to elicit the meaning of that call, ‘suck it from the girl’(12). Instead, Berridge stages a dangerous altercation, initiated by the doctor’s charged question to Theresa: ‘Do you really want your baby?’ (13).The young woman’s response is edged with feelings of defiance and rancour or possibly bitterness, torment even sorrow; the doctor cannot tell. Theresa replies with another question: ‘You’d like me to want it, wouldn’t you?’ following it with a malicious rebuff:

‘The only people you can deal with are weaklings – the world’s temporary throw-outs. The world’s too sharp a place for you [...] I am the pin cushion you sit on by mistake, or perhaps a rash between the shoulder blades you cannot reach. A very special function. And very necessary. Look how it has roused you’. (14)

Discomforted by this intrusion from the real, sharp world, the doctor has been ‘roused’ by a challenge to her ordered existence, as if Theresa had been sent to stir up even more trouble in such troubled times. Later, when Theresa’s baby is still born (possibly as the result of self-harm) the doctor contemplates the voices in her head, eroding her confidence in her own ability to save others. There is the ‘bitter knowledge of what the girl had done’ and the self-recrimination that she should have watched Theresa more carefully, should have assessed the danger of the telephone call more accurately. There is also a voice from ‘somewhere deep in her mind [...] the calm voice, the beloved voice’ from her past, which could restore her feelings of self-worth and usefulness as ‘a healer’ working on the psychological and physical wellbeing of her patients. However, the trust between a doctor and her patient is a precarious thing, perhaps even irrelevant in these turbulent times, when ‘the world can turn up and around like the snowstorm in the glass ball’ (23):

Help, who was to help whom? It was all lies, the voice from the past, your hands’ cunning, lies to get you into a bright little, tight little hygienic cage, rubber sprung – and still you helped nobody. (21)

Berridge's repetition of 'lies' echoes the voices of deception, voices creating smokescreens frequently involved in wartime security. Although set in the countryside outside London, the story resonates with what William Sansom calls 'the atmosphere of war secrets' around Westminster, which was he says, 'ubiquitous'.<sup>97</sup> Indeed, after the birth and death of her child, Theresa had a 'burnt-out look to her, and her mouth lay defenceless and innocent' as if she had just survived a bombing raid, a victim rendered mute by trauma and to whom nothing more could be said (18). Berridge's use of 'hands' cunning' for the doctor's applied skills also connotes the idea of writing itself, so that the narrative is likened to a well-wrought, bright and tight 'hygienic cage' (21). If this is so, Berridge was to break out of this protective cage by placing the characters and her next story at even greater risk.

In its compressed form (just four pages long), 'Lullaby' also evokes the conflicting demands of two worlds, their differences brought about by convulsive changes to a domestic, intimate network. Here, in a wartime marriage, life with a man away at war is precarious for the woman 'knowing he had gone on to some other life and needed no-one' (61) – that 'other' life is the dangerous and self-reliant world of the pilot. With the arrival of the child 'the juggling began', introducing the idea of competition for the woman's attention, a version of the 'hands' cunning' that is now an analogy for the trick of pleasing father and son but equally suggestive of how she is safely, wearily bound by domestic duty; 'she could keep them both spinning equably, dexterously, for a time; father and son, son and father, but then her hand would become tired, the trick fail' (61). This story also turns on the intervention of technology, the mechanical reproduction of the human voice recommended by a friend of the father who had 'cashed in on the pre-war vanity of people who wanted their voices recorded' onto a wax disc (61). The woman is persuaded by her husband home on leave to record her voice singing a lullaby, which could soothe their baby son to sleep even in her absence. Armed with the recording, the couple put the child into his cot and play the record as they

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<sup>97</sup> William Sansom, *The Blitz: Westminster at War* (London: Faber, 1947/2010), p. 16.

eavesdrop from the next room: ‘Go to sleep, darling,’ comes his mother’s voice from the black box, continuing with ‘Everything’s all right, Mama’s here’; the voice delivers a terrible lie but the child settles and falls asleep, lulled by the recorded voice of his mother (62). Unable to object to the success of the enterprise, the woman (an un-named, generic female figure) agrees that the record seems ‘a good idea’ and the couple leave the baby alone with the sounds of the ‘lullaby’. They go out together, exchanging reassurances that the child will be safe even though the woman feels ‘as if her whole being (is) caught beneath the sharp needle, dragged round like a piece of fluff in the shining grooves’(63). Her voice plays and replays its soothing lullaby, speaking lovingly to the baby and only to him, signifying nothing of her silent distress as she feels trapped and unable to escape its relentless spinning. Her integrity as a mother is diminished as ‘fluff’ and while she hates the very sound of ‘her voice spinning off the black disc’, the child only hears ‘the trusted voice that was with him all day’, the voice of his mother connecting him to every good feeling of love, comfort and safety. The woman’s spinning trick, appeasing the man and the child by turns, eventually fails as it has done before: appeasement is no defence. The human voice, framed here as a soothing and safe lullaby, becomes the agent of adult manipulation set against a child’s helplessness, an affective turn that sharpens to a betrayal of innocence and trust.

By the time the husband is next on leave, the record is established in the home as a more than adequate, even safe, substitute for the mother’s presence. A film he wants to see is on, but not at a local cinema; he is determined to go ‘in the face of any obstacle’ and besides, ‘We’ve got the record,’ he says, the mechanical, reliable substitute for the mother, her voice captured in its grooves as its own guarantee of safety (63). On the point of leaving, the man suddenly puts the closed question to her: ‘You’re sure you feel all right about leaving him, darling? [...] I’m a selfish brute.’(63). His disarming statement makes it emotionally unsafe for the woman to disagree and in a move to strengthen the connection with him, to win the competition (with the war, not the child) for his time and his affection, she goes further saying: ‘He’ll be all right’ (63). Berridge returns to her theme of emotional juggling and its

dynamic of precarious ‘spinning’ in the woman, whose ‘fear was always there’ but who suppresses it because it ‘must not spoil his evening’ (63).

This story strongly suggests Caruth’s ‘forgotten wound’, although here it is more like a suppressed, emotional wound in the woman inflicted by the war-absorbed, distracted husband. One of Caruth’s textual figures of departure, figures that signify the presence of the wound, is ‘burning’; this signification illuminates the tragic turn in this story. The couple go out to the cinema, leaving the child alone in his cot in the nursery with the record playing and a naked night light. At first, he obediently closes his eyes to the ‘gentle’ trusted voice of his mother on the record, telling him ‘You’re quite all right. Mama’s here’, but gusts of wind dislodge the blackout and blow the curtains towards the candle with a ‘sudden intensity of light’, alarming the child (64). From across the room, the wax disc continues to replay her voice but ‘he look(s) about’, eager to know that she is there. The lullaby continues ‘...we’ll put him away for a rainy day...’ as the baby stands in his cot ‘almost islanded by flame [...] his eyes wide and black with fear’, as black as the disc itself and the blackened nursery furniture and charred picture books (64). The story derives from something Berridge recalls from her time in London: she would wind up a little musical box bought in Munich before the war and place it in her own son’s cot, ‘so that he could listen to the gentle Berceuse rather than the whistle of bombs and the labouring throb of seeking planes’ (169). The music box plays a German lullaby, mechanically creating an atmosphere of safety and calm for the child (for whom the German words sound soothing, not sinister) by blocking out the soundscape of unwelcome machines of destruction. Its transformation into her story, using a mechanical substitute for the mother’s watchful presence with fatal consequences, is shocking. Bowen’s observation, on safety strategies and their affective implications during the Blitz, also seems

to fit: ‘Where you stay is your own choice, how you feel is your fight’.<sup>98</sup> As previously noted, Jameson was alert to the position of the writer in wartime as one of defence and resistance:

The writer spends his life trying to give a correct account; of what he feels; trying to penetrate the nature of reality; trying to communicate the result of his experiments and exploration; in short, trying to tell the truth [...] Governments at war only care about truth if it is useful [...] we are required precisely to defend the integrity of the written word. (125)

In the title story, ‘Tell It to a Stranger’ Berridge explores the currency and prestige attached to the telling of a good story, honed from experience and with its truth credentials intact – ‘I was there’ is always compelling with its promise of drama and authenticity. Berridge explores the behaviour of a wartime community and its internal dynamic, especially the individual who achieves feelings of belonging by eliciting the rapt attention of others. Mrs Hatfield and her ‘fellow-guests at Belvedere’ represent a company of talkers and listeners who from a position of personal safety are thrilled and exhilarated by their proximity to violence and destruction (53). Before the bombing had started, the guest house had not been particularly successful, but:

When the guests at the promenade hotels saw the sun pick out the bitter spikes of barbed wire set in concertina rolls along the beach, and heard the cry of rising gulls as shells whistled deadly out to sea, every room at Belvedere was taken, and an annexe planned. (55)

The guests settle into the best seats in the house, a theatre audience ready to be connected to another world by the latest spectacle of war, listening and scanning the scene, unaware or uncaring that they themselves could be the object of scanners and a chosen target. On a visit to London, Mrs Hatfield receives her own promising ‘news’ from the young reserve policeman on her doorstep; her home has been ransacked and looted during a raid. Insisting on surveying the whole house, she concludes that ‘This was not a total loss – but by the evening it would be’ (53). Mrs Hatfield is already rehearsing her account, complete with an unsettling visit to the police station to have her fingerprints taken; it ‘touched her, pricked the

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<sup>98</sup> Bowen, *Mulberry*, p. 23.

present into her calm' for a moment until 'the thought of the evening comforted her' (54). We begin to see this character's emotional threshold, how much she can take and still remain safely detached enough to privilege the telling above the living of this experience. Mrs Hatfield has the instinct of the writer in control of the revelation, confident with pathos and irony ('my beautiful wine-glasses, Jack's last present to me') and safe in her knowledge of the end point (57). The story must meet the expectations of her friends at Belvedere, who live in a state of heightened and theatrical anticipation of 'news from the world at war'; the community of listeners will be transported but not endangered by her safely mediated depictions:

That evening on the train she felt even more exhilarated than when she had seen the dogfight in the sky. How they had listened as she described the tiny metal flashes high over the town, how they had sighed when the smoke poured out, like life-blood into the clear sky. (54)

Mrs Hatfield is gratified and valorised by her testimony, reflecting that she is happier and 'more alive than she had ever been', for she feels like 'envoy back from untold perils', like a real veteran (55). She is a survivor tasked with raw sometimes painful scenes to talk of – 'news without the slickness and positivity of the radio' and a reminder of how the mediated voice of the BBC could neutralise a threat with exaggerated reporting of a minor victory (57). To add a second, more dramatic episode to her first, the train bearing its envoy Mrs Hatfield back to the safety of Belvedere, comes under shelling and machine-gun fire. She temporarily joins the network of 'white-lipped' passengers who 'told each other it was impossible to hit a moving object in the dark' and that 'the Hun flashboards weren't fitted with proper sights' (56). The voices of the group attempt to lift them all out of fear, towards feelings of relief and safety by way of facts or superstitions, whatever is closest at hand. As the corridors fill 'with strung voices, some jaunty with relief, others low and shaken', the train reaches Mrs Hatfield's station and this time:

Here was some real news, directly touching her, and through her, every person at Belvedere. The war had at last affected them personally; they were no longer grouped outside it, they shared in the general lawlessness. (57)

The near miss on the train explores how human networks can coalesce and divide, position and re-position at will, and also how connections between human voices articulate to formulate a group's responses to threat as part of its survival strategy. The Belvedere guests have an appetite for the excitement of war but only from within its security as a group; they rely on news and stories to fill their evenings, 'recreating their lives' as if they are actual survivors (58). Just as the train fills with human voices engaged in drowning out fear, so the guests fill idle hours in conversation, assessing and ordering the chaotic progress of the war into a safe scheme of their collective making.

As Mrs Hatfield follows the lane to Belvedere, the landscape and the atmosphere have changed beyond her recognition. She arrives on the drive to find fire fighters tackling a scene of blazing rafters and rubble that was the guest house. Her threshold of emotional detachment is quickly reached and surpassed as, with tears streaming, she shouts 'to drown the flames with noise [...] I've got some news – some news' (58). It is as if the news itself can turn back the clock, summon the dead and dying guests back to life, can reconvene them as the earlier community of attentive listeners, eagerly and safely awaiting news from the sharper world of war. The storyteller in Berridge's tale is herself undone by the scene, now populated by a network of busy strangers who 'would not care' about her news. She tears at the burning rubble of bricks and glass, a messenger with no-one to deliver her message to, like the figure from a childhood tale, 'the little barber who has to shout his secret into the earth', or the unheard voice of the writer who has no reader (59). The story captures the essence of safety in talking and listening in the reciprocal relation between having something of value to say and the careful attention and acceptance (not the same as agreement) of the listener.

These three stories vividly illustrate Berridge as a writer acclimatised to the human voices of wartime and alert to the tense dynamics of connectivity and isolation. She was part of a literary network that supported her but she was also part of a civilian work force of those who ‘wrote books for a living’, like her character, Lenny Roughton in ‘The Notebooks’ (103). In this story, Lenny’s widow, wracked by private grief, seeks solace from radio voices and randomly tunes in to the ‘throbbing beat of men marching and whistling’ Lili Marlene, ‘snatched as it had been from the airways of the enemy’(110). It makes her laugh and cry simultaneously in a tangible connection to the artificiality of the transmission, allowing herself to ‘weep at twenty men sitting round a microphone stamping their patent-leathered feet!’(110). It is also Berridge’s assertion of an essential connection between ‘men and women divided’ by their differences, but with ‘sorrow the common denominator of them all’ voiced by the radio transmission (110). And in spite of the relentless positivity of the BBC to which Berridge alluded, she later wrote that ‘life would have been bleak indeed’ without it; ‘our Bakelite Philco wireless set was a lifeline’ as was listening to the voices in ‘plays, poetry, music, comedy, to keep us sane’ (173). Berridge’s close, literary network maintained for her a safe (independent) writing space under pressure from demands of expediency and restraint; the group to which she belonged formed a collective resistance not to submit to intellectual compromise, whatever the risks.

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To conclude, the narratives discussed in this chapter are, with the exception of a few departures, London stories, written from knowledge or direct experience of the national trauma of the Blitz. Elizabeth Bowen, writing about London in 1941, says that the city ‘to save something [...] contracts round her wounds’ and the contraction of tissue closing around a wound, past and present, begins the silent process of healing the body.<sup>99</sup> To approach the

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<sup>99</sup> Bowen, *Mulberry*, p. 23.

healing of the mind, these authors scrutinise trauma, however discomforting, and reopen partially healed wounds seen in literary terms as taboo subjects – breaches of national security, guilt, shame and betrayal, the broken mind, the trauma of torture, the suicide of the falling man, the burning of a child. On an individual level, they tell stories that confirm a literary integrity that can itself be therapeutic and culturally significant. Storm Jameson, who was the first female President of the English P.E.N. (1938–1944), understood in more ways than most, how literature could sustain a nation's sanity and integrity in the war and post-war, politicising the organisation in ways not previously declared. She warned against the way an 'over-eager authority' would only see danger in free speech (124) and worked to maintain strong ties between writers in Britain, establishing connections to writers in all countries where a tangible intellectual and spiritual life would keep safe the culture of those democracies through an openness of talking and writing.

The chapter shows how the writers working throughout the 1940s exercised their talents to explore specific tensions engendered by safe and unsafe talk. Characters in Aistrop and Balchin, who have been read as wounded storytellers, grapple with narrative insufficiency and the paradoxically unsafe consequences of their talk, depicting scenes of torture and interrogation; Berridge describes the death of a child, by burning. Storytelling sustains us even when terrible events and extreme dangers are recounted; and talking safely (in the form of the story or otherwise) is part of a process that can not only represent the 'unspeakable' but can diffuse its power to cause harm.

## Chapter Four: Safety and Grief

### Introduction

What is grief compared with physical pain? Whatever fools may say the body can suffer twenty times more than the mind. The mind has always some power of evasion.<sup>1</sup>

Hallucinations are an unconscious, instinctive, saving resort on the part of (the) characters: life, mechanised by the controls of war and emotionally torn and impoverished by changes, had to complete itself in *some* way.<sup>2</sup>

This concluding chapter focuses on literary expressions of safety in relation to grief, the response to loss which has been in the substrate of previous literary representations and which is seen as an inevitable consequence of war. Elizabeth Bowen, alert to the emergence of ‘a rising tide of hallucination’ in her own wartime stories, viewed fantasy as a salve to lives wounded by loss and grief. Hallucinations, she noted, were a ‘saving resort’ activated to provide writers and readers with a strange psychological and emotional completion amid the ongoing, diminishing forces of war.<sup>3</sup> Bowen’s perception informs this chapter, which employs models of grief (of which fantasy can be one) to examine its relation to safety in selected novels. Safety and completeness, at the local and national level, continue to be threatened at the war’s end and the novels chosen to represent this post-war period confront us with experiences both of untrammeled grief and of the mind’s ability to evade grief, pursuing the survivors’ alternative ways to reconceive safety.

<sup>1</sup> C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (London: Faber, 1961/2013), p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree: Writings of Elizabeth Bowen*, ed. by Hermione Lee (London: Vintage, 1999), p. 96.

<sup>3</sup> Bowen, *Mulberry*, p. 96.

The chapter discusses *Back* by Henry Green (1946)<sup>4</sup> which centres on the veteran Charley Summers, whose ‘saving resort’ is exemplary of the hallucinatory quality recognised by Bowen. However, the novel, itself a literary fantasy, toys with the conviction that hallucination can be a means of remaking the subject’s wholeness in grief. The narrative insists on Summers’s inability to grieve and this reading considers the text’s uncertainty as to whether his tendency to hallucination and dream is protecting him or damaging him. His fantasy is ultimately delusional, stuck in the cycle described by C. S. Lewis who, grief-stricken after the death of his wife, reflects that in grief ‘nothing stays put. One keeps on emerging from a phase, but it always recurs. Round and round. Everything repeats’.<sup>5</sup> As Mengham and Reeve propose, ‘demobilisation is primarily an experience of lack, of the loss of relations for which only fantasy can provide substitutes’ and as one of many losses represented in the post-war fiction, it is essentially unsafe.<sup>6</sup> Green’s novel *Back* (1946) depicts fantasy as a substitution for loss; it is engendered by Summers’s blocked grief and disrupts the surface of the text with hallucinatory intensity. Judith Butler’s concept of ‘tarrying with grief’ is considered as a safer alternative to fantasy and it informs this chapter; I build on her proposal outlined in *Precarious Life* (2004), in which the grieving subject remains exposed to grief’s unbearability. Exposure to grief over time resists the circular, unending pattern of sorrow-respite-sorrow and by entering into the suffering of self and others an individual and a nation can negotiate a pathway to wholeness and collective, restored sanity.<sup>7</sup>

*The World My Wilderness* by Rose Macaulay (1950)<sup>8</sup> constructs a landscape of topographical loss and ruin which is, I argue, a state characterised by Bowen of ‘lucid abnormality’.<sup>9</sup> Macaulay provides the reader with lucidity in the form of emotional and

<sup>4</sup> Henry Green, *Back* (London: Dalkey Archive Press, 1946/2009).

<sup>5</sup> Lewis, *Grief*, p. 49.

<sup>6</sup> Rod Mengham and N. H. Reeve, eds, *The Fiction of the 1940s: Stories of Survival* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), p. xiii.

<sup>7</sup> Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004/2006), p. 29.

<sup>8</sup> Rose Macaulay, *The World My Wilderness* (London: Collins, 1950/1968).

<sup>9</sup> Bowen, *Mulberry*, p. 95.

material salvage – a clarity of representation (in this novel and other writings) about what is found, saved and can be taken forward from the chaos of ruin to restore safety. The term ‘salvage’ and its relation to safety and grief will be explained with reference to Adam Phillips’s ideas about clutter, productive disorder and psychological safety, which he distils as ‘mess and meaning’ in *One Way and Another* (2013).<sup>10</sup> The final contribution to this discussion is *Little Boy Lost* by Marghanita Laski (1949).<sup>11</sup> Laski’s work takes the reader along a narrative trajectory in which personal grief has resulted in the protagonist’s withdrawal from all emotional attachment, suppressing the emotional life in an extreme form of stoicism, explained below. The protagonist, Hilary Wainwright, is brought out of his emotional anaesthesia by attending to ‘self-listening’ identified by Phillips as a process in which we can ‘be equal to what we hear’ and highly suggestive of Butler’s tarrying with grief.<sup>12</sup> Wainwright arrives at a humane and safe conviction, which is that making and keeping the future generation safe will also be his salvation. Each novel illustrates Tony Walter’s model of the ‘durable biography’ explained as an integration of the memory – or literary figuring – of the lost object into an ongoing life.<sup>13</sup> A sociological approach, it models the mechanism of safety in grief, in which storytelling is again at the heart of a restoration – if only attempted – to wholeness for writers and their characters. Each text is a literary barometer, recording the postwar pressure on survivors who are diminished by loss, grief and ruin. There are additional models of ‘safe grieving’ called upon to elucidate the novels selected for discussion and explained below: recreating the lost one through Walter’s durable biography, Butler’s tarrying with grief, Phillips’s exposure to chaos and self-listening, creative salvage and stoicism. The mind’s power of hallucination to evade grief stands apart as an ambivalent and problematic model, which nevertheless illuminates Green’s

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<sup>10</sup> Adam Phillips, *One Way and Another: New and Selected Essays* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2013), pp. 117–128 (p. 117).

<sup>11</sup> Marghanita Laski, *Little Boy Lost* (London: Persephone, 1949/2001). The novels are discussed out of chronological order because the writing of *The World My Wilderness* spanned several years prior to its publication and had its seeds in the short story ‘Miss Anstruther’s Letters’, published in 1943.

<sup>12</sup> Phillips, *One Way*, p. 228.

<sup>13</sup> Tony Walter, ‘A New Model of Grief: Bereavement and Biography’, *Mortality*, 1.1 (1996), 7–25 (p. 7).

disconcerting novel, *Back* and, as a means of completion, is a prevailing literary tendency in the period as Bowen asserted.

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Studies in psychology and sociology provide us with a sustainable concept of grief recognised as being fundamental to a living, loving human life and therefore integral both to safety and to feelings of safety. For instance, Christopher Hall, Director of the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement, invokes the commonly held view that ‘grief is the price we pay for love’.<sup>14</sup> This view of grief, part of the currency of living fully connected to others, relates to John Bowlby’s work on loss and attachment discussed in Chapter One, namely that grief is our inescapable response to the loss of an important and (usually) beloved figure of attachment first expressed in childhood.<sup>15</sup> The novels discussed in earlier chapters have variously narrated the pain of private and public loss, both actual and anticipated: loss of the subjects’ attachments, due to evacuation and death, loss of home, losses in combat, loss of identity and loss of one’s mind, loss of connectivity, losses of aspects of self and others and loss of the subject’s imagined future. Loss is, by definition, a diminution that leaves the human subject incomplete and as shown throughout, completeness and its cognates, wholeness and intactness, are fundamental to feelings of safety. Grief is widely feared as an uncontrolled emotion, which is overwhelming for the human subject and for this reason it may be evaded, suppressed or displaced with potentially damaging consequences. As Melissa Zeigler writes:

The bereaved are likely to feel – and be made to feel – that their grief reveals their irrationality, weakness, inadequate self-control, and impiety; [...] denial of loss, grief and fear, to the degree that it is constitutive of masculinity and of social order, requires outlets and displacements.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Christopher Hall, ‘Beyond Kübler-Ross: Recent Developments in our Understanding of Grief and Bereavement’, *InPsych* (2011), para. 2 of 24 <[www.psychology.org.au/publications/inpsych/2011/december/hall](http://www.psychology.org.au/publications/inpsych/2011/december/hall)> [accessed 12 May 2015]

<sup>15</sup> John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss: Attachment* (London: Hogarth Press, 1982), p. 27.

<sup>16</sup> Melissa F. Zeiger, *Beyond Consolation: Death, Sexuality and the Changing Shapes of Elegy* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 13.

In the novels discussed in this chapter, characters do not talk openly of the impact of grief and the authors themselves must conquer what Gill Plain calls a ‘crisis of expression’, the inadequacy of words to capture and authenticate deeply felt pain and suffering.<sup>17</sup> And, set against accepted, marked pathways through grief, there are some dangerous impulses; a death without meaning or one that results from violence, sharpens grief with anger or a wish for revenge. Such impulses may be controlled by disciplining unproductive and disorderly emotions, the approach known as stoicism, which is founded on the Roman tenets of self-rule. Melissa Lane explains and extends the concept of stoicism, naming it ‘self-fashioning’:

The extent to which one withdrew from the public realm, the private realm of self-fashioning, of ruling one’s own body and desires in place of attempting to rule over others, became a favoured domain for ethical practice. If one could not escape a wayward sovereign in the public realm, one could make oneself one’s own sovereign in personal behaviour.<sup>18</sup>

According to Lane, the stoic teacher and philosopher, Seneca (1–65 CE) insists repeatedly that:

Anger is useless and counter-productive, even in battle or in war. With its wish to bring others into danger, it lowers its own guard. The surest courage is to look around long and hard, to govern oneself, to move slowly and deliberately forward’.<sup>19</sup>

In his treatise, *De Ira* (On Anger), Seneca prescribes, according to Lane, practical steps for ‘how to free ourselves from anger, and [...] on how the angry should be restrained, pacified and brought back to sanity’, implying that the opposite, being ruled by negative emotions like anger, is a kind of madness.<sup>20</sup> Butler finds an alternative way to deal with anger in grief and advocates a differently conceived relation between the individual and a community to be explained below; meanwhile, stoicism is significant in its alignment with sanity. Alert to dangerous impulses in grief and the mind’s attempts to divert them or suppress them by extreme stoicism, the novelists in this chapter explore grief, idiosyncratic, intractable and

<sup>17</sup> Gill Plain, *Literature of the 1940s: War, Postwar and ‘Peace’* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 178.

<sup>18</sup> Melissa Lane, *Greek and Roman Political Ideas* (London: Penguin, 2014), p. 301.

<sup>19</sup> Lane, *Greek*, p. 303.

<sup>20</sup> Lane, *Greek*, p. 302.

unbearable as it may be, as a process, a psychological state and an emotion. Grief and its diverse expression in both public and private mourning, as I now argue, can itself be productive as a form of and a way back to safety, whereas evaded or suppressed grief takes hold or finds an unsafe outlet.

Since the Stoics, approaches to bereavement have undergone transformational change in our understanding of how we experience, express and represent grief by acknowledging its internal complexity and its somatic appearance. However, some models, drawn from case studies and life writing continue to treat grief as a homogeneous experience, emphasising a single goal of ‘successful’ and ‘healthy’ grieving. The goal that becomes a focus for the grieving subject can be achieved with professional assistance and by enacting schematic rituals of mourning; it encourages the subject to envisage a future life in which he/she can participate with confidence and restored intactness, in spite of having suffered great loss. In these models, critiqued by Hall, grief is frequently figured as a journey, which the subject undertakes singly or in the company of others to work through identifiable stages to an end point. The journey follows a predictable emotional trajectory, moving along a pathway from distress to recovery. Hall’s view is that ‘stage theories have a certain seductive appeal – they bring a sense of conceptual order to a complex process and offer the emotional promised land of recovery and closure’.<sup>21</sup> He concludes that such a scheme fails to capture and engage with the ‘complexity, diversity and idiosyncratic nature of the grieving experience’ and I propose that it is the artists and writers (as well as the psychologists) who search beyond the schematic to explore the diverse and unpredictable experience of grief and to provide literary representations of individual ways of achieving feelings of safety.<sup>22</sup> Just as the most recent psychological models resist a single, well-defined route to the safe end-point of grief, so these post-war novels offer a striking diversity of approach.

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<sup>21</sup> Hall, ‘Beyond’, (para. 6 of 24)  
<sup>22</sup> Hall, ‘Beyond’, (para. 9 of 24)

As a human process existing in time, grief may be linear in its evolution or circular in its revolution; in its literary representation, writers can bring clarity of thought out of anguish without the constraint of either model. Hall notes a recent emphasis on the empowering ‘reconstruction of meaning’, difficult as that may be, as a way back to safety and integrity for a life crushed by grief.<sup>23</sup> This essential reconstruction of meaning involves firstly, making some sense of the loss, to refocus the mind away from all-consuming sorrow. That sense can come from anticipation or prediction of the loss, an understanding that it was consistent with the subject’s world view or belief in a natural, but ordered scheme. Storm Jameson’s grief at the unnatural death of her sister illustrates her incomprehension at a loss with no meaning; as she writes in her fictional journal:

It is not true that, two weeks ago, an air-raid killed my young sister [...] It is not true that she is dead [...] When old people die, surely with nothing left to want [...] one’s anguish is without disbelief [...] But there was so much she wanted [...] from everything of hers we touched, afterwards, it was the future sprang out.<sup>24</sup>

Jameson grieves for her younger sister’s lost future and for the children facing a future without their mother; both offend the natural order of things in which that lost future painfully ‘sprang out’ of every association with the dead woman. Conversely, those who anticipated loss resulting directly from the war often adopted a deterministic and fatalistic outlook; combatants felt that if a bullet had their number on it, there was nothing to be done and death was inevitable. This fatalism results in a ‘psychic numbing’, a detachment from risk and loss described by Joanna Bourke that must surely complicate the experience of grief by psychological repression and suppression, the mind’s evasion of grief.<sup>25</sup> The second part of reconstructing meaning involves finding some benefit from the loss – a growth in character, improved self-rule and resilience or a strengthening of relationships, which can take the

<sup>23</sup> Hall, ‘Beyond’, (para. 20 of 24)

<sup>24</sup> Storm Jameson, *The Journal of Mary Hervey Russell* (London: Macmillan, 1945), p. 221.

<sup>25</sup> Joanna Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History* (London: Virago, 2005), p. 216. The repression and suppression of trauma was discussed in the Introduction to Chapter 3 with reference to the ‘talking cure’ and the work of W. R. Rivers during the First World War.

subject into the future. In recent psychological thinking, expanded below, the subject does not, as Bowlby had argued, benefit from a swift transfer of attachment to replace the lost object in order to achieve intactness. Bowlby insists that the purpose of grief and the task of mourning are to detach the survivor's hopes and memories from the dead and transfer the vision of a future to a new object of desire and attachment.<sup>26</sup> But such a ready transfer of desire and attachment to a new object may give rise to feelings of betrayal towards the lost one.

Public and private rituals of mourning express grief in controlled forms that can safely memorialize the lost one, for example, as in the use of a dedicated discourse such as the literature of grief. The healthy negotiation of grief in literature (in which health and wholeness are aligned with safety) takes place in the changing tenor and forms of elegy, literature's genre of loss, valediction and mourning. Elegy will be considered when analysing the novels because the prose may be elegiac in tone, if not in form; elegy and the elegiac mode construct an enduring connection, a continuance of the relationship in which the lost object can be taken forward into a reconfigured future. Writing and creativity (as well as the making of art objects) therefore play a significant part, in that the loss can be reconfigured as the commemorative artefact, the elegiac text, where presence in art is predicated on absence in life. Jahan Ramazani's work on the modern elegy is concerned with how twentieth century writers have 'forged a resonant yet credible vocabulary for grief in our time'.<sup>27</sup> Ramazani's *Poetry of Mourning* (1994) acknowledges the debt to psychology, which 'usefully elucidates the structures of bereavement' but Ramazani anticipates Hall when he argues that it 'leaves us

<sup>26</sup> Freud's 1917 article 'Mourning and Melancholia', *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916)* (London: Vintage, 2001), pp. 243–58, is generally cited as the foundation work on the scientific, psychological understanding of grief, followed by Erich Lindemann, 'Symptomatology and management of acute grief', *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 101 (1944), 141–48, and later by Bowlby's *The Making and Breaking of Affectional Bonds* (London: Tavistock, 1979).

<sup>27</sup> Jahan Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. ix.

in want of a mourning discourse more subtle and vivid, less normative and schematic'.<sup>28</sup>

Ramazani eschews the widely held view that compensatory mourning is the basis of elegy, an iteration of the model of safe grieving that involves overcoming grief by installing a living substitute for the lost person, providing both compensation and consolation. Instead, Ramazani argues that the modern elegy offers:

A spur to rethinking the vexed experience of grief in the modern world [...] the modern elegist tends not to achieve but to resist consolation, not to override but to sustain anger, not to heal but to reopen the wounds of loss.<sup>29</sup>

From this perspective, he establishes a continuum of greater scope for the elegy, in which the artefact itself forges a more subtle and vivid account of grief and resists a formalised and schematic mode of mourning; thus, Ramazani aligns with the expanded concept discussed here, that exposure to grief is essential for the integrity of the individual and the collective safety of the wider world.

The relationship, between grieving subject and lost object can be developed further by considering Walter's model of the durable biography; it is an example, alongside the elegiac artefact, of the part played by literature and its discourse to constitute safety in grieving through reconstructed meaning, for authors and their characters. Walter locates safe (or healthy) grieving in the diverse forms of biography (factual, fictional or hybrid) by shifting the purpose of grief from letting go of the lost one to the 'construction of a durable biography, one that enables the living to integrate the memory of the dead into ongoing lives'.<sup>30</sup> He acknowledges that this cognitive activity is complicated by mutable grief, which often heightens unfamiliar, threatening psychic states such as a sense of the presence of the dead as an 'illusion' and a 'hallucination'; and he cites C. S. Lewis who, as he begins to let go of his dead wife, begins to gain a clearer picture of her and his love for her.<sup>31</sup> Bowlby too

<sup>28</sup> Ramazani, *Poetry*, p. ix.

<sup>29</sup> Ramazani, *Poetry*, p. xi.

<sup>30</sup> Walter, 'Model', p. 7.

<sup>31</sup> Lewis, *Grief*, p. 39.

conceded that in spite of the cognitive and affective detachment that tends to result from grief, the grief-stricken can ‘reach a state of mind in which they retain a strong sense of the continuing presence of their partner’ and this may be a healthy way in which the survivor preserves a sense of identity.<sup>32</sup> Walter continues to draw on Bowlby’s view that ‘failure to recognise that a continuing sense of the dead person’s presence [...] is a common feature of healthy mourning, has led to much confused theorising’.<sup>33</sup> For Walter, that presence finds meaning in the durable biography of the dead person, which can turn raw, disorderly grief into the safer coherence of a commemorative yet living narrative – and for him it is achieved by ‘not working through feelings but through talking’, which also lends further confirmation of the efficacy of curative, safe talk discussed in the previous chapter.<sup>34</sup> This seems to me to distinguish fantasy (as disembodied or displaced feelings) from a sustainable and shared narrative. Walter goes on to explain more about the process of constructing that biography, how it may be safely achieved by talking (privately or publicly) or in its permanent creative form, by writing (life writing, the memoir, poetry or the novel). The grieving subject is also part of a wider society where horizons, Walter claims, are no longer bounded by tradition and religion; individuals living in a late modern society must continually construct and reconstruct their identity, expressed in the forms of biography and auto-biography.<sup>35</sup>

In the culture of the 1940s however, in the midst of war and during its aftermath, there was not a strong sense that opening oneself to the pain of grief was in any way desirable or productive. On the contrary, as noted by Carol Acton, there was a prevailing expectation of silence and stoicism when:

<sup>32</sup> Bowlby, *Attachment*, p. 96.

<sup>33</sup> Walter, ‘Model’, p. 8.

<sup>34</sup> Walter, ‘Model’, p. 9.

<sup>35</sup> Walter, ‘Model’, p. 7.

Official and unofficial propaganda encouraged silent acceptance of (one's) losses, requesting men in the forces, women at home or in war work and evacuated children to hide emotions behind a cheerful exterior.<sup>36</sup>

Pat Jalland concurs that in this 'culture of avoidance, minimal ritual and private sorrow [...] silence and stoicism, in the interests of morale and a successful war effort, were immeasurably reinforced by the experience of the Blitz'.<sup>37</sup> Jalland further notes that although there is a Holocaust Memorial Day, there is no national day of mourning for those who died in the Blitz.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps the numbers of the dead do not compare (6 million and 28,000) but with no people's memorial of any kind, those victims are doubly absent and the literature of this period may have come to fill that void.<sup>39</sup> Private grief was to be borne stoically and early propaganda left little space for anguish or anger; the Ministry of Information poster 'Keep Calm and Carry On' was designed and printed in 1939 but kept in cold store until copies were finally pulped – its mantra, an official directive to be stoical, was clearly thought to be unhelpful and ill-conceived. Its message now survives in the nostalgic merchandise encoding an indomitable, wartime 'spirit' and giving it a paradoxically popular afterlife as the nation's favourite protection in a crisis. The Mass-Observation diarist, Nella Last, rejects the cultural injunction of the time when she records her own son's grief at the death of his closest friend, George and she narrates the younger generation's loss as part of her own:

My heart ached for him. He seems to have lost his wide smile; his lips fold quietly and firmly, and his face looks thinner [...] he said 'I never knew death before – did I? – that dreadful 'nevermore' feeling, I mean'. I could only hold him closely, and pray that he would be comforted. So much sorrow and pain and loss – so much passing that was beautiful and good.<sup>40</sup>

Even as she prays for comfort on his behalf, Last begins to turn against the Christian discourse of a just war and a stoic acceptance of 'God's plan', questioning its language of

<sup>36</sup> Carol Acton, *Grief in Wartime: Private Pain, Public Discourse* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 69.

<sup>37</sup> Pat Jalland, *Death in War and Peace: A History of Loss and Grief in England, 1914–1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 121.

<sup>38</sup> Jalland, *Death*, p. 139.

<sup>39</sup> At the time of writing, there is no memorial dedicated to those who died in the Blitz in the National Memorial Arboretum.

<sup>40</sup> Nella Last, *Nella Last's War: The Second World War Diaries of Housewife 49*, ed. by Richard Broad and Suzie Fleming (London: Profile, 1981/2006), p. 189.

consolation for George's passing to a 'place of rest' and to 'everlasting peace'.<sup>41</sup> In the diary, Last enters into the grief of others in a way later envisaged by Butler, by opening up to or tarrying with grief, acknowledging that loss involves irrevocable change and significantly, at a time of war when the enemy is dehumanised, that lives on all sides are equally grievable. Last reflects that her son is being changed by knowing death and that 'it's dreadful to think of him having to kill boys like himself – to hurt and be hurt. It breaks my heart to think of all the senseless, formless cruelty'.<sup>42</sup> So, overcome by anger and frustration, in which she rejects the circumstances of war and any rationalised acceptance of its impact, Last attacks the page with 'Kill, kill, kill, sorrow and grief and loneliness, senseless cruelty and hatred, drowning men, mud, cold and a baffling sense of futility – what a Hell broth.'<sup>43</sup> This single example illustrates the tension and conflict between directives of stoical acceptance and the private rage, exposure to the pain and unpredictable consequences of grief, which are considered by Butler in her essays on safety, grief and violence now discussed in more detail.

Writing in response to the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, Butler takes up her concern that anger is an outcome of grief, which may then translate to violence; her essay 'Violence, Mourning, Politics' refers to a 'psychoanalytic understanding of loss to see why aggression seems so quickly to follow'.<sup>44</sup> By September 21<sup>st</sup>, President Bush had announced, in the name of all Americans, that 'we have finished grieving' (Butler's paraphrase) and that 'now is the time for resolute action to take the place of grief', subsequently naming his focus as the 'war on terror'.<sup>45</sup> In the context of national and international politics and in the wake of violent and catastrophic events, Butler asks what might be made of grief besides a cry for war, with its goal of vengeance and with its consequence of increased repression at home; she argues that even in the face of hostility, violence and loss, 'reactive aggression' should not be

<sup>41</sup> Last, *Nella*, p. 187.

<sup>42</sup> Last, *Nella*, p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> Last, *Nella*, p. 36.

<sup>44</sup> Butler, *Life*, p. xiv.

<sup>45</sup> Butler, *Life*, p. 29.

a norm of private or political life.<sup>46</sup> Her response iterates some of the ideas we have encountered in other models – she certainly attends to the strangeness of grief and observes how it threatens individual and national identity, rejecting stoicism:

One mourns when one accepts that by the loss one undergoes one will be changed, possibly for ever. Perhaps mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation [...] the full result of which one cannot know in advance. There is losing, as we know, but there is also the transformative effect of loss [...] what claims us at such moments, such that we are not masters of ourselves? To what are we tied? And by what are we seized?<sup>47</sup>

Thus Butler eschews the homogeneity of grief and linear stage theories in favour of a wider concept of human vulnerability in loss, asking whether ‘the experience of a dislocation of First World safety’ might ‘condition the insight into the radically inequitable ways that corporeal vulnerability is distributed globally’.<sup>48</sup> And she continues with some observations on inequality, asserting that ‘certain human lives are more grievable than others’.<sup>49</sup> In *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable*, (2009/2010), Butler develops her claim made in the earlier essays by saying that far from ‘privatising’ us and rendering us solitary, the precariousness of life altered by grief:

Implies living socially, that is, the fact that one’s life is always in some sense in the hands of others [...] Reciprocally, it implies being impinged upon by the exposure and dependency of others, most of whom remain anonymous.<sup>50</sup>

In foregrounding the obligation of the individual to unknown others, a significant endorsement of solidarity, Butler extrapolates that such obligation will collectively ‘furnish a sense of political community of a complex order’, creating global justice based on rational tenets, interdependence between peoples and ethical responsibility.<sup>51</sup> It is an ambitious

<sup>46</sup> Butler, *Life*, p. xiv.

<sup>47</sup> Butler, *Life*, p. 21.

<sup>48</sup> Butler, *Life*, p. 30.

<sup>49</sup> Butler, *Life*, p. 32. Butler names this inequality as ‘a hierarchy of grief’, explaining that ‘certain lives will be highly protected, and the abrogation of their claims to sanctity will be sufficient to mobilise the forces of war. Other lives will not find such fast and furious support and will not even qualify as grievable.’ Butler’s position on power and powerlessness is relevant to the narratives analysed in the body of the chapter.

<sup>50</sup> Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009/2010), p. 14.

<sup>51</sup> Butler, *Life*, p. 22.

theoretical end-point, a new conceptualising of loss, grief and mourning that looks beyond existing boundaries and which has global ambitions. Butler's insistence on exposure to the unbearability of grief, for the self and others, advocates that dangerous, reactive aggression should give way to safer, humane and empathetic or sympathetic connections. Her position rationalises that exposure to and acknowledgement of the disordered vulnerability of grief is more productive than stoicism and certainly safer than perpetuating a cycle of violence, in which losses mount. Walter would add that a productive disorderliness, from which comes the making of his durable biography of the lost object (person, community or nation) should be achieved not through working through feelings (of anger and revenge for example) but through talking, the articulation of cognitive and affective reconstruction and the making of sustainable memory.

The significance of Walter's model of safe (productive) grieving, in which survivors construct a story that places the lost object within their lives and which is capable of enduring over time, is reflected across disciplines. Gill Plain describes the British postwar as a culture of 'disappointment and uncertainty in which the work of reconstruction is permeated by a necessary and painful negotiation of grief'.<sup>52</sup> Whilst the storytelling of this postwar period figures loss explicitly, it is also preoccupied with recovery and reclamation through textual negotiation, an open dialogue with and about grief that seeks a way through its intractability for the safeguarding of the subject.<sup>53</sup> Anticipating Plain's 'negotiation of grief', the psychoanalyst Judith Herman presented a model in which storytelling played a significant part in the way human beings process grief (and trauma, as discussed in the previous chapter). In the analyst's terms, this constitutes bearing witness to the past to achieve safety in the present. It is part of recovery from loss in which:

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<sup>52</sup> Plain, *Literature of the 1940s*, p. 177.

<sup>53</sup> This statement acknowledges that grief is not a homogeneous or unique experience but, as outlined in the chapter introduction, is complex and mutable.

The need to preserve safety must be balanced constantly against the need to face the past. The patient and therapist together must learn to negotiate a safe passage between the twin dangers of constriction and intrusion.<sup>54</sup>

Herman's 'safe passage', a subset of the journey analogy encountered earlier, is itself 'oscillating and dialectical', resisting attempts to give it pattern or order. Even so, Herman notes a discernible and gradual macro 'shift from unpredictable danger to reliable safety', which is figured as a narrative arc, anticipating Walter's attribution of safety to the durable biography and reconstructed autobiography.<sup>55</sup> With these models in mind, I now turn to the literary texts, first providing an overview of how the psychological ways of thinking can be applied to them.

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Henry Green's *Back* (1946) is set in the 'dreary closing phase' of the war, a world of food and fuel shortages, blitzed buildings and fear of flying bombs.<sup>56</sup> It narrates the repatriation of Charley Summers to his pre-war English base from a prisoner-of-war camp in France. Centring on Summers, the plot involves his unvoiced grief overwhelmed by an obsessive desire for his dead lover, Rose and his delusion that her living half-sister, Nancy *is* Rose. Green represents Summers's fantasy in scenes of hallucinatory and elegiac composition, revealing his urgent need to reconstruct the corporeal presence of Rose in the space of her incomprehensible absence. Whilst acknowledging what Bowen called the 'rising tide of hallucination' in wartime fiction and also the compensatory role of elegy, this reading finds that Summers's 'saving resort' – his fantasy of living Rose – is delusional and unsafe, fracturing his mind and confusing his body. Further, with its mistaken identities (there are several), Green's text resists Walter's model of the durable biography since characters' identities are themselves destabilised and are subject to delusional minds and to misdirected memories. Green plays with our interpretation of Summers's fantasies and our ability to

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<sup>54</sup> Herman, *Trauma*, p. 176.

<sup>55</sup> Herman, *Trauma*, p. 155.

<sup>56</sup> Jeremy Treglown, *Romancing: The Life and Work of Henry Green* (London: Faber, 2000), p. 184.

sympathise with him in his grief is compromised, since he fails to acknowledge it. His arrested state suggests that Butler's tarrying with grief could benefit Summers if he is to incorporate his loss into a sustainable future life with Nancy, which Green proposes and undermines in the closing scene of his novel.

Rose Macaulay's *The World My Wilderness* (1950) embraces fantasy in the form of desire and lust for ruins with their romantic suggestiveness and compensatory power; the novel is set amid the blitzed buildings, the postwar ruins of London, now colonised by wild plants and exposing a seductive heritage in 'the foundations of a wrecked merchant city'(52). Although Macaulay executes her composition of bombed streets and churches with a landscape artist's eye, she is fundamentally preoccupied with the human loss and grief they symbolise. As observed by Leo Mellor, the seventeen-year-old Barbary and her step-brother, Raoul, are bombsite *maquisards*, transplanted to London from the wild foothills of the Pyrenees and 'equally part of the wreckage, giving a symbiosis of material and human debris'; they have already experienced a parallel terrain of subterfuge, absence and loss by surviving in occupied France.<sup>57</sup> This reading focuses on how the novel weighs loss against what remains, in this symbiotic relationship between the ruined city and its re-claimers, asking what is salvageable after catastrophic loss, for the restoration and healing of the human spirit and in order to reconfigure biography and autobiography. The process of salvage, as creative constructive reclamation, is further explained below but it involves the selection of fragments with which one can reconfigure meaning – an important component of safe grieving suggested by Hall and Walter. Macaulay's themes of ruin-lust, salvage and reclamation resonate beyond literary representation to the wider, pragmatic question of what

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<sup>57</sup> Leo Mellor, *Reading the Ruins: Modernism, Bombsites and British Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 193.

to make of material ruins.<sup>58</sup> In Macaulay's novel, the picturesque ruin and the pragmatic, irreverent re-claimers coexist: the salvage gang hoard their loot at the edge of London Wall and the fire brigade makes a tomato garden in the ashes.

In Marghanita Laski's *Little Boy Lost* (1949), the narrative of grief turns primarily to the grief-stricken individual whose self-imposed protection is to withdraw from any emotional attachments. At the start of the novel, Hilary Wainwright, poet and intellectual who has been forced to leave his wife Lisa and their new-born child in Paris in 1940, understands that he has a son, safe and living in France. After his own repatriation, Wainwright receives notification from the Foreign Office in 'stiff official phrases' of the death of Lisa Wainwright 'at the hands of the Gestapo in Paris in December, 1942' (9). He has a last letter from Lisa, undated and imploring him to '*come and save our baby. As soon as it is safe, you must come over and fetch him [...] and teach him English and make him your son*' (11, italics original). Five years on, Wainwright receives news that the whereabouts of the boy is now unknown; the news initiates a quest, opening the narrative space for consolation, even redemption provided by the safe recovery of the child. But Laski's novel resists the compensatory goal of the quest, with its external safety mechanism of neat substitution, capable of fixing grief. What is more, Wainwright as a character can be alienating and unsettling in his persistent refusal to allow himself to grieve – by adopting extreme stoicism. The narrative has four sections, with each inter-title reflecting the emotional and moral testing of Wainwright: *The Loss, The Search, The Ordeal* and *The Judgement*. When Wainwright finds a boy, an orphan of the right age, he persists in consciously resisting compassion so that his ethical position is scrutinised, his motivation and behaviour called into question. But the psychic wound of his loss is reopened and he breathes again as the creative and empathetic figure he wants to be, directed by 'self-listening'. Finally, with its obligation to the anonymous other, the novel

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<sup>58</sup> Kenneth Clark had commissioned war artists, such as Graham Sutherland and John Piper, to paint arresting, glowing compositions of fire-bombed churches; they could be seen as picturesque and equally could serve as war memorials, to remind the next generation that its security was built on past loss and sacrifice.

guides us to the safe conviction that compassion, connection and solidarity, born out of Butler's tarrying with grief, can renew feelings of completeness and renewed hope. Wainwright finally accepts the boy Jean, in an act of recognition of his personal loss and of the child's equally grievable life.

#### **4.1      Unsafe Fantasy in *Back* (1946) by Henry Green.**

When grieving is something to be feared, our fears can give rise to the impulse to resolve it quickly, to banish it in the name of an action invested with the power to restore the loss or return the world to a former order, or to reinvigorate a fantasy that the world formerly was orderly [...] Is there something to be gained from grieving, from tarrying with grief, from remaining exposed to its unbearability?<sup>59</sup>

At the start of *Back* (1946), Henry Green's veteran Charley Summers returns to the London suburb of Redham where he and his dead lover Rose had conducted their secret affair before the war. After four years of internment in France and having lost his leg to a 'sniper's rifle', Summers finds a changed community of individuals, unrecognisable to him after such a long absence and preoccupied with the quotidian practices of a war-weary home front during the final phase of the war (7). As we saw in the work of Jack Aistrop and Nigel Balchin in the previous chapter, the literary figure of the returning soldier is a complex nexus of post-conflict loss, disorientation, fragmentation and safety and danger-seeking instincts. The pain of incomprehensible and unbearable loss itself endangers the protagonist but the instinct to return home is primordial; the tensions and ambiguities raised by such a figure stimulate Green's experimental representation. In this section, I examine Green's figure of blocked grief, Summers who is the embodiment of precarious, psychological confusion and unresolved loss. Summers is a damaged survivor whose multiple losses are physical, emotional and psychological: they are signified by his loss of hearing and intermittent

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<sup>59</sup> Butler, *Life*, p. 29.

muteness, his lost leg, his lost lover Rose, his amnesia, his loss of fatherhood and above all, his hallucinations. Green wrote to Rosamond Lehmann when *Back* was a work in progress:

It's all about a man whose nerves are very bad. [Having been] blessed or cursed by a frightful surge of power & ideas [...] the truth is that the present times are an absolute gift for the novelist. I see *everything* crumbling and growing all around me.<sup>60</sup>

Green's intense surge of creative power and his sense of the specificity of the time as a period of strange volatility and dramatic opposition, in which the world was 'crumbling and growing' simultaneously, finds expression in Summers's unsafe recourse to the 'saving resort' of fantasy. Green's grief-stricken protagonist constructs vivid hallucinations of Rose as still living – the reinvigorated fantasy of the world as it once was so precisely identified by Butler that *feels* safe because it denies the pain of loss and grief in favour of the cherished order of the past – Summers and Rose together, as lovers. And by creating a delusional fantasy that Rose lives, Summers embodies an unsafe psychic state, because in failing to experience grief, he does not move towards a safer state of acceptance of her death fashioned as a durable biography of her life. Butler, as noted above, argues that it is unhelpful to aspire to or to 'reinvigorate a fantasy that the world formerly was orderly' (to attempt to cling to the past); rather, one should live in the present and tarry with grief, even though it feels unsafe and one is overcome by untrammelled, disorderly emotion. Although disorder in grief is inevitable, it can be, eventually, productive, providing a way to a safer state. This counter-intuitive model of grief's lasting disorderliness as a prerequisite to re-constituted safety will be tested in *Back*.

There is a further aspect to this topic which concerns the relationship between the writer, the text and myself, as the reader. The proposition made here is that Green's novel is itself a work of disorderly fantasy and that the literary fantasy (which is the text) thwarts a

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<sup>60</sup> Henry Green is the *nom de plume* of Henry Yorke; in the text, the author of *Back* will be referred to as Henry Green; for this note, see the letter dated 14 March 1945 from Henry Yorke to Rosamond Lehmann (Modern Archive of King's College Library, Cambridge).

critically-minded reader in its destabilising to-ing and fro-ing – its uncertainty of meaning, which is a kind of unsafeness. Butler, while fully acknowledging the interior, psychic disorderliness of grief, focuses on its external fall-out and its disruption to our connectivity to others. She argues that:

What grief displays [...] is the thrall in which our relations with others hold us [...] in ways that often interrupt the self-conscious account of ourselves we might try to provide, in ways that challenge the very notion of ourselves as autonomous and in control.<sup>61</sup>

Similarly and in my view, the artist who is engaged in the work of loss creates an imagined (fantasy) narrative, which can be seen as a purposeful ‘self-conscious account’ of the grief-stricken individual, wherein the novelist is ‘autonomous and in control’. In the case of *Back*, cycles of fantasy and disruption characterise the novel as a work of literary disorderliness and disequilibrium, thwarting my sense of a safe, coherent interpretation. For instance, Green undercuts his own moves to salvage his veteran’s psychological and emotional life by introducing a new romantic attachment: Summers accepts and then denies Nancy, still haunted by his fantasy of the living Rose. The narrative progress and tone of *Back* is therefore ambivalent, shifting unpredictably between Summers’s episodes of painful reality and ruminative fantasy. Ultimately and in my view, Green equivocates by playing with feelings of safety in the uncertainty of whether or not Summers can ever achieve wholeness and completion with Rose’s half-sister, Nancy. A closing scene of intimacy with Nancy seems possible, but at its climax, Summers ‘bawl[s] like a child’ and the name he utters is still ‘Rose’ (207). Summers is now in double jeopardy, as Green renders his protagonist both deluded and sexually impotent; at the end-point of the novel, unsafe fantasy, rather than healthy memory (as a durable biography of Rose) finally prevails.

Thus, in the case of the character of Charley Summers, the process of grieving never gets underway – he repeatedly turns away from the reality of his loss, fixating on the erotic

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<sup>61</sup> Butler, *Life*, p. 23.

figure of Rose.<sup>62</sup> According to Green's biographer, Jeremy Treglown, the novel was written in a time of personal instability against the backdrop of the breaking down of Green's love affair with Mary Keene and following the 'judicious, equivocal response of some reviewers' to his previous novel, *Loving* (1945), which he found wounding.<sup>63</sup> Mary Keene's own copy of *Back* has no inscription to her by Green, but, as Lara Feigel notes, it does contain *her* 'angry' response to the figure of Summers on the back page. Summers, Keene writes, 'has no active love, but a sickness, which is mainly bewilderment' and she adds that the novel blames the war for this, which is 'suspect' suggesting that the character displays a lack of emotional literacy or commitment at its core.<sup>64</sup> Green's delineation of Summers is certainly problematic for readers since he is without a discernible, sustained voice in the novel. A silent man, he presents as psychologically bewildered, physically diminished and haunted by flashbacks of his incarceration. In his fantasy of living Rose, Summers imagines a private, consolatory idealisation of his past – a reinvigorated 'fantasy' of his previous world of wholeness and fulfilled desire in Judith Butler's terms, thereby denying grief its time and space. Summers's irrational fantasy is of disorderly desire, figured by the uncontrolled proliferation of roses and red hair, beguiling and yet ungraspable, unhealthy and unsafe, conjuring a revenant of lost Rose.

Having been told that Rose is dead, Summers resolves to find the graveyard, where 'they had put her without him' while he was away; but there is already some slippage in his mind, an early warning of his feelings of paranoia suggested by the otherness of 'they' and the egocentric 'without him' (5). Summers is a figure ill-at-ease, suspicious and anxious in case the local gossip should recognise him and raise a scandal, his ill-fitting 'peg leg' a visible

<sup>62</sup> Freud, 'Mourning', p. 244, had suggested that even in healthy, 'normal' mourning, the subject can turn away from reality and cling to the lost object 'through the medium of a hallucinatory wishful psychosis'.

<sup>63</sup> Treglown, *Romancing*, p. 184. For Evelyn Waugh's love-hate critique of *Loving* see comments from his letters to Green in the private ownership of Sebastian Yorke, quoted by Treglown, pp. 175–76.

<sup>64</sup> Lara Feigel, *The Love-charm of Bombs: Restless Lives in the Second World War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 283. Keene's copy of *Back* is held in a private collection (Feigel, *Love-charm*, p. 489).

sign of his damaged state. Arthur Middlewitch, a fellow ‘repatriated maniac’ who has lost an arm, recalls that the injured prisoners of war are dubbed *les grands mutilés*, attracting the curiosity of women and little more (21). Summers feels threatened by any such attention and in his silence and his desire for invisibility, he lives in his imagination, wherein the work of fantasy generates a false rationale. The scene is, as Rod Mengham observes ‘incurably addicted to the sense and sound of the word ‘rose’’, suggesting Summers’s ‘sickness’ or a trance-like, heightened state over which he has no control and which he perceives in arrested time.<sup>65</sup> Mengham notes the layering of meanings in Green’s vocabulary, which is highly provocative, elegiac and yet simultaneously full of dire warnings about Summers’s fragmented psyche. It is implicated by the manner Summers lost his leg in France, from a ‘sniper’s rifle in that rosebush’ (7) ‘for not noticing the gun beneath a rose’ (3). The Latin equivalent to ‘beneath a rose’, notes Mengham, is *sub rosa*, a phrase from the semantic field of military manoeuvres denoting strategy, a secret or covert position known since medieval times. It is a reference that invokes the rose and its thorns as a traditional symbol of beguiling beauty and concealed danger.<sup>66</sup> The prevailing tone is however elegiac rather than erotic, revealing Summers’s disposition to be drawn to every manifestation of ‘rose’, for ‘climbing around and up these trees of mourning’ in the graveyard ‘was rose after rose after rose’ and ‘her name, of all names, was Rose’ (4); and the roses ‘stared at whosoever looked, or hung their heads to droop, to grow stained, to die when their turn came’ (3). Rose is here aligned with the transient beauty of a sympathetic natural world as it dies and revives, resonant of Green’s sense of ‘*everything* crumbling and growing’.<sup>67</sup> Yet, although Green’s language is freighted with the ‘primary consolation of the pastoral elegy’, Summers seems haunted and

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<sup>65</sup> Rod Mengham, *The Idiom of the Time: The Writings of Henry Green* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 157.

<sup>66</sup> Mengham, *Idiom*, p. 166.

<sup>67</sup> See footnote 62.

taunted rather than consoled. With more ‘elegiac pathos’,<sup>68</sup> Green juxtaposes sex and death in Summers’s search in a suburban churchyard for Rose’s grave:

In what seemed to him should be the sunniest places on a fine day, the warmest when the sun came out at twelve o’clock for she had been so warm, and amongst the newest memorials in local stone because she had died in time of war, when, or so he imagined, James [Rose’s husband] could never have found marble for her, of whom, at no time before this moment as cold beneath a slab, food for worms, her great red hair, still growing, a sort of moist bower for worms. (6)

Rose is the absent presence of the novel and this elliptical passage is replete with erotic suggestion and images of her sexual appetite, of life and passion, symbolic desire and suffering. In its proliferating vitality, her red hair is ‘great’ and ‘still growing’ in death; aligned with the rose, Rose’s hair figures a transcendent fantasy of immortality while the graveyard is a landscape of morbidity and of fleeting time in the manner of Marvell.<sup>69</sup> Colloquial phrasing sits alongside the fanciful and archaic, just as reality gives way to fantasy in this graveyard, that is now the one place ‘one could pay a call on Rose, whom he could call to mind, though never all over at one time [...] crying, oh Rose, best of all in bed, her glorious locks abounding’ (5). Later, when still in thrall to visions of Rose, conjured now by an overheard comment about flies, Summers sees her:

As he had once seen her, naked, at sunset, James away, standing on the bed [...] flitting mosquitoes on the ceiling above, and with her hair which, against the light, on the edges of it, shook and trembled in a flaming rose. (52)

Rose’s ‘glorious locks’, which have now become an erotic ‘flaming rose’, shake and tremble; they are abundant and captivating. Thus, roses and red hair proliferate in the text to convey Summers’s fetishized fantasy of idealised Rose; yielding to this delusion, to his saving resort to a mythical past (in reality, Rose was coarse and betrayed him), seems to complete him by satisfying his desires. Summers is caught in the arrested time of his fantasy and is

<sup>68</sup> Ramazani, *Poetry*, p. 99.

<sup>69</sup> Andrew Marvell, ‘To His Coy Mistress’, circa 1650: ‘The grave’s a fine and private place / But none, I think, do there embrace’ in *Selected Poems* ed. Bill Hutchings (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1988) p. 35.

invulnerable to grief, contrary to what Butler advocates – an exposure to grief in time that is present and continuous. While in the prison camp, the inmates had done everything possible to make time pass, now Summers wants to turn back time, ‘the fool, only to find roses grown between the minutes and the hours, and so entwined that the hands were stuck’(7). So, his hallucinations become his reality – an unsafe fantasy in which his desires are fuelled by and figured as roses and red hair, vibrant, abundant and immortal. Green’s writing takes the mind of Summers away from grief and its authentic vulnerability, to open up a false replacement of the lost one and an evasion (as Lewis had noted), which is highly seductive in its sensual gratification to be summoned at will, then arrive unbidden.

With dogged persistence, Summers invests all he perceives with fantasy and idealised memory, from the rose to a common fly, from time itself to the boy on the bicycle, Ridley, as he searches ‘in the shape of the bones’ of his face for ‘an echo of Rose [...] a likeness, a something, however false, to tell him he was a father, that Rose lived again, by his agency’ (10). The idea that the boy could be his son reinvigorates Summers’s addiction to Rose, which Green further depicts as dangerous by inscribing it on his body. As Mary Keene had noted, Summers’s character suffers a ‘sickness’ that she associated with an emotional void; in the novel his pain is palpable, manifest in his guts and in the insomnia of his troubled nights. Whenever prison camps are mentioned, he experiences ‘nausea, which (has) recently begun to spread in his stomach’, denoting anxiety that he might be expected to ‘speak of it’ (15). Whisky becomes medicinal and therapeutic, helping to clear ‘a sort of block in his stomach, which in the ordinary way, seemed to stand between him and free speech’, reiterating his preference to remain silent (22). In the presence of his work colleague, Dot Pitter, who taunts him with the mention of Rose’s name, Summers denies Rose and starts up out of his chair ‘at this cruel shock, this searchlight on a naked man [...] out of the room to the lavatory, in case he should have to vomit’ (107). He experiences his addiction somatically (his vomiting is real enough) and as a fantasy urge to expel the reality of dead Rose; this is compounded by his refusal to speak of her, which again precludes any possibility of a durable

biography of her and her part in his life. But, Summers's withholding is not akin to the self-discipline and self-control of stoicism, even though Green depicts a micro-society in which this man is constrained by the general and cultural injunction of silent withholding. Most of Green's characters (except Nancy, discussed below) see the expression of grief as a challenge to the rule of reason and as damaging to the social order as well as feminising, though this is not articulated explicitly. Green's narrative asserts that when loss is denied, when grief is repressed rather than expressed, it manifests itself as an unhealthy, unsafe morbidity, akin to disease. The waves of nausea which seize him, together with feelings of unbearable exposure (as a 'naked man') mark a need to withdraw to immediate, solitary safety where he can hide his symptoms without acknowledging the cause of his pain. Conversely, when his mind is numb and insensible to emotion, he feels 'the relief in his stomach' and a short-lived feeling of wellbeing followed by a recurrence of un-wellness (23).

Summers is instrumental in several episodes of mistaken identity on which the plot turns and with which, due to displacement of grief, Green further complicates his character's physical collapse.<sup>70</sup> Having been given the address of someone who knew Rose by Rose's father, Mr Grant, Summers unaccountably finds himself at the address, impelled to revivify his past. Nancy Whitmore is Grant's unacknowledged, illegitimate daughter, Rose's half-sister and when she opens the door to Summers 'he look(s). He sag(s)' and then pitches forward in a 'dead faint' at 'herself, Rose in person' (43). Coming back to consciousness, he knows it is 'all right at last' and he feels 'content' with the sensation of his blood flowing 'all over the inside of him' (47). His feelings of wellbeing and safety in her 'presence' reinvigorate the illusion of Rose, which is also the embodiment of his desire; but, elsewhere 'he fled Rose' while 'every place he went she rose up before him' haunting him, twisting his

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<sup>70</sup> Mrs Grant, mother of Rose, mistakes Charley Summers for her younger brother John, who was killed in 1917. She too invokes a fantasy of a safe return: 'John, to think you're back at last'(13); Summers invites Dot Pitter to stay with him at James Phillips's house (Rose's house) in Essex, where Dot mistakes the identity of the man who comes to her bed and a handwriting expert is called upon to authenticate Rose's letters.

guts because ‘she had denied him and it was doing him in’, leaving him crushed (52). As Summers’s fantasy state becomes ever more confused and contradictory, we appreciate the opposing forces at work in his mind. Summers even rationalises the conviction that Rose lives as Nancy, applying the delusional logic that the ‘Rose’ before him had not heard about him, had given him up or that she had lost her memory asking ‘Don’t you know me at all?’ (47). Nancy is understandably distrustful, angry and suspicious, especially when Summers mentions Grant, the father who denies her, attacking Summers’s masculinity with a fierce accusation: ‘why aren’t you a man, a real man would never do a thing like that’ (...). In her eyes, Summers is disappointingly emasculated, enfeebled, devious or simply dishonourable (Nancy is unsure which) and her own trust in the world as a safe place is unsettled by war widowhood and her ‘unconfessed father’, Grant (76). The mistaking of Nancy for Rose as a displacement of grief and his interpretation of a hostile conspiracy against him, take Summers down to his lowest point; he uses the language of disgust and corruption for the world set against him, muttering that he ‘never knew such filth existed’ (84). ‘Filth’ is ironic and with its connotations of contamination, degradation and disease, Summers describes the world he has come back to, as more unhealthy, unsafe and morally degenerate than the sites of war he left behind.

Nancy’s role as Summers’s saviour is ultimately inconclusive. Her own intentions are ambiguous and her physical likeness to Rose is undermined by other characters who comment that there is no resemblance between them. In spite of their surreal first encounter, she becomes increasingly sympathetic to Summers, who mediates between her and the Grants in their decline. Furthermore, Nancy demonstrates how to accept and live with grief after the death in action of her pilot husband, Phil, asking Summers the questions he has long avoided: ‘What did your Rose mean to you? [...] Was she a part of you? Did you wake with her in the morning? Did you know what was in her mind when she was a thousand miles overseas?’ (172). Green highlights, albeit briefly, the intensity of her very human, intimate loss and its authenticity in contrast to Summers’s idealisation of Rose and his alienation from the

common place, which gives him a ‘day to day sense of being injured by everyone, by life itself [which] rose up and gagged him’ (127). According to Treglown, *Back* ‘continues the sombre exploration of the human capacity for making chaos that lies behind all Green’s work [...] above all in personal relationships and in the individual psyche’.<sup>71</sup> Specifically, Summers embodies blocked grief and delusional fantasy as causes of that chaos, while Nancy is the pragmatic survivor in the text, accepting that the postwar period will be inhabited by diminished, incomplete and sad soldiers back from the war, struggling with reintegration into a changed society that is incoherent to them.

Pragmatic and wanting to build a compensatory relationship from the chaos, Nancy eventually offers herself as a replacement to Rose with ‘Take me where you used to take (Rose) then’ (172). In spite of her request, they walk along a road new to Summers, where houses have been recently blitzed by flying bombs and as the sirens begin to wail again, they look for shelter and safety:

But when they got round the red garage, which was intact, and a privet hedge, which, in this light, and because it was shaded, burned a dark glowing violet, they found what had been the rose garden, enclosed with a low brick wall, and then they had before them, the outlines edged in red, stunted, seemingly withered rose trees which had survived the blast as though it had never happened, and for a screen at the back, a single line of dwarf cypresses [...] with briars that had borne gay rose, after rose, after wild rose, to sway under summer rain [...] the briars wreathed from one cypress to another were aflame, as alive as live filaments in an electric light bulb against this night’s quick agony of the sun. (174)

As if to introduce an entirely new proposition that renewal and regrowth occur unexpectedly in the midst of disorder and devastation, the dark but vibrant privet hedge is a threshold to an enclosed and safe space of rose trees and ramblings briars that seem withered, but are in flower. They thrive as though the blast has ‘never happened’ in an imaginative, momentary returning of the world to its previous order. Green’s insistence of the survival of the wild roses, which glow brilliantly in the darkness, returns us to that connection to a sympathetic

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<sup>71</sup> Treglown, *Romancing*, p. 184.

and resilient nature characteristic of the elegy. But it is Nancy who is now authentically present and emboldened in the moment; she puts her arms around Summers's neck and kisses him, asking 'Was it like that?' in an attempt to get him to acknowledge the two women as distinct and separate beings. As Nancy takes a step closer towards occupying the place of Rose, the boundaries of their separate identities are still dangerously blurred in Summers's perception (175).<sup>72</sup> The kiss provokes in him part erotic sensation and part reverie, characterising the ambivalent tone of the whole scene during which:

Her breath (is) an attar of roses on his deep sun-red cheek, her hair an animal over his eyes and alive, for he could see each rose glowing separate strand, then her dark body thrusting heavy at him, and her blood dark eel fingers that fumbled at his neck. (175)

Nancy's erotic and complete presence is undermined, as if supplanted by the 'attar', the essence of lost Rose with her 'glowing' hair and 'blood dark eel fingers' who has become some fantastic creature. As Summers sees the dying, reflected glow of sunset in Nancy's eye, it is as if she has 'opened the eye hole to a furnace' (175). Treglown highlights the continuing ambiguity of this 'seeming' climax to the novel, ending as it does with Nancy breaking away from Summers, with his arms left hanging at his side, unable to speak and 'paralysed' yet again (175). Treglown asks if the encounter is intended to be 'romantic or apocalyptic?' and by suggesting that it is 'unresolved' in terms of Summers's continued obsession with the idealised Rose, he notes that Green denies his reader a secure interpretation or consolation on Summers's behalf.<sup>73</sup> Perhaps most unsafe and unsettling is the image of the 'furnace' that for Treglown symbolises a sexuality that has been 'temporarily quenched, and then misdirected and thwarted' by losses experienced by both Summers and Nancy.<sup>74</sup> Summers's emotional

<sup>72</sup> We note that Nancy has now moved in with the Grants with her pregnant cat, Panzer (a defiant and quirky appropriation of the name given to the Nazi tanks), to help with the final illness of the manipulative Mr Grant and that she is now calling Mrs Grant 'mother', contributing to the unsafe confusion relations and identities (180).

<sup>73</sup> Treglown, *Romancing*, p. 192.

<sup>74</sup> Treglown, *Romancing*, p. 192. Treglown observes that the 'furnace' image derives at least in part from Green's everyday life as managing director of Pontifex, the Yorkes' manufacturing business. Like Pontifex, the firm employing Summers in the novel incorporates a metal foundry. The factory was destroyed in the Blitz so that essential processes were contracted out to other companies and in the novel this gives rise to bureaucratic muddle and complaint for which Summers is held responsible.

inability to grieve for Rose renders him inert in all other dimensions; we register his silence, his lack of confidence in a new attachment, his inability to recognise that neither he, nor Nancy, wish to replace their lost loves and his mistrust of his own and her sexuality.

However, the intimacy offered by Nancy does constitute a provisional lifeline to Summers, a ‘real life’ rescue attempt. But the question remains as to whether he is fully able to know that Rose is lost to him, to know himself without her and actively to accept the humanity and sexuality of Rose’s half-sister. Nancy remains an ambiguous figure, at times assuming the comforting, unconditional solace of a mother, as when Summers stays the night at the house of the Grants. She speaks to him as a mother would to a child when she says, ‘I’ll look to see if you want tucking in’, which nevertheless leaves Summers in heightened anticipation of a visit from her in the darkness and confused feelings forming ‘one tall question mark’ (181). When she comes to him to tell him that Grant has died, she brings whisky to which she has added ‘a sleeping draught’, so that he sleeps ‘like the dead’; it is only his snoring that shakes the springs of the makeshift bed, nothing more (184). Nancy continues to be depicted as a safe, maternal figure rather than as a lover because he is ‘so helpless’ and ‘his need [is] desperate’ (199). Joking to lighten his low mood, she calls him ‘Charley Barley’ and ‘you old silly’ and in spite of himself, he comes to recognise her way of being with him, on which ‘he had come to rely for peace of mind and with her walking by his side, she [grows] upon him, [becoming] an embodiment of everything comforting, and true, and good’ (202). Feeling safer and more secure in her presence, Summers is able to reveal more to Nancy about Rose: that he was with her before she married James, that the affair continued afterwards as if nothing had happened, and that he could be the father of her child, although we never do learn how she died. Suggesting that he had been used and betrayed by Rose, Nancy sees Summers as the naïve innocent, enmeshed in Rose’s self-serving game, replying ‘She properly played you up, didn’t she’ (203). With eyes wide open, Nancy proposes to Summers and is accepted, to begin what Green unconvincingly insists will be ‘a happy married life’ (207). Simultaneously, Green undermines Summers’s first visit to Nancy’s room

as a return to the profusion of roses, which takes us back to his deluded fantasy, his unsafe protection against the vulnerability of opening up to himself and giving himself to another:

The pink shade seemed to spill a light of roses over her in all their summer colours, her hands that lay along her legs were red, her stomach gold, her breasts the colour of cream roses, and her neck white roses for the bride. She had shut her eyes to let him have his fill, but it was too much, for he burst into tears again, he buried his face in her side just below the ribs, and bawled like a child. ‘Rose,’ he called out, not knowing he did so, ‘Rose’. (207)

The salt water of his tears is the only fluid that runs down between her legs as she comforts him with ‘there...there’, for ‘she knew what she had taken on. It was no more or less, really than she had expected’ (207). It is a release in which Summers is dramatically infantilised but by fully exposing the character to his unbearable loss and by allowing his despair to be known by Nancy, Green offers intimations of a safer future life possible for vulnerable, grieving figures such as these. My own view is that there is a problem for the reader in Summers’s call to ‘Rose’, ‘not knowing’ that he does so in a final iteration of his mind’s evasion. The promise of consolation in the passage above is figured by the suggestive new colour palette of pink, red, gold, cream and white roses formed by the light patterns, ‘summer colours’ enhancing Nancy’s body as if Summers can see her true self. But the roses are ‘too much’ and the promise of consolation is overturned without warning so that we are plunged once more into Summers’s dis-ease of a deluded and now, emasculating fantasy. Summers’s carnal desire and longing for Rose was kept alive in the prison camp in his dreams as what Herman calls ‘a fantasy of rescue’, in which Rose lives and is his salvation.<sup>75</sup> But the only certainty at the novel’s end is that fantasy, the mind’s displacement of grief, damages more than it protects, however seductive and consoling it may seem. Green’s novel juxtaposes psychic damage (‘crumbling’) and protection (‘growing’) in his depiction of Summers and his circle,

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<sup>75</sup> Herman, *Trauma*, p. 166. George Bone is Patrick Hamilton’s protagonist fixated on a ‘fantasy of rescue’ in *Hangover Square*, as discussed in Chapter Two.

survivors for whom the saving resort of hallucination is the line of least resistance and tarrying with grief is too great a challenge and a threat.

#### 4.2

#### Ruin and Salvage in *The World My Wilderness* (1950) by Rose Macaulay

Ruin must be a fantasy, veiled by the mind's dark imaginings [...] in beauty, wholeness is all. But such wholesome hankерings are, it seems likely, merely a phase of our fearful and fragmented age.<sup>76</sup>

Clutter, as chaotic accumulation, could be both a thwarting and a source of revelation.<sup>77</sup>

Psychoanalysis, Phillips argues, usually has ‘an aversion to clutter’ and to the disorder of fantasy always seeking coherence and clarification where there is mess.<sup>78</sup> And amongst disorderly clutter, Phillips argues ‘if you lose something you might find something else in the process of looking for it. Indeed, this may be the only way you can find something else’.<sup>79</sup> I align Phillips’s ideas on clutter, mess and meaning with the process of salvage, a creative reclamation of ‘something else’ found the chaos of loss, ruin and grief and suggested by Macaulay’s novel. This section also keeps in mind the durable biography, employed by an author as part of the creative process of finding safety through the re-conception of meaning in grief, which readers may also find therapeutic.<sup>80</sup>

Herman had insisted that order and stability are essential needs for the human subject undone by grief, whether actual or fictional; indeed, the restoration of safety ‘begins by focusing on control of the body and gradually moves outward toward control of the

<sup>76</sup> Rose Macaulay, *Pleasure of Ruins* (New York: Walker and Company, 1953/1966), p. 455.

<sup>77</sup> Phillips, *One Way*, p. 128.

<sup>78</sup> Phillips, *One Way*, p. 117.

<sup>79</sup> Phillips, *One Way*, p. 119.

<sup>80</sup> There is a school of thought that maintains that literary form of the novel performs therapy (is curative) for writers and readers. See ‘Fiction as Therapy: Towards a Neo-Phenomenological Theory of the Novel’, Patricia Waugh, *The British Academy Lecture* <[www.britac.ac.uk/events/2014](http://www.britac.ac.uk/events/2014)> [accessed 15 March 2015]

environment'.<sup>81</sup> Conversely, Butler, as previously noted, advocates *relinquishing* control, while tarrying with grief even though it means temporary disorder and extreme vulnerability for the subject. Butler conceives of something enriching and restorative to be gained when she asks:

If we stay with the sense of loss [...] are we returned to a sense of human vulnerability, to our collective responsibility for the physical lives of one another? [...] To foreclose that vulnerability, to banish it, to make ourselves secure at the expense of every other human consideration is to eradicate one of the most important resources from which we must take our bearings and find our way.<sup>82</sup>

Butler sets great store on vulnerability as the prerequisite of the safe way through grief and as a resource, although she still uses the metaphor of the pathway as a tangible measure of safety – taking ‘bearings’ and finding ‘our way’ – as through a newly-excavated narrative. Counter-intuitively, a contested space opens up for safe grieving to be bound up with being *out of control* because accepting vulnerability, which is shared and unexpectedly protective, alerts us to the lives and losses of others in a network of reciprocal obligation. Whilst Herman advocates uncluttered order and control, Butler allows for a messy lack of control. For Butler, vulnerability is a resource offering real world protection against a cycle of destruction and violence. She uses the analogy of the safe pathway very differently from Herman but puts equal emphasis on empathy and its cognate, sympathy. Thus, both Herman and Butler advocate a creative reclamation from loss, which I liken to the act of salvage.<sup>83</sup> To salvage (transitive verb) from the Latin *salvare* means to save from peril or total loss; it also means to select, collect or reuse matter, to reconstitute what remains from wreckage and to recover or reveal something of value. Salvage aligns too with narrative selection, the tendency to foreclosure and the validation of matter, claimed and reordered. Salvage is therefore a cognate of safety, which is involved on the one hand through the controlled framing of storytelling amid postwar loss and ruin, and on the other by sustained vulnerability, a level of calculated

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<sup>81</sup> Herman, *Trauma*, p. 160.

<sup>82</sup> Butler, *Life*, p. 30.

<sup>83</sup> Salvage, v. from the Latin, *salvare*, in *Oxford English Dictionary* <<http://www.oed.com>> [accessed 5 July 2014]

unsafeness that heightens sensitivity to and validation of others, crushed as they are by local and national loss.

In *The World My Wilderness*, Macaulay's representation of postwar loss is driven by the concept of salvage: the novel and its young salvagers make their own meaning from mess, while exposed to the messiness and intractability of grief. In 1953, when Rose Macaulay writes of 'wholesome hankerings', she is expressing her longing for personal and aesthetic feelings of completeness when all around her was in ruins.<sup>84</sup> She acknowledged the pleasure to be found in a line of beauty, which is whole and unbroken; but, Macaulay was equally bewitched by the aesthetic of the ruin. In *The World My Wilderness*, striking out from 'the fantastic ruined city into Cheapside', Barbary and Raoul, newly arrived in war-torn London:

Surveyed the gaping shells, the tall towers, the broken windows into which greenery sprawled, the haunted, brittle beauty, so forlorn and lost in the wild forsaken secrecy of this maquis: it was their spiritual home. (57)

The reader gazes on the London bombsites, invited to dwell on and in a postwar terrain, which Macaulay depicts paradoxically as unsafe and chaotic but which she frames within a unifying aesthetic of ruin lust.<sup>85</sup> As Macaulay sifts and shapes the material and human debris and clutter into the 'spiritual home' of her protagonist, Barbary, her novel has a richly suggestive tone. She simultaneously presents the ruined city as a place of chaotic and 'brittle beauty' and through the agency of creative salvage embodied in Barbary, she conveys an awareness of its creative possibility and spiritual uplift, even revelation. The clutter and dereliction of Macaulay's ruined city is perilous but the 'mess' is symbolic and a resourceful character, like Barbary, owns it and takes from it what she needs to build her own idiosyncratic security. Thus, as posited by Phillips, out of clutter and loss one can salvage

<sup>84</sup> Macaulay, *Pleasure*, p. 455.

<sup>85</sup> Macaulay's fascination with ruins aligns with the *Ruinenlust* of nineteenth-century German romanticism and the ruin tourism she herself undertook to complete her work, *Pleasure of Ruins* (1953). The new ruins of 1939-1945 posed questions of representation and memorialisation for Kenneth Clarke, who was, until 1946 the Chairman of the *War Artists' Advisory Committee* commissioning artists such as John Piper and Graham Sutherland to depict the bombed landscape. The preservation or otherwise of bombed churches is the subject of Hugh Casson's proposal in *Bombed Churches as War Memorials* (London: Architectural Press, 1945).

something revelatory and desirable, engendering feelings of unexpected pleasure and wholeness. Macaulay changed the title of this novel, which was originally called ‘In Ruins’, replacing ‘ruins’ with the morally freighted and elemental ‘wilderness’, suggesting Phillips’s concept of seductively rich and volatile chaos.

The embodiment of Macaulay’s vision of ruin and salvage is her protagonist, the seventeen-year old Barbary, who is a creature of the wilderness and emblematic of the exoticism of the North African coast from which her name derives, a territory used as a land base by dangerous, raiding pirates. Barbary’s father is moved to ask if his daughter herself qualifies ‘as salvage’, reclaimed from the wreckage of his first, ruined marriage to Helen and framed as a figure of compensation for that loss (139). Further, the concept of textual salvage had first appeared in Macaulay’s short story ‘Miss Anstruther’s Letters’ (1943) which will also be considered for its close affinity with ‘mess and meaning’, the durable biography and safety amid loss and grief.<sup>86</sup> Macaulay herself declared the bombsite, the landscape of loss, to be a symbol of postwar spiritual ruin, even though she was aware of certain contrary forces.<sup>87</sup> In the novel, she imposes an order less to do with the recovery of civilisation or the safety of the soul and more to do with topographic pleasure, as she tracks a pathway through the wilderness with her ruin gaze.<sup>88</sup> She does so with what Mellor terms ‘taxonomic precision’, ordering the disorderly, listing and naming the streets and alleys together with the plants that have seeded themselves and taken hold amongst the rubble.<sup>89</sup> In the example that follows, the

<sup>86</sup> Macaulay was also charmed by the idea of counterfeit – the idea of the fake or hoax text which deceives, resulting in the reader’s distrust of the text and the writer. She was drawn to the literary fake, which like the literary fantasy provided a refuge from the anxieties and pain of the present.

<sup>87</sup> Letter to G.G.A. Murray, June 27<sup>th</sup>. 1950: ‘I meant the ruins to be a symbol of the spiritual ruins of our world. But Jack Priestley tells me that London, anyhow, is more civilised and moral than ever before’ (Trinity College, Cambridge, ERM. Box 17).

<sup>88</sup> According to her two main biographers: firstly, *Rose Macaulay: A Biography* by her cousin, Constance Babington Smith (London: William Collins, 1972) and secondly, *Rose Macaulay* by Sara LeFanu, (London: Virago, 2003). Macaulay’s spiritual wellbeing, perhaps even the safety of the soul is a preoccupation in many of the letters to Father Johnson which were sealed by Babington Smith on the writer’s death in 1958 and unsealed in 2012. Barbary, in the novel, has an actual fall ‘into nothingness’ losing her footing on the ruins: the message to her mother, Helen reads ‘Barbary seriously injured bad fall some danger’ (200).

<sup>89</sup> Mellor, *Ruins*, p. 176.

children gaze down on arresting exposed foundations; their viewpoint is from on high and safely commanding:

The children stood still, gazing down on a wilderness of little streets, caves and cellars, the foundations of a wrecked merchant city, grown over by green and fennel and ragwort, coltsfoot, purple loosestrife, rosebay willow herb, bracken, bramble and tall nettles, among which rabbits burrowed and wild cats crept and hens laid eggs.  
(53)

It is a scene of colonisation in which the animals appear as escapees from backyards dedicated to wartime husbandry and the plants, described by the nature writer and botanist Richard Mabey (2010), are ‘a riot of opportunists and chancers, the spivs of the vegetable world’.<sup>90</sup> As noted by Mabey, the rosebay willow herb ‘unfurled like a purple surf across the bombed-out areas of Britain’s big cities in the summers after the Blitz’, an illusion of the fires returned. This rampant plant in particular was emblematic of the colouring of the bombsites from grey to green and purple; Mabey continues that Londoners, ‘most of whom had never seen the plant before’, christened the rosebay willow herb ‘bomb-weed’ or fireweed, to denote the violence of its arrival, as well as its colour.<sup>91</sup> Particularly suited to taking hold in scorched earth amongst soot and ash, disintegrating mortar, stucco and plaster of lime and cement, the seeds were washed into newly made crevices and hollows becoming simultaneously a symbol of regeneration (nature salvaging a growing medium from the rubble) and a garish insult to the painful destruction of urban homes. In the early stages of her project, Macaulay wrote:

I spent much of today in the ruins round St. Paul’s, which I like. The golden charlock and fennel luxuriate among the catacombs and the broken cellars of what were once houses and offices. Part of my new novel is laid in this wrecked scene.<sup>92</sup>

This letter fragment in which she appears to contemplate a memorialisation of what had been, illustrates further Macaulay’s ambivalent attitude to ruins. Firstly, she recognises their

<sup>90</sup> Richard Mabey, *Weeds: How Vagabond Plants Gate-crashed Civilisation and Changed the Way We Think about Nature* (London: Profile, 2010), p. 24.

<sup>91</sup> Mabey, *Weeds*, p. 209.

<sup>92</sup> Letter to G.G.A. Murray, May 4<sup>th</sup>. 1948. (Trinity College Cambridge, ERM Box 17).

poignancy as the burial place of entombed victims (in their ‘catacombs’) so that they are, as Mellor observes, sites of loss and mourning.<sup>93</sup> Secondly, the greening of the ruins with diverse, opportunistic flora offers an unexpected concealment and masking of loss as the roots take hold, binding the rubble together in a temporary beauty and wholeness. Another way of seeing the plants that colonise this broken territory are, as Mabey notes, ‘weeds’, but through metonymy, as Mellor points out, these weeds are ‘garb for mourning’ (widow’s weeds), which clothe and visually transform the ruins for a while, preserving their instability and the unsafe chaos beneath. In the plant world, weeds are characterised as plants out of place, unwanted amongst refined cultivation and order; but they are robust survivors – safe and unsafe, concealing and revealing – these plants will always find a place in which to propagate and thrive. Thus the bombsites give materiality to a consolatory myth of survival and natural regeneration, which Macaulay undermines as illusory: she describes St. Paul’s in an aside, asking whether its dome constitutes a public memorial to survival and spiritual safety, a ‘mighty symbol dominating ruin [...] or mirage and gigantic hoax’ (186). The greening of the ruins also screens Barbary’s loot from shoplifting with ‘sly secrecy’ and provides her with secure ‘salvage headquarters’ to which I will return (180).

These ‘new ruins’ differ in character and tone from the romantic, archaic ruins of the past: in her 1953 survey, *Pleasure of Ruins*, Macaulay notes:

But often the (new) ruin has put on, in its catastrophic tipsy chaos, a bizarre charm. What was last week a drab little house has become a flight of stairs winding up in the open between gaily-coloured walls [...] the house has put on melodrama.<sup>94</sup>

As a consequence, the horizon has been opened up to view and the drab becomes picturesque and dramatic. Macaulay published this work more than ten years after she herself was bombed out of her flat in Luxborough House, W1, on the night of 10<sup>th</sup> May, 1941 and with the distance of years, she can objectify and romanticise the ruins in a way that was not

<sup>93</sup> Mellor, *Ruins*, p. 187.

<sup>94</sup> Rose Macaulay, *Pleasure of Ruins* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1953), p. 454.

possible when loss and grief were raw and subjective. The loss of her home and possessions on that night in 1941 was an experience, which she fictionalised with no sense of ‘bizarre charm’ but as ‘the blazing night that had cut her life in two’.<sup>95</sup> She wrote personally of the loss in a letter to her friend, Daniel George: ‘House no more – bombed and burned out of existence, and *nothing* saved. I am bookless, homeless, sans everything but my eyes to weep with’ and in a letter to Storm Jameson, ‘My lost books leave a gaping wound in heart and mind’.<sup>96</sup> The trauma of the event is fictionalised in ‘Miss Anstruther’s Letters’, a piece commissioned by Storm Jameson, intended for American readers and collected in *London Calling* (1943).<sup>97</sup> Miss Anstruther is ‘alone in the bed-sitting-room she had taken, a small room littered with the grimy, broken and useless objects which she had salvaged from the burnt-out ruin round the corner’ – all that is left of her home.<sup>98</sup> The raid has reduced her life to ‘blackened fragments [which] had fallen through four floors to lie in indistinguishable anonymity together’ and she speaks of the ‘chaotic mass’ that represents her ‘burnt-out past’.<sup>99</sup> Finding one burnt corner of notepaper to salvage from the twenty two years of letters, she takes it back to her bed-sitting-room, ‘which she filled each night with dirt and sorrow and a few blackened cups’ in a still-life of grief.<sup>100</sup> The many hundreds of letters from her lover who had died ‘last year’ were all that she had left of him, not yet re-read but ‘a solace waiting for her when she could take it’.<sup>101</sup> The short story makes explicit the emotional consequences of saving the wrong thing and of failed acts of salvage, resulting in cherished items ending up in the wrong hands:

<sup>95</sup> ‘Miss Anstruther’s Letters’ in *Rose Macaulay: A Biography* by Constance Babington Smith, p. 164.

<sup>96</sup> Both letters are quoted by Sarah LeFanu in her biography, p. 231.

<sup>97</sup> *London Calling*, ed. Storm Jameson (New York: Harper Brothers, 1943), pp. 299-308. The story was first published in England in Constance Babington Smith: *Rose Macaulay: A Biography* (London: William Collins, 1972) and references to Macaulay’s text of ‘Miss Anstruther’s Letters’ are from this work.

<sup>98</sup> Macaulay, *Miss Anstruther*, p.161.

<sup>99</sup> Macaulay, *Miss Anstruther*, p.162.

<sup>100</sup> Macaulay, *Miss Anstruther*, p.163.

<sup>101</sup> Macaulay had an intimate relationship with Gerald O’Donovan, an ex-priest and married man, which was secret. Babington Smith notes that ‘Miss Anstruther’s Letters’ was written while Gerald was dying (Babington Smith, p. 161).

All she thought of was the desk crammed with letters that should have been the first thing she saved. What had she saved instead? Her wireless, her typewriter, a suitcase full of books; looking around, she saw that all three had gone from where she had put them down. Perhaps they were in the safe-keeping of the police, more likely in the wholly unsafe keeping of some rescue-squad man or private looter.<sup>102</sup>

These lost objects, which attract the attention of others for whom they have only an economic value, trouble Miss Anstruther less than the letters. Certain words in particular continue to haunt her and send her back into the bombed building over several days, until she retrieves ‘the charred corner of paper which was now all she had of her lover’. The only legible line, written twenty-one years before, accuses her anew: ‘Leave it at that. I know that you don’t care [...] if you did you would’ – and in the gap, ‘have saved my letters’ is the sole and inevitable conclusion; the pain of failure and her double loss leave her ‘wholly bereft’ so that ‘she hoped each night that there would be another raid, which should save her the trouble of going on living [...] like a revenant, Miss Anstruther still haunted her ruins’.<sup>103</sup> Miss Anstruther is a ‘drifting ghost’ in her grief as well as a writer of the experience of loss, haunted by the sense that she had failed years ago and ‘failed again now’.<sup>104</sup> Mellor notes that ‘against such a total loss Macaulay has her protagonist remember what the letters had contained, amalgamating them into an incantatory list’, which lists the ‘secret stolen travels of twenty years’; in this view, it is ‘very much the precursor of the list of flowers in *The World My Wilderness*. All are tinged with regret, sex, eroticism and loss.’<sup>105</sup> The sterile objects that were looted from Miss Anstruther’s bombed-out flat are as nothing compared to the letters, the smallest fragments of which could constitute a durable biography of a love affair and conjure the voice of the lost lover, giving her some meaning and safety in grief. This earlier story is a revealing companion piece to the later novel, in which a much expanded agency of salvage takes on its creative significance, not as a durable biography of loss but as Barbary’s autobiography of survival.

<sup>102</sup> *Miss Anstruther*, p. 167.

<sup>103</sup> Macaulay, *Miss Anstruther*, p.163.

<sup>104</sup> Macaulay, *Miss Anstruther*, p.170.

<sup>105</sup> Mellor, *Ruins*, p. 190.

Barbary is a ‘rather lost and strayed and derelict girl’ who has been ruined by years of neglect in France and has experienced a futile and meaningless loss, the drowning of her step-father.<sup>106</sup> Paradoxically, her childhood among the *maquis* of occupied, southern France amid the foothills of the Pyrenees felt safe; displaced to London, she seeks out a substitute wilderness and makes the bombed ruins encircling St. Paul’s her actual and ‘spiritual home’.<sup>107</sup> On her return, the London house of her father, Sir Gulliver has been dangerously invaded by his new family; it is a household in which she is now ‘in the hands of the Gestapo’ (228). Her pragmatic response to such insecurity and treachery is to take herself away, to live a secret life by going into hiding in the ruins. Doubly displaced, Barbary is still a survivor living in a territory of enemy occupation, drawing on practised powers of resistance and autonomous creativity from which she salvages a self-determined, alternative way to live. Barbary’s ability to salvage food, to find shelter in an upended church bell, to collect saleable goods and requisition a radio enabling her to listen to jazz, earns her considerable admiration. With Raoul, she acquires a bicycle; the two ride fearlessly through ruined streets ‘fast and furious, crouched low over bent handles’ (161). When Raoul’s wheel buckles, he abandons the bicycle and three days later picks up another; together ‘they had begun to think of themselves as pickers up’, as salvagers and gleaners (161). In spite of her energetic attention to business of living, Barbary is bereft, feeling the loss of her mother who has remained in France; she also grieves for Maurice, her French step-father who was drowned for being a *collaborateur* and she is further troubled by guilt about his death, because she and Raoul made no attempt to save him. On all counts, Barbary is finely tuned to fear of betrayal and its associated response, self-preservation. For instance, she distrusts the ‘unsafe young men’ who

<sup>106</sup> Letter to Father Hamilton Johnson, August 30<sup>th</sup>. 1950 (Cambridge: Trinity College Library, Macaulay Papers, ERM, 12).

<sup>107</sup> Letters from Macaulay to Father Hamilton Johnson, August 30<sup>th</sup>. 1950. Johnson’s letters to RM do not survive since she ordered them burnt after her death, but he had been her spiritual mentor and confessor before his move to Massachusetts, USA. Their relationship continued, conducted by letters, from which she evidently took great solace, seeming to need a ‘spiritual home’. She replied to Fr. Johnson on August 3<sup>rd</sup>. 1951, ‘Your letter is full of salus and veritas. What a lot of good these thoughts and those verses and texts, might have done to the Dangerous Ages (for) people in their various needs’ (Trinity College, Cambridge, ERM. Box 12).

have no credit in the world, spivs and deserters who live precariously amongst the ruins like the fireweed, without scruples, ‘only with gain and loss, comfort and hardship, safety and risk’ (163). In this novel, safety is a form of currency on the margins of a fragmented society, easy come and easy go, like the ‘spivs’, ‘chancers’ and opportunistic weeds taking temporary root, as described by Mabey. For Barbary there is:

Nothing to be done about it, in that jungle world in which justice could not be invoked, in which the only safety – and how incomplete – from betrayal was the universal guilt, in which the hated enemy, pacing ominously heavily, on the jungle margins, integrated its denizens into a wary school-tie solidarity, defensive yet precarious. (163)

In this chaotic, ‘jungle world’ Barbary sees ‘treachery, treachery everywhere’, so that the London police are the ‘Gestapo’ and her father’s housekeeper ‘Coxey’, who had always let Barbary have anything she wanted and was ‘the great comfort’ of her life, is now a ‘collabo’ (191). For Barbary and Raoul, the ruined city is familiar, an echo chamber of the life they had known; they reflect that ‘the *maquis* is with us; [and] we take our wilderness where we go’, depicting a terrain of the mind, in which treachery and self-preservation coexist (210). In the material ruins, Barbary makes her salvage headquarters, which is her safe haven and site of privatised fantasy. Located:

Among the broken alleys and caves of that wrecked waste [...] it had familiarity, as of a place long known; it had the clear, dark logic of a dream; it made a lunatic sense, as the unshattered streets and squares did not; it was the country that one’s soul recognised and knew. (61)

In this scene of clutter and chaos, Macaulay’s phrase ‘lunatic sense’ suggests what Adam Phillips calls ‘mess and meaning’.<sup>108</sup> The disorderly rubble, the remains of bombed out buildings, staircases which lead nowhere, stones and bricks, fragments of doors and windows left where they fall or are thrown, constitute Phillips’s material ‘clutter’ out of which a

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<sup>108</sup> Phillips, *One Way*, p. 117.

disclosure can be ‘closer to one’s heart by being beyond one’s design’.<sup>109</sup> For Barbary, the wrecked wasteland is both a dream and a familiar terrain, providing unexpected completeness despite her separation from her mother and her home. In reality, younger children, resilient evacuees and survivors of the Blitz, found pleasure amongst the wreckage for, as Mellor asserts ‘the one group who spent more time than any other amid the ruins were children’ with their ‘guerilla desire for camouflage and shelter’.<sup>110</sup> In their loosely-formed gangs, the children owned the bombsites, tapping into the ruined city’s unlimited potential for mimetic play, enacting real and imagined adventures of danger and survival.<sup>111</sup>

This observation recalls the assertion (encountered in Chapters One and Two) that children absorb and assimilate adult tensions, while being more able to respond imaginatively with strategies and games to exploit adult distractions and to make sense of a world disordered by war. Barbary, in a joyous parody of the war artist, makes her own collection, painting postcards of the ruins, which she sells for a shilling each to ladies who ‘liked bomb ruins, and liked to take mementoes back to Bournemouth’ and for ‘half a crown’ to American tourists who wanted to show that they had really seen ‘the scars of war’ (170). Barbary’s strategy of salvage turns up surprising things to give meaning to her life amongst the ruins but, ultimately, the ruins are physically unsafe and her London life as a salvager must come to an end – it does so with a momentary loss of balance and a dangerous fall, after which she will be returned to France with her mother, Helen. The final bombshell of the novel is Helen’s disclosure to Sir Gulliver that he is not Barbary’s father. Barbary’s future safety and wellbeing are returned to the adults, at war with each other over ownership and responsibility for her protection and attempting to salvage her from her disorderly tendencies. Helen recognises that ‘the maquis is within us’, that ‘we take our wilderness where we go’ but that

<sup>109</sup> Phillips, *One Way*, p. 128.

<sup>110</sup> Mellor, *Ruins*, p. 183.

<sup>111</sup> For children enacting and parodying adult wartime activities including black marketeering amid the bombsites, see *Hue and Cry* (dir. Charles Crichton, Ealing Studios, 1946) and C. Day Lewis: *The Otterbury Incident* (London: Putnam, 1948).

Barbary must be ‘under her eye’ (210), salvaged, rescued from the deadening influences of the London relations. As for Barbary, ‘she could run wild in France as well as in London, and with more love’, an alternative biography, which Helen reclaims for herself and her daughter as their postwar future (210). In this way, Barbary is salvaged and restored to her true home; meanwhile, London’s transient wilderness with its capacity for revelation will soon be halted and tamed by a safely ordered and reconstituted ‘civilised intelligence’ (252).

Returning to another of Phillips’s essays developing links between fiction and psychoanalysis, he introduces the concept of ‘self-listening’, claiming that ‘what the analyst does from the outside, the dreamer and the artist do from the inside: a sustained, forgetful self-listening’.<sup>112</sup> For the self-listener, the making of a dream is very like the making of a work of art, involving ‘fantasies of what disorder might entail, something orgiastic, something violent, something inchoate, something longed for and feared’.<sup>113</sup> Phillips’s concept informs my reading of the final novel, *Little Boy Lost* and Laski’s protagonist, Wainwright, for whom self-listening both misdirects (towards extreme stoicism) then reveals, as a safe, humane and moral conviction that justice and integrity can still operate in the confusion and wreckage of the postwar.

#### **4.3 Grief, Self-listening and Safe Conviction in *Little Boy Lost* (1949) by Marghanita Laski**

Surely occupation, or battle, or something like that, brings the whole thing to an inescapable point – a sort of judgement by ordeal? [...] Is it possible that this search has become the ordeal by which his entire judgement of himself will be measured? (33)

If I’ve got to give up my precarious peace, my tentative security, I’ve got to be sure [...] I know that I’ve got to go through this alone. (134)

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<sup>112</sup> Phillips, *One Way*, p. 110.

<sup>113</sup> Phillips, *One Way*, p. 117.

In *Little Boy Lost*, Marghanita Laski depicts in her protagonist, Hilary Wainwright, a state of withdrawal from an emotional life following the death of his wife at the hands of the Gestapo and the loss of their child. He has withdrawn from all but minimal human interaction and he displays what appears to be a form of stoicism, the philosophical position previously discussed, in which the subject resolves not to submit to the disordering of grief and to assume a self-possessed control. However, Wainwright is not possessed of stoical acceptance; neither does he, like Green's Charley Summers, block grief with vibrant, risky fantasies, nor tarry with grief. In Laski's novel, Wainwright's detachment begins with his intellectual decision to purge his consciousness of tenderness, emotional ties and obligation to others – and it is this emotionally barren existence that he believes will make him impervious to grief and will protect him from further pain. Towards the end of the novel, in the last of his many interior conversations, Laski dramatises Wainwright's final ordeal on his return to France to search for the boy. Still afraid and feeling unsafe (susceptible to intense emotion), he weighs up the facts and argues with himself that:

There was no proof that the child was mine. I didn't come here to adopt a child but to find my own. I didn't find him and so I may go freely to my pleasure, freely to my invulnerability and to my memories [...] If I had let myself succumb to tenderness, he argued [...] I would have been torn to pieces by this child [...] but I dared not give tenderness [...] I'm incapable of giving. I dare not give and so I'm running away. I've finished with ordeals. I am fleeing to the anaesthesia of immediate comfort and absolute non-obligation. (213)

The passage iterates Laski's theme of flight from emotion and rejection of attachment to others as forms of self-protection, making his mind a psychological fortress. Wainwright tells the Frenchman, Pierre Verdier, 'I couldn't endure being hurt again; I'd sooner feel nothing' (75). After his traumatic loss, his need to resist emotional ties equates to feeling safe because for him, emotion now means pain. If he were to agree to undertake the search for the lost boy, 'pity and agony must be indefinitely extended, happiness and comfort indefinitely postponed' (20). But the strategy diminishes him because this life of 'immediate comfort' and 'non-

'obligation' is represented as 'anaesthesia' – the procedure that numbs all sensation by inducing unconsciousness and blocking pain. His is an existence rather than a life, meeting the most basic of safety needs to keep the physical body alive and no more. He has lost confidence and trust in emotions, knowing how they have the power to jeopardise his safe invulnerability. To preserve the 'tentative security' he is so unwilling to give up, Wainwright takes refuge in his imagination, in waking dreams and in literature (134). By reading and writing, he displaces emotional responses that would otherwise threaten his fortress, maintaining safety in a siege mentality. Paradoxically, Wainwright will need to invest in emotional risk-taking with all its unpredictability during which he feels so imperilled that he comes to accept vulnerability to pain as part of the pursuit of human relations and joy – this is the psychological trajectory of Laski's work.

Laski's novel illustrates a number of ideas that connect the postwar with grief and safety, as discussed earlier. Plain's 'negotiation of grief' reflects the novel's interest in the human process of grief after loss; Herman's storytelling is shown to be 'indescribably painful' before providing a safe pathway through grief (13) and Butler's tarrying with grief highlights the need to maintain human vulnerability and empathy, opening up to the suffering of others. It is this last principle that brings Wainwright to a newly conceived emotional life and enables his final decision to commit to the safeguarding of the boy Jean, which I term his 'safe conviction'. This concept, a legal term, is defined as a verdict or judgement not liable to be overturned and therefore sustainable and reliable, even in the face of challenges and counter appeals. The verdict also assumes that a sufficient burden of proof exists in order to reach such a judgement. Two citations from the *Oxford English Dictionary* illustrate the use of the legal term: firstly, that 'there is probable and presumptive proof upon which a conviction may be safe' and secondly that 'the evidence (may) fall short of that degree of proof that would

render a conviction safe'.<sup>114</sup> In the novel, Wainwright repeatedly invokes the very lack of proof of his paternity in order to defer his judgement about whether or not to take Jean and raise him as his son. He deems any judgement about the identity of Jean to be unsafe, unproven and unreliable, causing us to question how the dilemma will be resolved, other than with a trite resolution. The feelings extend to his judgement of himself during the search, which is both for the boy who may be his son and for his own humanity. This is where Laski's novel is more complex and humane than the legal term suggests, problematising the narrative outcome.

In spite of his resistance, the search presented as an ordeal initiates Wainwright's process of healthy grieving characterised by Phillips. It is messy, unpredictably disordered and chaotic but it involves Wainwright in the cognitive activity that Phillips terms self-listening. In his withdrawn state, Wainwright continues to be depicted as a dreamer and an artist (as noted, he is a reader and a writer) and Laski's use of interior conversations aligns him with Phillips's concept of listening to himself. Wainwright undergoes an emotional and psychological trajectory, tracked in these passages of self-listening during which he repeatedly rejects tenderness and compassion as the source of vulnerability. Indeed, only at the end of the novel is he able to articulate his grief for Lisa, as he tries to summon her presence. He reasons that he would betray her if he takes a child not his own, recognising a very great emotional risk in that feeling of betrayal:

He thought, if I could know what she would have said. If I imagine her face, if I imagine her voice answering my question, I shall know what I should do [...] He tried with all the intensity of his imagination to call up her face, to see it turned to his, to see the lips moving, to hear her voice [...] he could imagine nothing. (215)

The moment he lets go of her as a conjured presence, he feels her loss intensely. The revelation that he must make the decision alone, that Lisa has gone and that he will 'never know which is the greater betrayal' (to take the boy or not), is crucial to Wainwright's

<sup>114</sup> safe, adj. 10e, 1795 and 1869 in *Oxford English Dictionary* <<http://www.oed.com>> [accessed 8 February 2014]

progress through grief and his growing reliance on his own judgement. His ability to conceive of his life with a child as restorative, a form of completion, is a revision of all his previous thoughts and feelings and the product of creative self-listening. His own safe conviction transcends the burden of proof and is ultimately informed by his acceptance of emotional vulnerability. More importantly still, it is a conviction that he can and will provide physical, emotional and psychological safety for someone whose suffering is equal to his own. Throughout this process, which spans the sections called *The Search* and *The Ordeal*, Wainwright is like a man who has stopped breathing. He is restored to a full emotional life at the narrative safe end-point, given the forensic title of *The Judgement*.

Laski published three novels during the 1940s, depicting wartime and its aftermath as inescapable and unsettling in ways beyond the immediate threats of injury and death.<sup>115</sup> As a secular humanist, she is preoccupied in her fiction with the individual's struggles with conscience, grief and forgiveness (of self and others) without, as she sees it, the safety net of religious doctrine and belief.<sup>116</sup> There is no consolatory afterlife for characters who submit their lives to duty and sacrifice. Rather, her protagonists, notably the promiscuous Deborah Robertson in *To Bed with Grand Music* (1946) as well as Hilary Wainwright in *Little Boy Lost*, experience 'ordeals of decision' about this life and how best to live on, diminished by loss and bereavement (33). As discussed above, the ordeal in Laski is a test or series of tests by which a character judges him or herself and based on that judgement, hopes to commit to a decision – a safe conviction that is applauded and is strong enough to resist counter judgement. In the earlier novel, *To Bed with Grand Music*, set when the war is still in

<sup>115</sup> Laski later turned away from fiction to become a highly successful radio broadcaster and critic; she was also a major contributor of quotations to the Oxford English Dictionary which was her choice of book on the BBC Radio programme, *Desert Island Discs*, December 1<sup>st</sup>. 1973, <[www.bbc.co.uk/archives](http://www.bbc.co.uk/archives)> [accessed 9 January 2014]. The richness of the English language was a preoccupation of her professional life up to her death in 1988; she continued to speak and write on current affairs from a humanist point of view.

<sup>116</sup> Laski's first novel, *Love on the Supertax* (1944) is a parody of Walter Greenwood's *Love on the Dole* (1933), a comic treatment of the English upper classes in love and at war. Laski's social satire has narrative elements remarkably similar to Peck's *Housebound*, discussed in Chapter 2: the run-down family mansion, rooms boarded up, blacked out and unheated, domestic servants who have left to join the war effort, inedible meals cobbled together in a basement kitchen by an inept aristocrat.

progress, Deborah's husband is sent to North Africa leaving her in rural Hampshire to care for their small son and at a loss about what to make of her life. It was the reality for many young women whose circumstances were changed by war, but Deborah's reaction to her restricted life is to delegate parental responsibility and to seize an alternative existence as a career mistress in London, where her married status is a convenient protection against a damaged reputation. Deborah's emotional detachment (she calculatingly describes one affair as her 'last dabble in emotion') enables her to lead two separate lives and secures her freedom from the wartime imperatives of loyalty and duty promoted in the propaganda. There is a pathological pattern (defined by a style of dress, a string of pearls, a new hat or expensive handbag) to the way she separates sex from emotion, conveying it as a defiant, controlling strategy, a way of minimising psychological risk and displacing feelings of loss, mingled with guilt and betrayal towards her husband. These are feelings that remain unresolved at the end of the novel. In *Little Boy Lost*, Wainwright also uses sex as a distraction from grief, something with which to fill an emotional void and yet, despite a conscious determination to keep things physical, he, like Deborah Robertson, is 'always looking for some indefinable, transcendental comfort in the sexual relationship', without giving emotionally of himself (76). Laski explores safeguarding behaviours, shifting and under revision in the emotional lives of these characters, by framing their inescapable ordeals after loss. Of these two protagonists, it is Wainwright who, as a passionate reader and a writer of poetry, is equipped with the capacity for empathy, the humane vulnerability that eventually saves him.

Laski's narrative maps the pressure-points of postwar grief, asking specifically how one can live fully in the world and contribute to postwar recovery, forgiveness and redemption after violent loss. In his state of emotional withdrawal, Wainwright remains in thrall to his past and to his poetry, aspects of an emotional life that he feels he can still control to maintain 'tentative security' (134). This tendency to feel emotion vicariously through literature is part of Wainwright's inheritance of loss, a deflection from grief, causing him to seek refuge in reading and writing. It also suggests the unsafe fantasy of Green's novel, *Back*.

The lure is of an impermeable, detached fantasy akin to an opiate, a ‘drug of remembered happiness’ in his life with Lisa (43). Yet, ‘even my love poetry’ [he thought] ‘was founded on an illusion rather than on the reality of the life Lisa and I were having together’, in which the false note of his poetry is neither emotional outlet nor consoling elegy (42). The role of literature in Wainwright’s emotional life will be explored in more detail below; material and direct rather than illusory is Lisa’s final letter, in which her voice is directly represented. Even here, Wainwright intellectually frames her words as a fantasy and dream-inducing but emotionally remote from him as time passes. The letter, which ‘Hilary told over again in his mind’, placed in the first section called *The Loss*, had been delivered in secret to Hilary by an injured airman who met Lisa on his way back to England, one of several she helped to escape to safety (11). It is an emotional farewell but also a plea – ‘*you must come and save our baby*’ (11). In the letter, Lisa implores him to return to France at the end of the war, asserting that ‘*I can bear everything, even leaving you forever [...] I can endure everything if my baby is safe*’ (11). Despite its invocation, the call on a father’s duty and a husband’s obligation to save and protect the child, Wainwright defers rescue on the understanding that the boy is being cared for somewhere in France. And this inertia, representing a displacement of his anguish, is likened to a dream:

Since Lisa’s death he had ceaselessly dreamed that he would one day find happiness with a child who was not yet an imagined person but only a surviving symbol of his and Lisa’s love. But there had seemed no need to open his heart to this token child, safe in France and unattainable; his deep unassuageable anguish could be all for Lisa. (20)

His undeniable pain and desolation since Lisa’s death is locked down deep in his consciousness so that neither the love poetry he writes, nor the letter he keeps, release him to grieve and to assuage the anguish. While Wainwright’s creative imagination is both a blessing and a curse, we also see him as a man with intense desires, calculated to distract him from grief; they belong with his memories of France which still have the power to create a visceral longing ‘so intense as to be almost carnal’(27). Equally, this is a longing described as if from an old story, one of many ‘enchantments’ from the past that have increasingly ‘lost their

magic' (27). It is clear that Wainwright's double loss weighs heavily on him, faced as he is with the materiality of Lisa's letter; between the two states of dreamlike longing on the one hand and an emotional dead zone on the other, he dramatises his inertia by telling the French envoy, Verdier:

‘I couldn’t do what you said – imagining how Lisa died, I mean – I couldn’t think about it. I couldn’t think about the boy being lost, how he’d wonder what had happened, how people might be cruel to him, how lonely he’d be – [...] I don’t want to think about it now [...] we’ve both been cuckolded by death’. (75)

But Verdier had said that Wainwright would ‘discover [...] that it is easier to let (his) imagination comprehend all possible horrors than to pretend to ignore them’ or displace them, because ‘it is as true of mental pain as about physical things.’ (22) As Verdier has witnessed, only by confronting the horror can the healing begin. At first, Wainwright has a determined resistance to all such thoughts and feelings, cleaving to his notion of emotional detachment and rejecting the Frenchman’s offer of help. The two men are polar opposites in their approaches to loss and grief but both have an understanding of wartime terror and know that expiation is framed as storytelling.

Ultimately, it is Verdier’s narrative of the intervening years of the postwar, since Wainwright left France for the safety of England in sorrow and in haste, that provides the turning point, from the loss to the search. In bringing the story of what happened to Lisa and to their friend, Jeanne who was helping to run a ‘clandestine newspaper’, Verdier is the catalyst for change. Wainwright is compelled to listen to Verdier, comprehending that not knowing is a wilful blindness, merely an illusion of safety (13). The ‘telling of this (is) indescribably painful to Pierre’, whose willingness to articulate the horror is necessary – firstly, to penetrate Hilary’s carapace with its hardening protection against emotion and secondly, to shift the focus from the group (the network of single-minded resistance workers, of which they were a part) to the individuals, Wainwright and his lost son (13). Wainwright prepares himself for a visit to the orphanage where his son may be – he will not allow Pierre to accompany him for that ‘would be to contaminate (his) ordeal’, endangering the encounter

with another's agenda and compromising what is at stake (78). He also debates the alternatives: if the child is not his, he reasons with himself that he can 'go home again to (his) writing and (his) reading and all the other substitutes (he has) found for emotion', a reference to the distraction of sex (86). Then, unwarranted:

There came into his mind a vision of himself and Pierre and the child held together by love, the ordeal surmounted, the catharsis complete [but] there is nothing left in me to make it possible that it should be like that. The traitor emotions of love and tenderness and pity must stay dead in me. I could not endure them to live and then die again. (86)

Throughout the search and his ordeal he pictures his life remaining 'safely unemotional', frequently reverting back to his former view that it is 'unthinkable that a child should invade this refuge' (72). Paradoxically, the 'traitor emotions of love and tenderness', the very feelings that make him feel vulnerable, unprotected and unsafe are the feelings that will bring him to that 'inescapable point' of judgement, one which will re-affirm his humanity.

The trips out of the orphanage, time that Wainwright spends alone with the child, Jean, are the most testing for him. The poverty of the child's existence is immediately clear, from his too-small black overall, his ill-fitting, shabby boots, lack of gloves, meals of bread and sugar to his single reading book, from which he has gleaned more about Africa than he knows of the small town in which he lives. The image of the child as a plastic mind and a fragile spirit being nourished by reading, is striking. This, together with what the Mother Superior tells Wainwright of the plight of children in Germany and in Austria, shocks him into a response, so that 'sincerely from his heart' he confesses to the Mother Superior saying 'you must forgive me. I have become unused to pity, these past years – and today it has overwhelmed me' (119). The orphanage reeks of 'institutional poverty' and its children, especially those orphaned by the war, suffer from tuberculosis, rickets and anaemia (118). The shock and the pity Wainwright experiences at the sight of such deprivation are quickly channelled into his reading. Alone in his hotel room after his first meeting with Jean, Wainwright's pity is deflected as he reads, with 'all critical judgement suspended', from

*Dombey and Son*, the death-bed scene of little Paul. He presses his face into the pillow and in a paroxysm of weeping, sobs for Dickens's dying child, 'for poor lonely Paul Dombey whose swollen red hands dangled so pitifully from the too short sleeves of his little black overall', knowing that his pity for this fictional child can be safely relinquished with the closing of the book (125). Even so, the next morning, Wainwright reads Swift, a satirical antidote to emotion, reflecting on the 'ghastly emotional meeting' of the previous day during which he had been exposed to, not protected from, pity and distress, just as he has feared (126). In spite of these disturbances, Wainwright continues with the visits, deciding that some key questions might reveal some 'flicker of awareness' in Jean, some memory or recognition that will prove that the child is his son. Evidence would safely settle the question of obligation, the decision taken out of his hands by the burden of proof and free from the messiness of grief. When Wainwright returns the boy to the orphanage 'safe and sound', he is referring to his own sense of relief that he can hand him back and resume his feeling of safe non-obligation (142). However, and over time, the seeds of attachment are being sewn and at the end of one visit, Wainwright goes 'out of the door and down the steps, filled with an inner panic that he had committed himself to something, he (isn't) sure what' – because he has promised, the next day, to bring Jean a gift of warm gloves (143). The gesture echoes the poem Wainwright had earlier recalled, 'The Toys' by Coventry Patmore with its orderly list and consolations drawn from a child's many treasures, '*ranged there with careful art—To comfort his sad heart*' (95). He reasons that the gloves are purely functional but they represent much more than protecting Jean's cold hands, to the giver and to the receiver – a promise and a gift symbolising a connection between the two, which can be interpreted as the seeds of a mutual dependency and of an emotional bond.

Such has been Wainwright's commitment to his emotional withdrawal that we lack narrative conviction that his ability to be kind, even to himself, will return. In my view, the reader of the postwar novel, as now, may hope for a life-affirming ending, a narrative foreclosure, which writes against the inestimable losses and grief of the age and which asserts

itself as a fantasy of rescue for adult and child. It is therefore important that Wainwright makes his decision to become a father to Jean *before* proof is revealed, so that the ethical and psychological debate in the novel leads us to the only humane and safe conviction possible – that we must grieve beyond the personal to live socially and responsibly with and for others. Laski withholds Wainwright's decision and his change of heart until the finely judged, final scene.

After a visit to the local fairground, which leaves Wainwright disappointed with himself for misjudging and mismanaging one episode after another, Jean finally falls asleep in his arms, exhausted. As Wainwright carries him back up to the orphanage, his ‘anger against the boy (dies) away and he (is) left only with his anger against himself, which must either be expiated or must consume him utterly’ (201). Nevertheless, his anger is authentic, an emotional response; it is clear that the afternoon has brought him to a crisis as he ‘kissed the child’s pale cold cheek and then quickly put him down, pushed him inside the door; and went away’ in a gesture of rejection (201). Simultaneously, Wainwright has struck up a liaison with a local woman, Nelly with whom he almost escapes back to Paris on the day after this disastrous afternoon. In her company, the familiar desires seize him and:

The more cheap and vulgar; the more blatantly a sexual animal she could appear; the more certain he (becomes) that this (is) the object on which he (can) spend passion without emotion. (189)

They are at the fairground together when Wainwright sees, among the row of prizes, a pink velvet dog that closely resembles Binkie, the toy representing the only memory he has of his son. Almost in spite of himself, he must win the prize and keep the toy dog; strangely, the toy and Nelly’s willingness to relinquish it, seem to ‘*comfort his sad heart*’, so that as he kisses her, Wainwright rediscovers ‘a range of familiar actions and with them the old forgotten emotions’ (209). He has a revelation that ‘not even in this relationship, in which he sought only escape, could he partake without tenderness’ (209). Unsettled and deeply insecure at the thought of emotions that now show signs of life, he wants more, but:

No miracle happened to let me face happiness. So now you want a miracle, said his conscience from the emptiness of the bomb-shattered square. Once you wanted triumph in the ordeal. (213)

In place of a miracle, his obligations to all those who have been, separately and individually, connected to him, bringing him through this ordeal, crowd in – until he is left with thoughts of Lisa and the child: “‘Lisa,’ he (says) aloud, ‘what do you want me to do?’”(215). The memory of their parting represents the only time Wainwright actually saw his baby, indelibly connected to the ‘bead-eyed pink plush dog’, Binkie, which Laski withholds until the end of the novel to confirm, for Wainwright and for the reader, that Wainwright’s judgement now has the burden of proof and is incontrovertibly safe. He must provide the answer himself and his ability to give tenderness to Nelly, who is almost a stranger, sways him so that ‘with absolute certainty’ he says aloud, ‘I can give love. In my heart, this child is my son’. (215) Only after he makes this decision, from the heart and not the head, does Wainwright proffer the present of the pink dog to Jean who opens his gift with ‘it’s Binkie come back!’ (220). As Plain observes, Wainwright ‘brings the child into the realm of what Butler classes the ‘grieveable’ and he becomes a being whose loss would be mourned.’<sup>117</sup> Laski’s protagonist also cures himself of an emotional anaesthesia, which threatened his capacity for life by becoming his own analyst in what Phillips calls the ‘listening cure’. In such a process, Phillips claims, we can invoke ‘an equality of listening’ (to oneself and others) which can be an inquiry ‘into the senses in which we can be equal to what we hear. And into what we might do when we are not’ – a belief in the therapeutic agency of active listening, to an individual and social conscience, in the shared pursuit of wellbeing, wholeness and safety.<sup>118</sup>

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Genre and realistic fiction has a tendency towards order and the establishment of a consistent set of bearings, orientating the reader to narrative resolution and foreclosure. In the novels

<sup>117</sup> Plain, *Literature of the 1940s*, p. 221.

<sup>118</sup> Phillips, *One Way*, p. 228.

discussed in this final chapter, the negotiation of loss and a working through of intractable grief is also magnetically attracted to the disorder of the dream and of fantasy. In some respects, the characters in these novels seem caught between unsafe evasion and denial of grief (which seeks an outlet) on the one hand, and the perilous but essential opening up to grief on the other. Denial (when grief is buried and sealed off) occurs when an individual is unduly influenced by stoicism, such as that which prevailed in the culture of the 1940s; evasion makes use of hallucinatory impulses that recklessly attempt to restore the world to a former order or to complete lives in an unreal dimension. Both attack the lines of least resistance and damage rather than protect the subjects – as dramatised by Green and Laski. Sustaining a life and finding feelings of safety in grief, by contrast, takes time, emotional stamina and considerable cognitive application. It is built on the essential acknowledgement that grief makes the individual and the nation, vulnerable – an unwelcome notion in the postwar and indeed, today. By confronting loss and ruin, reconfiguring meaning in the form of the durable biography (of Barbary and the city she temporarily inhabits) and in the process of salvage, Macaulay offers the reader an unorthodox model of creative reclamation and self-realisation, after loss and grief. From all three novels come nuanced representations of memory, empathy and enduring love, not just to model the reconstruction of a (fractured) nation, but to make creative transformations into the future. Barbary's life as a salvager is transient but she demonstrates a creative energy and resourcefulness that is uplifting in the midst of so much ruin; Wainwright's extreme self-rule becomes so deeply entrenched that it renders him numb and only the spontaneous impulse (like the gasp of breath from a suffocating man) opens him up to grief . These two novels focus on the safeguarding of the future generation, suggesting that neither Barbary nor Jean should be burdened or traumatised by the damaging wounds and grief of those whose lives had been transformed by war. Charley Summers remains as much of an enigma at the end of Green's novel as at the start; in his oscillating state between unsafe fantasy and meaningful reality, he fails to make a durable

biography of Rose, to keep her close while opening a space in his heart for Nancy, who is his lifeline.

## Conclusion

Safety is shown to be compelling for the writers in this period, drawn to its many complex forms and to its fundamental contingency on not being in war's heart and hinterland of danger. A reciprocal and shifting relationship between the essentially safe and the threateningly unsafe, exercised the imagination of authors who continued to write determinedly and with originality throughout the long decade from 1939–1950. Wartime and its aftermath narrowed and sharpened the interest of the authors of novels and short stories discussed in this thesis, whether they were established professionals like Joyce Cary and Patrick Hamilton, or emergent writers in the services, who found their subject matter in extraordinary experiences and their voices in storytelling. Collectively in the fiction, the impulse to represent the complex and idiosyncratic human spirit *in extremis* is driven by the need to articulate precious and frequently elusive safety, wrestled from the midst of danger.

Some of the narratives are themselves safer than others; some take us to the point where we feel the need to 'look away' in the interests of truth and integrity. It is one thing for us to encounter the adult protagonist placed in harm's way with a problem to solve – we know the jeopardy and anticipate a narrative trajectory that defuses the danger. It is another for us to be presented with a figure of the suffering child, whose safety is in the hands of adults exercising their best but ultimately misguided intentions or the figure of the tortured combatant. I have given my own responses to these works, representing a twenty-first century reader (in the first person singular or plural), who is informed by some of the cultural imperatives, historical events and relevant tendencies of the period. It is not the intention of this thesis to formulate a generic, contemporary reader based on my own responses, but that said, there are some essentials which I believe are universally valued. Profoundly present in the narratives as a significant preoccupation connecting the diverse fictional representations is the work of the imagination. The imagination (the human ability to envisage states other than

the reality one is faced with) is a transcendent and sustaining constant, as well as an intellectual and emotional territory from which to observe the gathering danger. In Aistrop's *Pretend I am a Stranger*, for instance, the protagonist's novel within the novel will (he hopes) exorcise his past and sever its dangerous hold on his present; and in Cary's novel, the reader is aware of a growing insistence on the part of the author that his child protagonist has an untutored ability to envisage a world very different from that which harms and constrains him – one in which he is both free and safe, in spite of adult intervention. It is this quality of visionary storytelling, combined with the narrowing of interest in the conditions of this specific, elongated decade, which conveys the authors' investments in manifestations of safety.

However, of the many functions of the imagination, it is its delineations of dream and fantasy that recur in the fiction of this period. These imaginative processes are fully exploited and contested by the authors as manifestations of both safe and unsafe states, serving the needs for safety and the desire for danger. In Elizabeth Bowen's view, hallucination was a 'saving resort' and her articulation of the writer's life during the war is telling and apposite:

The search for indestructible landmarks in a destructible world led many down strange paths. The attachment to these when they had been found produced small worlds-within-worlds of hallucination – in most cases, saving hallucination. Writers followed the paths they saw or felt people treading, and depicted those little dear saving illusory worlds.<sup>1</sup>

While Bowen's 'saving illusory worlds' may suggest escapism (with its tendency to simplicity) they do not preclude the reality of everyday life and the 'personal cry of the individual', which particularly commanded the writers' attention. People whose homes had been blown up, reassembled 'bits of themselves [...] from the wreckage' and 'in the same way, they assembled and checked themselves from stories and poems, from their memories,

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree: Writings of Elizabeth Bowen*, ed. Hermione Lee (London: Vintage, 1999), p. 97.

from one another's talk'.<sup>2</sup> This too is the saving resort of storytelling, involving the 'communicative touch of personal life' with its affirmation of actual and spiritual survival.<sup>3</sup>

In conclusion, it is worth further drawing out some of the main ideas investigated in the thesis. Chapter One establishes that safety for the child correlates with feelings of safety for the adult; the thesis begins and ends with literary depictions of the endangered child, both as an end in itself and as a symbol for existence at large in this decade of national crisis and survival. From Joyce Cary to Marghanita Laski, the child is depicted as an agent or provider of safety for the adult author, character and contemporary reader. Moreover, the advances in child developmental psychology facilitated the literary depiction of the inner life of the child, whose natural impulse is to seek constant reassurance and who is highly adaptive and endlessly trusting, until danger intrudes.

Chapter Two employs a spatial concept of safety, establishing that the place we call 'home' is the archetypal place of safety, complicated and compromised as a consequence of the unprecedented threats to its intactness in wartime. But 'home' is also a metonym for the family and for the values and identity of the whole nation and this chapter attempts to convey the scope of feelings about the safety of home, from the quotidian regime of housework, to notions of safety aligned with freedom in England, 'Englishness' and thoughts of oneiric home, orphan-hood, exile and belonging.

Chapter Three juxtaposes safe talk and dangerous talk as close correlatives that can occur in a single wounded protagonist. In the novels of Aistrop and Balchin, talk that is recognised as safe (for instance, in a therapist's consulting room) paradoxically incurs great psychological danger in the traumatised subject, while unsafe talk (the giving up of secret information) is perceived as a 'safe' alternative to physical pain and torture. Narrative

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<sup>2</sup> Bowen, *Mulberry Tree*, p. 97.

<sup>3</sup> Bowen, *Mulberry Tree*, p. 97.

insufficiency is weighed against the potency of storytelling in life and in art and throughout the chapter the work of the clinical psychologists asserts the saving, curative power of shared talk so valued in the contemporary treatment for combat stress.

Chapter Four examines safety and grief – a pairing that is counter-intuitive in many ways. Writers in this group represent the magnetic pull of dream and unsafe fantasy by which to evade and suppress grief with its power to undo the integrity of the individual psyche, as represented by Green and Laski. In so-doing, they create a space for the mind to open up to grief and to accept one's unique and shared vulnerability. Collectively, the novels recognise that living with a certain lack of safety in wartime and its aftermath is inevitable and can be productive, so that that vulnerability itself leads to sense of collective responsibility for making safe the lives of others. The concept of creative reclamation or salvage amid ruins in Macaulay's novel provided a different but valid point of departure, from which to find a safe way back from grief.

Safety in the war and the postwar was, as Bowen said in 1945, 'an obsession in every heart', which the writers felt as a 'high-voltage current'.<sup>4</sup> As if to reverse Shakespeare's image of 'this flower, safety' with which this study was introduced, Dan Davin's story of wounded soldiers taking refuge in a church in Crete, is called 'Danger's Flower'.<sup>5</sup> Women and girls come in to the church and give the wounded and dying men flowers, carnations – 'a stranger's warmth, that sudden intuition of the universality of suffering, kinship of blood in danger, an abstraction felt at the heart', the narrator recalls.<sup>6</sup> The church will come under fire and the walking wounded prepare to leave a building that offers neither spiritual nor physical protection, to make their way over the hills to the port and safety. The narrator, Alan, finds

<sup>4</sup> Bowen, *Mulberry*, p. 99.

<sup>5</sup> Dan Davin, 'Danger's Flower' in *Selected Writing*, edited by Reginald Moore and Tambimuttu (London: Nicholson and Watson, 1944), pp. 38-47.

<sup>6</sup> Davin, 'Danger's Flower', p. 42.

being in the church both a ‘shelter and threat’ and although leaving it for open country is risky, away from the other men he could release:

The dam-burst of uncontrolled emotions [...] for such a release a man might well deny the tyranny of the distant sea, the vision of safety and a quiet in which to heal and weld his soul. But thirty miles of uphill road stretched ahead, as compelling as a duty, and refused to be denied.<sup>7</sup>

Alan carries a badly injured boy having previously determined in his own mind to leave the boy who would only slow him down. Carrying him, ‘his double burden made him light’ (which is Davin’s own image of the saving power of shared vulnerability) and under cover and protection of darkness, the ‘immense Cretan night deepened above them to its profound perfection’.<sup>8</sup> Safety in Davin’s story is a strange and elusive sensation, overturning a previous unsafe state in which everything is out of kilter and seems wrong; feeling safe is possible, the story says, even when the odds are stacked as heavily against the individual as they are for these escapees.

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This thesis has attempted to theorise safety, situating it alongside established critical approaches of trauma, anxiety and fear, which seek to understand the human subject’s experience of this unique period. Whilst recognising the high premium placed on safety in wartime and its aftermath, this study asserts, with increasing intensity, its resonances for our own times. In spite of seven decades of ‘peace’, our nation’s safety seems as precarious as ever – politicians continue to speak of the war on terror, with acts of terror and hate perpetuated daily. Even the personal safety of our democratically elected representatives cannot be assured; safety is in the forefront of all our minds. In spite of real world dangers, then as now, safety as a critical approach to the literature of the period reveals insights into

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<sup>7</sup> Davin, ‘Danger’s Flower’, p. 45.

<sup>8</sup> Davin, ‘Danger’s Flower’, p. 47.

the diverse and timeless forms of resilience and the survivability of the human spirit, even when the harm done to body and mind seems irreparable.

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