

**Modernism and non-fiction:
place, genre and the politics of popular forms**

**Submitted by Stephanie Jane Boland
for fulfilment of the degree of
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in English, May 2017**

Declaration

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Submitted by Stephanie Jane Boland, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, May 2017.

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S J Boland

Abstract

This thesis considers the hitherto unexplored question of modernism and non-fictional genres. Although modernist studies have long been attentive to the implications of modernism's "manifestos", and recent work on modernist magazines has shed new light on forms beyond poetry and fictional prose, little attention has been afforded to other non-fictional writing. Similarly, although a growing school of criticism has emphasised the significance of "the everyday" in modernist texts, few have examined non-fiction concerned with leisure or daily life – a particularly unusual omission given the rich possibilities such texts offer for our understanding of how everyday lives relate to wider society.

This thesis examines instructional texts which make radical interventions in the social and political upheavals which follow the First World War. Contra to the well-debunked yet still pervasive narratives which typify the modernist text as a work of disinterested – even isolated – genius, these examples demonstrate a broad-ranging, complex engagement with popular venues. Surveying examples of popular genres such as cookbooks, travel guides and radio programs written by a range of canonical and lesser-known modernist writers, it demonstrates how modernist writers re-appropriated the common features of such mainstream forms in order to stage various (and varied) interventions in local and national affairs.

Its reading of Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Somerset* (1949) and *Scottish Scene: The Intelligent Man's Guide to Albyn* (1934), by Hugh MacDiarmid and Lewis Grassie Gibbon, shows how adopting the "textual codes" of travel guides provided authors with a means of writing back against the over-simplistic narratives of region and nation popular in other examples of the genre. Likewise, *The Alice B Toklas Cook Book* (1954) and F.T. Marinetti's *The Futurist Cookbook* (1932) are read as divergent examples of texts which stage radical interventions in food practices as they relate to nationhood and conflict.

Comparable interventions are also unearthed in the media. Flann O'Brien's *Cruiskeen Lawn* columns (1940-66), published under the name Myles na gCopaleen, are often read in studies of Irish political and cultural consciousness. This thesis argues that they must also be read in terms of genre, demonstrating how a subversive use of headlines, bylines and other page architecture signals O'Brien's use of the newspaper form itself to pass comment on the cultural and political life of the Republic of Ireland.

Finally, this thesis turns to broadcast culture, with a chapter on radio and documentary films. Through readings of Virginia Woolf and Elizabeth Bowen's radio broadcasts, and the GPO Film Unit collaboration of Benjamin Britten and W.H. Auden, this chapter shows how irony and experiment allowed writers to turn state-sanctioned media to their own ends during the interwar years – suggesting that literary readings are crucial to understanding modernism's engagement with new media.

Through these different readings, this thesis highlights the sheer diversity of modernist genres which have either received little critical attention, or whose formal specifics have been under-acknowledged. As a result, it is able to reframe modernism's approach to several areas of twentieth-century life, approaching anew pressing areas of concern in the field – for instance, space and place, the circulation of texts, the everyday, and the commercial, lowbrow and domestic – demonstrating the critical importance of instructive genres to understanding literary modernism.

Contents

Introduction	7
Pleasure	
1. “Err-and-Stray” Books: locating modernist travel guides	23
2. Recipes for war: the everyday politics of the avant-garde cookbook	83
Business	
3. “That grey tablet of lies”: <i>Cruiskeen Lawn</i> and the newspaper as cultural object	135
4. From the BBC to <i>The Way to the Sea</i> : a journey through new media	195
Conclusion: “Fidgety about form”	261
Bibliography	269
Acknowledgements	297

List of Figures

1. Somerset's 18 th century map	59
2. Promotional material for the Lawn Road flats	86
3. Man Ray's "Transmutation" (1916) and Edward Burra's "Composition Collage" (1929).	139
4. Page 8 of the <i>Irish Times</i> edition from Tuesday, November 19, 1963	174
5. Andy Clarkin's Clock is still stopped	179
6. Stills showing maps from <i>Coal Face</i>	233
7. A man mines coal in a still from <i>Coal Face</i>	235

Introduction: Modernism and non-fiction

To speak of “modernist non-fiction” is to invite complication. For a start, “non-fiction” is a broad term, contingent on a shared expectation of truthfulness for which it can provide no guarantee. Leaning on the negative, it describes itself only by what it is not: a piece of non-fiction is prose that has not been made up or imagined. Yet, if we understand “non-fictional” works as being something like “true stories”, we immediately run into difficulty. What, for instance, does one make of a fabricated newspaper article, or of the autobiographical novel (a genre increasingly referred to in contemporary literary criticism by the more ambiguous term “autofiction”)?¹ Consider the items which we categorise as non-fiction, and one quickly comes to realise that the term is as much about a work’s ostensible ambitions to truth as it is about whether or not, strictly speaking, it fulfils them. But what, then, happens when the slippery term “non-fiction” is married with the (even more slippery) term “modernism” – a type of writing whose salient features include complexity, pastiche, evasion, and an ambivalent relationship with the “real world” conditions of modernity in which it occurs? Invoking “modernism” means invoking long-running debates over what, precisely, counts as a modernist novel or a modernist poem – debates only complicated further when brought into the realm of public discourse within which much non-fiction resides. Instinctively, we may feel that one cannot expect a “modernist” newspaper article to display the same level of overt formal radicalism that one finds in the most frequently-cited examples of literary modernism, such as Ezra Pound’s *Cantos* (1954), T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922) or James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922). Yet if modernist studies’ gradual, deliberate turn away from the strictures of the canon has introduced new registers of writing to the scholarly fold, might it not also allow for the less overt stylings of modernist writers’ non-fiction? If so: under what conditions?

For Andrew Thacker and Peter Brooker, assessing whether a work which exists outside the usual generic expectations of the field can be termed “modernist” is more of an art than a science. In the introduction to the first volume of *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, in 2009, they write:

¹ See, for instance, Clair Boyle’s *Consuming Autobiographies: Reading and Writing the Self in Post-war France* (London: Legenda, 2007), p.18.

Our judgment over what to count as a “modernist magazine” has centred upon an understanding of the dominant character of the magazine, of how it contains sufficient material to constitute some version of modernism or significant discussion of modernism, or is closely related to other important contemporary cultural formations or attitudes towards the newness of social modernity.²

Thacker and Brooker's multi-faceted rubric hands us several tools with which to measure a work as potentially “modernist”. Yet the first, and foremost, characteristic they identify – the “dominant character” of a work – is perhaps the hardest to assess. One senses, in fact, that there is something in their idea of “modernism” akin to the famous *Jacobellis v Ohio* definition of hard-core pornography: “I know it when I see it”.³ “Some version of modernism” is equally difficult to characterise – and although the notion of “sufficient material” is a helpful one, especially when considering forms of non-fiction which come with certain expectations regarding content, the nature and quantity of that material remains highly context-dependent. Similarly, the dialectic between modernism and modernity, while productive in drawing attention to the social and political dimension of modernist writing, relies on a shared understanding of what “contemporary cultural formations” count as “important”.

Thacker and Brooker's rubric, then, leads us back to the more general questions that stand to upset our communal understanding of what constitutes modernist writing. Yet there is no denying that little magazines form an important component of the wider print culture around modernism, or that their examination is necessary to understand such cultures. Fortunately, one need not precisely define *how modernist* a work is in order to study it; in fact, I would suggest, it is often precisely the act of assessing how a work relates to our present understanding of literary modernism that allows us to interrogate the boundaries and biases of scholarship. So, too, might this principle be applied to modernist non-fiction more generally. In this light, difficulties of definition become a virtue, allowing us to reconsider modernism from a variety of different angles, and encouraging new associations to be made between “modernism” as an aesthetic designation and the cultural and social conditions with which it is associated. The fact that modernism is often popularly understood as a reaction against stylistic realism has long coloured readings of

² Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, eds. *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines, vol. 1: Britain and Ireland, 1880-1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.11.

³ Samuel L. La Selva, “‘I know it when I see it’: Pornography and constitutional vision in Canada and the United States”, *Constitutional Politics in Canada and the United States*, ed. Stephen L. Newman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), p. 133.

modernism's relationship to "reality" – as Fredric Jameson explains in his discussion of this "widespread and fairly conventionalized narrative" –⁴ by authors who, one suspects, have conflated modernism as an aesthetic category with realism as an ontological one. A study of non-fiction, which always signals to the real world as its referent, stands to be a necessary corrective.

1. Genre, Place and Politics

This thesis argues that reading non-fiction specifically in terms of genre reveals how modernist writers appropriated popular forms to stage interventions in social and political life. The examples contained within vary in terms of form and subject, ranging from cookbooks and travel guides to newspaper columns and documentary films. As such, they suggest not only the range of formal means by which such interventions were carried out, but also the diverse areas of public life in which authors chose to engage. To represent this range – and understand its significance – this thesis both assesses previously overlooked texts and proposes a new way of reading generically. I have heard the contribution a doctoral candidate should aim to make in her field described in terms of finding, and filling, a small gap in a vast wall. In the case of this thesis, the better metaphor may be that of the wall's grout: a thin layer which spans different portions of the "wall" of knowledge, in order to even out multiple, small gaps. By turning to non-fiction as a topic of interest in its own right, this thesis addresses several related gaps in existing criticism. Subsequently, although my study, I hope, advances scholarship concerning the particular authors and forms through which it makes the case for non-fiction as a vital critical lens, its argument is as much concerned with the state of the field as it is with our shared knowledge of any particular author.

The state of the field as it stands, however, is complex. With the recession of post-structuralism from its position as a dominant critical school, modernist studies has undertaken a gradual "material turn",⁵ bringing with it a return to the historicist hermeneutics that once ruled the field. Yet this historicism has been tempered by its

⁴ Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002), p.22.

⁵ Recent books which self-consciously ally with this "material turn" include such diverse contributions as *The Modernist Party*, ed. Kate McLoughlin (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013); Faye Hammill and Mark Hussey's *Modernism's Print Cultures* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016); and Jeffrey Mathes McCarthy's *Green Modernism: Nature and the English Novel, 1900 to 1930* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015).

dalliance with more theoretical methodologies. This has led to a recent spate of books which achieve nuanced, focussed formalist readings without being lured by the false promise of ahistoricism –⁶ something to which this thesis' study of genre as it is produced and deployed in a specific time and place is highly attentive. This is not the only critical move that has helped provide space for this dissertation. In line with the material turn, modernist studies' most visible recent developments are several revisions to the field's canonical boundaries which have drawn a slew of new works into the modernist fold. These expansions have occurred along several axes: as Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz put it in their 2008 essay "The New Modernist Studies", the field has performed "temporal, spatial and vertical" expansions to the remit of modernism.⁷ These broad-ranging revisions have generated anxiety over an apparent "refusal of limits", and instigated a series of ongoing debates over the geographical, chronological and textual boundaries of the field.⁸

If the "temporal" and "spatial" expansions are relatively self-explanatory – with the former questioning the chronological limits of modernism to include what are now sometimes called "late modernist" texts, and the latter undertaking important work to advance our collective understanding of regional, national and global iterations of modernist art – it is worth dwelling briefly on the "vertical". Although this word has a necessarily broad remit, given the volume and diversity of recent research, for our purposes the most compelling "vertical" turn is that which has brought a range of texts previously designated formally other, including so-called "middlebrow" texts and little magazines, to the forefront of literary scholarship.⁹ In the introduction to their 2006 volume *Bad Modernisms*, Mao and Walkowitz describe this expansive gesture as a move "towards a pluralism or fusion of theoretical commitments", accompanied by a "heightened attention

⁶ For an account of these developments in literary studies in general, see Marjorie Levinson's "What is New Formalism?", *PMLA* 122:2 (March 2007). This thesis is situated within what she calls, following Susan Wolfson, "activist formalism", i.e. scholarship by "those who want to restore to today's reductive reinscription of historical reading its original focus on form" (3).

⁷ Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz, "The New Modernist Studies", *PMLA* 123:3 (May 2008): 737.

⁸ Mark Wollaeger, "Introduction", *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*, ed. Mark Wollaeger and Matt Eatough (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): 11.

⁹ See, for instance, Sean Latham's *"Am I a snob?": Modernism and the Novel* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); Lise Jaillant, *Modernism, Middlebrow and the Literary Canon: The Modern Library Series, 1917-1955*, number 7 (London: Routledge, 2014); Tom Perrin, *The Aesthetics of Middlebrow Fiction: Popular US Novels, Modernism, and Form, 1945-75* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015); Jaime Harker, *America: The Middlebrow: Women's Novels, Progressivism, and Middlebrow Authorship between the Wars* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007).

to continuities and intersections across the boundaries of artistic media . . . and (especially) to the relationship between individual works of art and the larger cultures in which they emerged".¹⁰ Writing in the *PMLA*, they identify the circulation of print objects as one specific area of focus, writing of "modernist scholars' ongoing exploration of the networks of publications in which high modernist artefacts saw print and of the movements and agendas such publications served", and identifying a series of recent studies, such as those facilitated by the online *Modernist Journals Project*, as components of this turn.¹¹ In subsequent years, the publication of the multi-volume *Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Little Magazines* has become the most visible example of modernist studies' interest in print culture. In it, Brooker, Thacker and other editors not only catalogue an unprecedentedly broad sample of magazines across Britain, North America and Europe, but also, crucially, introduce to the field the notion of "periodical codes": bibliographic codes which relate specifically to magazines, including those "internal to the design of a magazine (paper, typeface, layout, etc.) and those that constitute its external relations (distribution in a bookshop, support from patrons)".¹² In doing so, they draw our attention not only to the existence of previously seldom-studied magazines, but also encourage us to read such magazines not only as texts but also as cultural objects, paying attention to their form, design and circulation.

Yet, so far, little work has extended the scrutiny now given to modernist magazines (or, indeed, that long given to modernism's manifestos)¹³ to other, less rarefied non-fictional forms. While it is impossible to state decisively why this is – it may be, for instance, that the volume of modernist magazines, compared to works in other genres, encourages scholars to study them – I would tentatively propose that the issue is, at least partially, one of familiarity. While texts produced in, say, the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries appear alien, forcing us to investigate how they function – we might think here, for instance, of research into early modern pamphlets – many of the generic forms popular

¹⁰ Doulgas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, "Introduction", *Bad Modernisms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), p.2.

¹¹ Mao and Walkowitz, "The New Modernist Studies", p. 744.

¹² Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History*, p.6.

¹³ See, for instance, the chapter on "Movements, magazines and manifestos: the succession from naturalism" in *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930* ed. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (London: Penguin, 1978), J.T. Harskamp's "Contemporaneity, Modernism, Avant-Garde" or Edwin Ardener's assertion that modernism was "a movement of manifestos" in "Social anthropology and the decline of Modernism", *Reason and morality*, ed. Joanna Overing (London: Routledge, 1985), p. 47.

in the age of modernism appear familiar to today's scholars. Cookbooks, travel guides, newspaper columns and radio broadcasts all, as this thesis will demonstrate, came to resemble their contemporary iterations at various points in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While the sense of distance from earlier textual artefacts encourages us to read them as cultural objects arising in a distinct geographical and historical context, then, the familiarity of equivalent mainstream items from the twentieth century discourages, or at least does not so readily invite, such attempts.

Yet such attempts are crucial. Generic forms, this thesis shows, can only be fully understood when we not only play close attention to their textual "codes", but when we recognise these codes as inseparable from the political and cultural context in which they initially appeared. As I intimated above, recent formal readings of modernist texts have operated best when grounded in historical context. As theorists from M. M. Bakhtin to Walter Benjamin have long held, it is impossible to sever a work's generic aspects from the time of its creation. The semiotics of bibliographic codes evolves like that of any other language, and to interpret the formal features of literature accurately requires an understanding of their context. (To borrow a phrase from Roland Barthes: "[a] little formalism turns one away from History, but . . . a lot brings one back to it.")¹⁴ It is only through awareness of this context that we can understand the genres the modernist writers in this thesis appropriate – and the impact of their ironic play.

In the case of twentieth-century texts, understanding genre means recognising the influence of specific technological and social developments. These influences fall broadly into two categories: those that introduce the conditions during which certain genres come to be useful or meaningful, and those which allow the production and distribution of texts themselves. Of the latter, Mao and Walkowitz draw our attention to "the development of novel technologies for transmitting information", including "new forms of journalism [that] not only reconfigured culture's audiences but also helped speed manifestos, works of art, and often artists across national and continental borders".¹⁵ To these we might add the development of new printing paper and cheap presses, as detailed in Chapter 3, and indeed the introduction of new radio and film technologies which allow for the development of the post-World War One "broadcast culture" on which the final chapter of this thesis

¹⁴ Roland Barthes, "Myth Today" in *Mythologies* (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 112.

¹⁵ Mao and Walkowitz, "The New Modernist Studies", p. 742.

focuses. Cheap transport, meanwhile, as well as new food distribution pathways and culinary innovations, came to inform the development of travel guides and cookbooks, while social changes, including changes within domestic space, encouraged their use. In that this thesis deals specifically with genres which are, at least ostensibly, designed to instruct the reader, it is also worth at this stage laying out some general thoughts regarding the various anxieties over how societies ought to function which arose after the First World War and were exacerbated by the Second. As Brooker notes,

‘modern’ society in these post-war years witnessed not only the introduction of new technologies of communication and transport but the mounting challenge to imperial regimes, the emergence of welfare systems, campaigns for women’s suffrage, and new patterns and types of leisure, consumption, and employment for a young, middle-class urban labour force.¹⁶

The depth of modernism’s concern with these developments has not always been sufficiently dealt with in scholarship, with critics traditionally more interested in their representation in fiction than in any notion of modernism’s active intervention in social affairs. Yet the texts in this thesis prove a widespread involvement in the public sphere – both in terms of the number of authors who wrote politically-engaged texts for mainstream spaces, and in terms of the variety of media outlets in which such writing appeared. As such, its reading of non-fictional modernist texts through genre also joins a growing school of criticism aimed at recognising the scope and seriousness of modernism’s engagement in politics. This recent work builds on earlier criticism, such as Michael Levenson’s *A Genealogy of Modernism* (1984), which had already given a sense of the urgency with which modernist writers tackled the thorny subject of how their art might reflect the demands of a secular, post-Victorian society.¹⁷ For Levenson, an “aggressive individualism” arose, the result of which was that “tradition and society could be . . . thoroughly dismissed”.¹⁸ Subsequent studies suggest a more complex reading of modernist writers’ relationship to society and the mainstream – one which recognises the heterogeneous nature of modernism’s politics. Far from being studious but detached observers of society, these scholars suggest, many modernist writers were highly

¹⁶ Peter Brooker, “General Introduction: Modernity, Modernisms, Magazines”, *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines, Volume III: Europe 1880-1940, Part I*, ed. Peter Brooker, Sascha Bru, Andrew Thacker and Christian Weikop (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 3-4.

¹⁷ Michael Levenson, *A Genealogy of Modernism: A Study of English Literary Doctrine 1908-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 52.

¹⁸ Levenson, p. 78.

exercised by the task of responding to the various upheavals of twentieth-century cultural modernity (as, indeed, they were by the traditions they had inherited). In fact, some make the case that the modernists' work is inherently political, such as Carman A. Pearson:

For argument's sake, even if a modernist discussion were limited to the original members of the modernist canon and even if it were agreed upon that high modernists were in opposition to consumer culture around them, inconsistencies in their self-proclaimed apolitical nature are readily apparent.¹⁹

For Pearson, this "apolitical nature" contrasts with modernism's engagement in what Bourdieu terms the "field of cultural production". In support of this, she cites the work of Lawrence Rainey and Bonnie Kime Scott's essay "Becoming Professionals", which deals with the efforts of Virginia Woolf, Djuna Barnes and Rebecca West to establish for themselves a place in the consumer marketplace. "Arguably", she concludes,

Modernist's artistic production, concomitant with their active involvement in the consumer culture and free market, is not a divergence from modernism's norm but is, instead, inherent to its nature.

As Pearson explains, this production is always political, taking place as it does in an inherently politicised space. Meanwhile, other scholars, particularly feminist critics, have pointed out how modernist writers engaged with what we might call politics with a capital "P" —²⁰ as, too, has more recently work on modernist magazines. As Mao and Walkowitz explain,

Among the most significant revelations to emerge so far from work on the larger culture of print has been that of modernism's entanglement, in the pages of early– twentieth-century periodicals, with what may seem at first quite un-literary promotions of feminism, socialism, nationalism, and other programs of social change.²¹

Together, these readings highlight the importance of acknowledging texts as agents in a particular social and cultural landscape. Yet they also invite further investigation. For if modernism's engagement with the mainstream is inherently political, and its engagement with the rarefied space of little magazines is explicitly so, then what, we might reasonably ask, is to be made of its political interventions – explicit and otherwise – within popular

¹⁹ Carmen A. Pearson, *Modernism and Mildred Walker* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), p. 73

²⁰ There exists, of course, important examples of criticism in this vein in earlier scholarship; for instance, Michael Long's essay "The Politics of English Modernism: Eliot, Pound, Joyce", in *Visions and Blueprints: Avant-garde Culture and Radical Politics in Early Twentieth-century Europe*, ed. Edward Timms and Peter Collier (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).

²¹ Mao and Walkowitz, "The New Modernist Studies", p. 744.

cultural spaces? It is this question, always anchored in the specific technological, spatial and social configurations of post-war culture, that this thesis seeks to answer.

2. Re-evaluating the mainstream

Pearson is, of course, far from the only scholar to advocate a re-assessment of modernism's relationship with the popular. I noted above an increased engagement with "middlebrow" writing in the *New Modernist Studies*. Other scholarly work which pursues the hazy boundaries between high modernism and mainstream culture has also proposed categories such as "intermodernism" – a term coined in a 2009 collection of essays²² to describe what one reviewer summarised as "any and all artists who come between the modern and the postmodern, the aesthetic and the social, high and low" –²³ and, separately but with the same attention to the commercial and popular, pursued new work on subjects such as fashion,²⁴ glossy magazines²⁵ and pulp publishing,²⁶ as a slew of new works have set about reviving the ethos of Lawrence Rainey's *Institutions of Modernism* (1998) with a particular interest in print forms.²⁷ Concomitantly, scholars have turned increasingly to the quotidian, everyday and domestic as important formulations in modernist fiction.²⁸ These two trends, I would suggest, might be read in tandem: by

²² *Intermodernism: Literary Culture in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain*, ed. Kristin Bluemel (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

²³ Jesse Matz, "Intermodernism: Literary Culture in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain (Review)", *Modernism/modernity* 18:3 (September 2011), p. 665.

²⁴ See Celia Marshik, *At the Mercy of their Clothes: Modernism, the Middlebrow, and British Garment Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017) and R. S. Koppen, *Virginia Woolf, Fashion and Literary Modernity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

²⁵ Although no studies exist which focus solely on modernism's appearance in popular magazines, see, to give just one representative example, Jessica Burstein's reading of *Vogue* in *Cold Modernism: Literature, Fashion, Art* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2012)

²⁶ See David M. Earle, *Re-covering Modernism: Pulp, Paperbacks, and the Prejudice of Form* (London: Routledge, 2016)

²⁷ Rainey's text, which identified the "firm distinction between modernism and the avant-garde" as a falsehood, based on the inaccurate perception of modernism as an aesthetic category whose "defining trait" is "hostility to mass culture" is an important antecedent to both much of the research named above, and, indeed, this thesis; particularly as it highlights how "the growing complexity of cultural exchange in modern society" came to bear on the lives and works of canonical modernists. *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p.2.

²⁸ The subject of the 15th Modernist Studies Association conference "Everydayness and the Event" held at the University of Sussex, August 19th-September 1st 2013, the notion of modernism's "everyday" has also been explored in books such as Bryony Randall's *Modernism, Daily Time and Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) and Liesl Olson's *Modernism and the Ordinary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

framing both commercial culture and the domestic as spaces in which the individual's relationship to society is mediated, we can begin to piece together the broader picture of modernism's interest in how society is structured. Subsequently, while I find most accounts of "intermodernism" as an isolated – or isolatable – category unconvincing, seeming to me to be based on what we would now recognise as a fairly limited reading of "straight" modernism's geographical and formal boundaries, I would propose that it is worth recognizing the social dimension which *Intermodernism* editor Kristin Bluemel and other scholars have sought to highlight, which underscores not only the commercial and the quotidian but also the modernist ventures into mainstream spaces which this thesis explores.

It is with this series of interlinking concerns in mind that we can recognise non-fiction as in need of urgent critical attention. Not only do the popular texts this thesis surveys tap in to both the commercial sphere and the everyday – as well as, in the case of newspapers and broadcasting, the question of the media as it relates to the state – but each also uses its instructive form to address the behaviour of the individual within society. They not only respond to the prevailing conditions of modernity, but seek also to influence them in turn; they are not just descriptive, but prescriptive. By appropriating the textual codes of genres which make claims to truth value and usefulness, these works invite us to focus on what each is intended to convey and the way each seeks to advise, forestalling any narrative of modernism's disinterest. It is worth acknowledging, too, that many of these works were highly popular in their time. As opposed to, say, the frosty reception afforded Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* (1938),²⁹ these mainstream texts have been forgotten by modernist scholars despite being highly accessible to, and enjoyed by, mass audiences.

Yet accessible does not necessarily mean practical, and many of these works, as this thesis will demonstrate, refuse to be useful – at least in the terms signalled by their respective genres. Through strategies of irony, play, and sometimes deliberately confusing complexity, the texts this thesis considers defy their generic designation even as they deploy that same designation to frame their intervention in society. The codes that indicate their generic category act to produce irony, or, at times, act as a "Trojan Horse" in which subversive ideas may be concealed. Thus, for instance, we encounter travel guides that

²⁹ See, for instance, Naomi Black, *Virginia Woolf as Feminist* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 147.

do not teach us where to go, or documentary films that refuse to endorse the holidays they advertise. There are cookbooks with “difficult” recipes which ignore the typical demands of ease and pleasure that shape the mainstream cookery guides of their time, and, in Flann O’Brien’s “Cruiskeen Lawn”, a column which rails against not only the easy comprehensibility towards which the form of the newspaper moved in the late nineteenth century, but its own sense of legitimacy and veracity. Whether or not these texts replace their ostensible purpose with another varies from each to each; with some, it is almost impossible to ascertain the level of irony they may or may not operate on. In fact, the shared feature which is most readily apparent is an ambivalent relationship to truth.

In each case, confusion is its own mode of resistance against various mainstream discourses. In his essay “In Praise of Profanation”, Giorgio Agamben offers a definition of what it is to profane which provides us with a useful means of thinking through this type of play. He writes,

The term *religio* does not derive . . . from *religare* (that which binds and unites the human and the divine). It comes instead from *relegere*, which indicates the stance of scrupulousness and attention that must be adopted in relations with the gods, the uneasy hesitation . . . before forms – and formulae – that must be observed in order to respect the separation between the sacred and the profane. Religio is not what unites men and gods but what ensures they remain distinct. It is not disbelief and indifference towards the divine, therefore, that stands in opposition to religion, but “negligence,” that is, a behavior [sic] that is free and “distracted” (that is to say, released from the religio of norms) before things and their use, before forms of separation and their meaning. To profane means to open the possibility of a special form of negligence, which ignores separation, or, rather, puts it to a particular use.³⁰

Of course, the comparison is not an exact one. Yet, broadly speaking, the notion of profanation as being not the act of railing against religious authority but of showing irreverence to it, might equally be applied to modernist approaches to instructive non-fiction. Travel guides, cookbooks, newspaper columns, radio programs and documentary films all seek to order the world in a particular way, with – as we shall see – their textual codes oriented towards emphasizing an authority which casts the text as instructor and the reader as acolyte. To reappropriate these formal features in order to gesture instead to ambiguity and complexity is to undermine this relationship, or, rather, to “put it to a particular use”. As Agamben goes on to explain, “[t]he passage from the sacred to the profane can, in fact, also come about by means of an entirely inappropriate use (or, rather,

³⁰ Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations* trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2007), p.74-5.

reuse) of the sacred: namely, play.” With this in mind, we can begin to understand how using genre deliberately incorrectly – ignoring the use value which its form leads us to anticipate – can act as a means of destabilizing its usual function, whether that be the lazy politics of news reporting, or the overly-simplistic taxonomy of place in travel guides.

To explore the variety of ways in which this appropriation and play occurs in modernist non-fiction, this thesis will consider several different uses of genre, remaining attentive each time to the specifics of place and time. Chapter 1 reads two travel guides, Hugh MacDiarmid and Lewis Grassie Gibbon’s *Scottish Scene: The Intelligent Man’s Guide to Albyn* (1934) and Sylvia Townsend Warner’s *Somerset* (1949), in terms of their treatment of place. This chapter takes an emerging area of modernist studies – regional modernism – and extends it into the realm of non-fiction. While this new thread of research has yielded fruitful studies, its scope remains limited, with recent publications too often focused on how modernist work set in regional space compares to that of the urban centre – a result of the field’s genesis in the transnational imaginary of the New Modernist Studies. Yet often the most striking feature of regional modernist works is their take-up of local traditions – textual and historical – which are then “made new”. As regional studies progress, this chapter argues, it is imperative that this local mediation is given due attention.

My reading of *Scottish Scene* and *Somerset* is therefore situated at a point of rupture. Through a close-reading of both texts, this chapter demonstrates how writers used the form of the travel guide to create complex works which embody the series of tensions with which regional modernist studies grapples: the local and the global; romantic and modernist; ancient and modern. Attentive to the changing politics of place in the twentieth century, and particularly of the lure of easy nationalist narratives, they advocate a reading of place which permits this uncertainty.

In doing so, they seek to rewrite the instructive role encoded in the guide book since the late nineteenth century. As Nicholas T. Parsons observes in his monograph *Worth the Detour: a History of Guide-books*, for the late Victorian reader, “to travel was to be well informed”, with the guide book a crucial tool for educating one’s self. In the early twentieth century, as the car and other means of transport became accessible to the middle classes – and conflict in Europe threatened overseas travel – the guide book evolved to instruct its readers in travel technologies and the delights of newly-accessible destinations. With

maps, practical information and even glossaries of local dialect, these guides were coded as authoritative, providing one with a seemingly comprehensive view of each locale. In borrowing the guidebook form, this chapter suggests, *Scottish Scene* and *Somerset* were able to invoke this sense of authority only to undermine it with deliberately ambiguous content, subverting not only the usual expectations of the genre but also what they saw as limited, and limiting, accounts of place.

Chapter 2 extends this study of leisure, place and instruction to the kitchen. As modernist studies increasingly turn to the everyday, food has become a particularly productive area of enquiry. Food is both a necessary part of daily life and a political one: especially in the early twentieth century, when rationing, the conditioning of the body and the geopolitics of trade were issues firmly in the public eye. Cookbooks from the period display a pre-occupation with these and other wartime concerns, outlining strategies with which to resist the adverse effects of conflict and promoting nationalist culinary discourses – easily replicated at home within the housewife’s increasingly busy schedule.

This chapter turns to two contrasting texts which use the form of the cookbook to examine the intersection between everyday life and politics. The *Alice B Toklas Cook Book* (1954) has been most frequently read as a thinly-veiled autobiography; being concerned with Alice Toklas’ life as the spouse of Gertrude Stein, the Cookbook details the couples’ life in Paris, and travels overseas, through food. Yet with chapters on eating during rationing, cooking for artists, and an account of a rolling coterie of foreign staff, Toklas’ book also sheds light on the matter of how nationhood, conflict and identity relate to eating, with its experimental poetics offering up somatic pleasure as a means of resistance during wartime. F.T. Marinetti’s *The Futurist Cookbook* (1932) also links food and nation; unlike Toklas’ autobiography, however, his book is closer to a manifesto. Alone of the texts in this thesis, Marinetti’s book appears less interested in subtlety and ambiguity than in dictating a culinary idiom to complement the Futurist artist’s lifestyle. Best known today for its incendiary attack on pasta, *La Cucina Futurista* – as it is called in Italian – brings together recipes, or “formulas”, with journalistic accounts, manifestos, dinner party plans and even a glossary of new gastronomic terms. In doing so, it fabricates a gastronomic system which reflects the Futurist strategies for living: fast, sensual, and imbued with geopolitical significance. Taken together, the books illustrate how two very different

approaches to food both utilize the form of the cookbook to communicate strategies for everyday living which enforce, or oppose, localised political structures.

Chapters 3 and 4 move from the realm of pleasure to that of business. While modernist criticism has never entirely neglected the importance of newspapers to modernist literature – with Patrick Collier’s 2006 monograph *Modernism on Fleet Street* undertaking a sustained study of the matter – so far little research has considered specifically the writing modernist authors did for the popular press. Instead, studies are understandably preoccupied with the way literary modernism both cites from the mainstream and defines itself against it. Thus, while there has been criticism on newspapers’ formal features as they appear in, for instance, the “Aeolus” chapter of *Ulysses*, so far few, if any, works have addressed newspaper reports, interviews, reviews or articles as genres of writing.

Chapter 3 therefore undertakes a consideration of the more mainstream cousin of the modernist magazine piece: the newspaper article. Drawing on the analytical tools used in studies of little magazines, it demonstrates how Flann O’Brien’s series *Cruiskeen Lawn*, published under the pseudonym Myles na gCopaleen, employed the long-established instructive space of the newspaper column. As Elizabeth Dickens notes, “a newspaper or periodical appears at a fixed interval, usually with a fixed amount of content”.³¹ With many newspapers in the early twentieth century appearing daily, the mainstream press was linked intimately with everyday life, both in the sense that the newspaper would be read each day, and in terms of its contents, designed as they were to appeal to and inform a non-specialist audience. Widespread anxieties over the decline of press standards, including specific concerns in the recently independent Ireland, were closely bound up with newspapers’ rôle as a commodity which, if not always overtly educative, was certainly encoded as informative. By turning to the newspaper columns of Myles na gCopaleen, then, this chapter shows how such features were manipulated by modernist writers to comment on not only the changing status of Irish political and cultural events in the years following independence, but also the part of the press in shaping and sustaining them.

Finally, Chapter 4 will turn to other forms of text which, like the newspaper, are explicitly addressed to a wider public: radio and documentary broadcasts. Although these

³¹ Elizabeth Day, “Circulating Ideas and Selling Periodicals: Leonard Woolf, the Nation and Athenaeum, and Topical Debate” in *Virginia Woolf and the Literary Marketplace*, ed. J. Dubino [eBook edition] (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), n.p.

are, strictly speaking, non-literary, it would be remiss to undertake a study of non-fiction as it plays a part in the public life of the twentieth century without discussing these emergent media forms. The publication of books such as the recent Verso collection *Radio Benjamin* (2014), as well as various studies of radio modernism, reflects the recent increased interest in how twentieth century politics intersected with nascent technological forms. Yet, while new attention has been paid to works for radio, television and film, few scholars have undertaken close-reading of individual radio programs, or made the association between these different components broadcasting explicit. This chapter, however, argues that to understand modernist work for new media requires us to recognise a shared “broadcast culture”. This is particularly the case in Britain, where the early years of the BBC, marked by the careful regulation of form and content, came to influence not only radio more generally, but also the documentary film industry, with which it shared both members of staff and also – more significantly – a shared ethos, built on a keen regard for the wishes of the interwar state.

By reading Benjamin Britten and W.H. Auden’s short films – including the famous *Night Mail* (1936) – alongside radio broadcasts made by Virginia Woolf and Elizabeth Bowen, this chapter traces a thread of modernist experiment in interwar mainstream media which uses the formal limitations of the medium to productive ends. It argues that relatively understated techniques such as repetition and irony achieve radical success within the enforced chronology of radio broadcasts. With the introduction of visuals and sound, documentary films are able to develop these techniques further, with Britten and Auden’s work on place, leisure and industry using the counterpoint between these different semantic channels to introduce humour and ambiguity within the usually instructive form of the 1930s documentary film – a medium more readily associated with propaganda than with play.

Collectively, these readings stand to deepen our insights in multiple areas of modernist studies. Studies of space and place, for example, are complicated and enriched by the guidebooks and travel films that this thesis focusses on. These works, as we shall see, assist us in teasing apart the relationship between what Franco Moretti neatly summarized as the “triangle” of “foreign form, local material—and *local form* [Moretti’s emphasis]”³² by themselves acting as intermediaries which toy with the scalability of the

³² Franco Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature”, *New Left Review* 1 (January-February 2000), p. 65.

geographical imagination. Caught as they are between modernist and romantic or, in the case of documentary, realist modes, they also encourage scholars to reassess the traditional aesthetics associated with “regional” writing, further contributing to the dissolution of the easy narrative which equates “modernist” with “urban” and “realist” with “rural”. Indeed, the aesthetic play of each work in this thesis invites similar reconsiderations: necessarily borrowing from specialist and populist discourses in turn, each combines typically modernist aesthetic play with more mainstream features. As such, a close-reading of modernist non-fiction enables us to revisit the boundary between the rarefied works of the avant-garde and popular texts, particularly with regards to various political and cultural discourses foremost in the popular consciousness of the early-to-mid twentieth century. More conspicuously, these works push textual materiality and the “bibliographic codes” of various cultural objects to the fore. In reading non-fiction through such formal features, this thesis therefore demonstrates the geographical and historical contingency of mainstream genre and the rich possibilities it affords for modernist play – proposing a new way of understanding work situated at the shifting front lines of scholarship, and demonstrating the crucial significance of non-fiction to modernist studies.

“Err-and-Stray” Books: Locating Modernist Travel Guides

Before leaving on the four-week walk in Liberia detailed in his travel account *Journey Without Maps* (1936), Graham Greene consulted a guide book. The volume in question is government issued; its vision of his destination seemingly all-encompassing. As Greene recounts,

There was something satisfyingly complete about [the picture the book presented]. It really seemed as though you couldn't go deeper than that; the agony was piled on in the British Government Blur Book with a real effect of grandeur; the little injustices of Kenya became shoddy and suburban beside it.³³

As his title suggests, “no maps were to be brought” on Greene's journey.³⁴ The guide book is his primary insight into the unmapped country, but it is a more than adequate stand-in: “it really seemed as though you couldn't go deeper than that”. The “grandeur” of the government book lends it an authoritative air which makes the widespread violences of colonial Kenya³⁵ appear “little injustices” – merely “suburban”. Greene's guide book is able not only to invoke a certain sense of place, but to create an invocation powerful enough that it reshapes its reader's understanding of other places. It gives the “complete” picture. Its word is, seemingly, final.

Greene is not the only modernist author to address the matter of travel guides. With modernist accounts of travel came, unsurprisingly, portrayals of the guide book, with the item making an appearance in a range of literary texts. Guides, however, did not only appear in modernist works, but also lent their form to two specific, if unusual, volumes: Hugh MacDiarmid and Lewis Grassic Gibbon's *Scottish Scene: Or, The Intelligent Man's Guide To Albyn* (1934) and Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Somerset* (1949). It is these two publications which I shall focus on in this chapter.

1. Moving through (rural) modernity

This chapter takes an emerging area of modernist studies – regional modernism – and extends it into the realm of non-fiction. At present, no work has been undertaken on the

³³ Graham Greene, *Journey Without Maps* (London: Mercury Books, 1936) p. 6.

³⁴ Liberia was, at the time, still largely unmapped.

³⁵ R. Mugo Gatheru's 2005 history *Kenya: From Colonization to Independence* recounts how violence was used by both coloniser and resistance ‘as a Tension Reducer’ (p.155), ‘as a Stimulant to the Movement’ and ‘as a Catalyst’ (p.157).

matter of modernist travel guides – a somewhat unusual omission in a field which is latterly so interested in space and place. Such an oversight can easily be understood, however, as symptomatic of the priorities adopted by studies of regional modernism. Once diagnosed as sentimental – even reactionary – artefacts fundamentally opposed to the tenets of modernism, regional texts have recently enjoyed increased credibility in British and American modernist scholarship. In spite of this increased attention, however, certain pathways remain unexplored. Specifically, the majority of work on non-urban modernist writers so far has read regional texts in relation to their metropolitan counterparts. This tendency is a side effect of regional modernism's critical genesis, which has evolved in relation to a broader school termed the "New Modernist Studies" – a newly dominant critical force which seeks to address modernism on a global scale. The most prominent output from this recent "spatial turn", whose best-known proponents include Andrew Thacker, Peter Brooker and, in the United States, Laura Doyle and Susan Stanford Freidman, is frequently an iteration of this global turn. In prioritising expansion beyond the confines of modernism's old imperial centres, and identifying international cities as alternative sites of modernist production, this work constitutes a necessary and significant development in the field. Yet local studies have suffered; indeed, Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz' seminal 2008 *PMLA* essay "The New Modernist Studies" specifically describes works which "globalize modernism by identifying new local strains in parts of the world not always associated with modernist production",³⁶ re-iterating the traditional hierarchy that has long shaped modernist scholarship.

Recent work on regional modernism attempts to counter this trend. Much of this later scholarship acknowledges a debt to David James, who has undertaken a substantial analysis of the spatial interests of modernism in the interwar years.³⁷ Yet scholars often fail to heed James' warning that "local, site-specific attachments" too frequently "remain the generic 'other' against which the vitalities of global modernism are defined",³⁸ and his related call for attentiveness to the "regional dialogues that emerge between geography

³⁶ Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, 'The New Modernist Studies', *PMLA* 123, no. 3 (2008), p.739.

³⁷ See, most recently, "Capturing the Scale of Fiction at Mid-Century", *Regional Modernisms* ed. Neal Alexander and James Moran (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), pp. 104-123, and, with Urmila Seshagiri, "Metamodernism: Narratives of Continuity and Revolution", *PMLA* 129, no. 1 (2013): 87-100.

³⁸ David James, "Localizing late modernism: Interwar regionalism and the genesis of the 'micro novel'", *Journal of Modern Literature* 32:4 (2009): p.51.

and genre”.³⁹ Instead, the continued dominance of writing on urban centres, and an enduring association of the non-urban with quaint realism, has allowed a disproportionate focus on the relationship between “mainstream” and rural modernism to endure. The 2009 special *Regional Modernism* issue of *Modern Fiction Studies* – principally concerned with American writing – is a case in point: although Scott Herring’s introduction warns that “it is not too difficult to see that the urbanized orientations of modernist studies can take a graceful swandive into metronormativity”, leaving rural sites to be conflated with a “quaint local colour”,⁴⁰ the essays featured within are mostly orientated towards global exchange. In this sense, regional modernism risks turning away from outward-looking comparisons with the metropolis only to replace them with similarly outward-looking connections to the transnational. A similar picture emerges across the Atlantic. While, for example, no review of British regional modernism in recent years could fail to mention Alexandra Harris’ 2010 *Romantic Moderns* – an interdisciplinary study which reviews “romantic” tendencies in the networks of art we might normally designate “modernist” –⁴¹ Harris deals far more with *modernity* than she does *modernism*. More significantly, the volume has a tendency to perpetuate the set of binaries which ally rural with romantic, and metropolitan with experimental, in such a way as to preclude a full excavation of how modernists struggles with these categories – a common trait in a field perhaps too concerned with how this tension plays out on a critical level to explore it fully on a textual one.

More recent studies have fared better in this regard, but still show signs – positive and otherwise – of self-consciously breaking away from an established field. The 2013 essay collection *Regional Modernisms*, for instance, suffers from a degree of hesitancy: while the book opens with a call to move beyond modernism’s metropolitan centres and consider modernist Europe heterogeneously, echoing the framework offered by Mao and Walkowitz, the pressure of establishing legitimacy in a field which has long “othered” regional work leads editors Neal Alexander and James Moran to prioritise arguments which justify a break from convention, reading regional texts against the established canonical nexus first and foremost. Subsequent publications, such as John Brannigan’s *Archipelagic Modernism* (2014), have followed much in the same vein (although

³⁹ James “Capturing the scale of fiction at mid-century”, p. 107.

⁴⁰ Scott Herring, “Regional Modernism: A Reintroduction”, *Modern Fiction Studies* 55:11 (2009: p.2).

⁴¹ Alexandra Harris, *Romantic Moderns: English Writers, Artists and the Imagination from Virginia Woolf to John Piper* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2010)

Brannigan's book does raise the intriguing notion of archipelagic networks of cultural exchange). While there is an obvious critical motivation for positioning regional modernist works firmly in wider modernist discourses, such studies run the risk of reaffirming the hierarchy they set out to denounce. While each of these texts posits regional modernism as a crucial area of exploration in the New Modernist Studies, then, I would suggest that they rarely go far enough in their consideration of how modernist works took localised traditions as a point of divergence.⁴² Leaving this broadly unexplored seems particularly remiss given the enduring consensus that the act of rupture – of radically “making it new” – is the unifying principle of modernist art. If regional modernism is to continue to develop as a critical field in its own right, rather than simply as a counterpoint to global studies, it must become attentive to the specifics of how this rupture takes place within local traditions, as modernist authors react to source materials which may at first seem unglamorous, or even reactionary, intertexts.

With this in mind, this chapter returns to an earlier iteration of geographical study and attempts an alternate pathway. Thacker's *Moving Through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism* (2009) was one of the principle instigators of the British “spatial turn” and is the study from which this chapter takes its key analytic architecture. *Moving Through Modernity* identifies a spatial thread in modernist fiction, which critical studies had previously neglected in favour of readings which concentrate on modernist temporalities. Space and geography, Thacker writes, are “central concerns of modernism” –⁴³ concerns which Thacker locates in the rapidly shifting geography of modernity. If we are to locate modernism in its proper historical context, he argues, it is imperative that “we should understand modernist texts as creating metaphorical spaces that try to make sense of the rhetorical spaces of modernity”.⁴⁴ For Thacker, there is an indelible link between these two types of space, as “social spaces dialogically help fashion the literary *forms* of the modernist text” (Thacker's emphasis). “Literary texts”, he writes, “represent social spaces, but social space shapes literary forms”.⁴⁵

⁴² It is worth noting here that author-specific studies, particularly those that focus on reference-heavy writers like Ezra Pound and James Joyce, have long been attentive to the specifics of place. It is only when considering writing under the banner of “regional literature” that scholars have tended to become more circumspect.

⁴³ Andrew Thacker, *Moving Through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p.2.

⁴⁴ Thacker, *Moving Through Modernity*, p.3.

⁴⁵ Thacker, *Moving Through Modernity*, p.4.

It is the interaction between these two spaces which constitutes the predominant focus of both Thacker's work and this chapter. *Moving Through Modernity* takes as its focus modernism's "textual space", a term which Thacker uses to refer to the relationship between the social space as represented in the text and the formal space of the text through which such representation takes place. It thus counts "the typography and layout of the page; the space of metaphor and the shifting between different sense of space within a text [and] the very shape of narrative forms"⁴⁶ among its remit. Formal features are as significant a component of a text's topography as the landscapes portrayed within, if only because these two components are inseparable. "[I]t is important", Thacker writes, "to consider how space and geography . . . have a profound impact on how modernist texts are formally assembled".⁴⁷

This chapter adopts the hermeneutics of Thacker's study and extends them into an area outside of his generic remit. By turning to non-fiction specifically, it assesses a new set of formal methodologies, contiguous with modernist fiction but notably divergent in both structure and purpose. While Thacker investigates the relationship between social space and stylistics, the authors studied in this chapter demand that intertextuality also be considered. Their subversive appropriation of the guidebook genre foregrounds the question of how authors adopt and manipulate commercial forms. The advancements that various modernist writers made on the form of the novel are widely acknowledged in critical studies.⁴⁸ Yet the self-consciousness identifiable in Warner, MacDiarmid and Grassie Gibbon's adoption of a specific genre is of a different tenor from that evidenced in modernism's fiction. As such, any reading of these texts prompts a shift in canonical focus. By taking as their subject not only specific locales but a specific transregional – yet almost invariably provincial – genre of writing, both texts bear witness to literary genealogies embedded in the countryside. In this way, they acknowledge a debt to work with a shared geography as much as that with a shared stylistics. Their pre-occupation with other representations of regional space invites us to consider the diverse ways modernist texts engage with their local surroundings, unearthing the ways such texts take root in regional

⁴⁶ Thacker, *Moving Through Modernity*, p.4.

⁴⁷ Thacker, *Moving Through Modernity*, p.4.

⁴⁸ See, for instance, Sean Latham's *"Am I a Snob?" Modernism and the Novel* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); Stephen Kern, *The Modernist Novel: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); *A History of the Modernist Novel*, ed. Gregory Castle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

space and make it new. Returning to the matter of how regional modernist writing may be read not only in relation to its metropolitan counterparts but also against other accounts of a region, it is easy to see how *Somerset* and *Scottish Scene* assist in rerouting towards the latter.

2. Home and away

Any survey of critical work on twentieth century travel writing cannot help notice how little focuses on domestic travel. The reasons for this are difficult to determine: in the case of scholars who focus on postcolonial readings the rationale is relatively clear, but elsewhere – such as in the case of James Buzard, who simply writes that domestic sites “do not figure in [his] work” which is “mainly on . . . foreign settings” –⁴⁹ there seems to be little justification. Perhaps, we might suppose, this is due to something of an image problem, with travelling in Britain less glamorous and conspicuously “modern” than the new possibilities of travel abroad afforded by advances in technology or commerce. Or it may simply be that domestic travel within Britain was relatively painless, and thus more likely to fall under the auspices of “tourism” than true, intrepid “travelling”. Whatever the reasoning, the association of “travel” with “overseas” is an enduring one. Indeed, when writing on the limitations imposed by the First World War, Paul Fussell states that “civilians were fixed in the British Isles for the duration. That meant four years, three months, and seven days of no travelling”.⁵⁰ For Fussell, it seems, travelling within the British Isles is not travel at all.

Those who could “not travel”, however, could still read about it, as Fussell notes while differentiating between the guide book and the travel book (a division which the writers featured in this chapter may give us cause to question):

A guide book is addressed to those who plan to follow the traveler, doing what he has done, but more selectively. A travel book, at its purest, is addressed to those who do not plan to follow the traveller at all, but who require the exotic or comic anomalies, wonders and scandals of the literary form *romance* which their own place or time cannot entirely supply.⁵¹ (Fussell's emphasis)

⁴⁹ James Buzard, *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to 'Culture': 1800-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 15.

⁵⁰ Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Travelling Between the Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 9.

⁵¹ Paul Fussell, “Travel Books as Literary Phenomena”, *Defining Travel: Diverse Visions*, ed. Susan L. Robersons (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), p. 105.

For Fussell, it is the intended experience of the reader which differentiates guide and travel books. Yet even these designations are open to complication and appropriation. Considering the authors he features in *Modernist Travel Writing: Intellectuals Abroad*, David Farley writes that “[i]n the travel books I examine here, we can see the vestiges of this preoccupation with form coupled with what becomes a deep suspicion of form itself”,⁵² going on to suggest that texts which “may at first appear to be travelogues . . . upon closer examination reveal themselves as inquiries into how to write literature in the twentieth century”.⁵³

This brings us to the matter of what a study of modernist responses to the travel guide specifically might offer us. While this may seem a minor strand of inquiry, it is, I would suggest, a significant one, located simultaneously on two of modernist studies' shifting front lines. As I shall demonstrate throughout this chapter, these modernist reformulations of guidebooks are textually ambiguous, incorporating travel guide “codes” but employing them in distinct and unusual ways. In doing so, they create multi-faceted, idiosyncratic and subtle portraits of the places they imagine that refuse to be accounted for in simple terms. They are similarly difficult to place in relation to our current understanding of “modernism”, not least in that *Somerset* and *Scottish Scene* deal with regional locations which, prior to very recent work, did not fit into the narrative of place permitted by modernist studies.⁵⁴

Furthermore, their use of the guide book form raises questions of certain genres and formats which until recently also, as the introduction to this thesis explained, lay outside our accepted understanding of modernist innovation and consumption. It is now increasingly recognised, with the advent of what Thacker and Brooker have termed the “materialist turn”,⁵⁵ that modernist writing does not reject popular material culture wholesale, but rather studies, incorporates and subverts it (as well as feeding into the commercial in turn). Thus modernist responses to the travel guides sit within the purview of both “regional modernism” and work on material and commercial modernisms, providing

⁵² David Farley, *Modernist Travel Writing: Intellectuals Abroad* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2010), p. 6.

⁵³ Farley, *Modernist Travel*, p. 15.

⁵⁴ Scotland, of course, presents a difficulty in that it is both a nation and a region of the United Kingdom - a tension which the second half of this chapter will consider.

⁵⁵ Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, eds, *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines, Vol. 1, Britain and Ireland: 1880-1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 6.

the means to bring these two emerging critical strands in to correspondence and demonstrate that regional, as well as urban, modernist texts were written in conversation with material culture.⁵⁶ In them, the form of the commercial travel guide becomes not a tool with which to provide an authoritative account of a landscape, but one with which to question prevailing discourses: rendered ambiguous or ridiculous, these subversively-employed guide book “codes” assist the authors in casting off simplistic narratives which purport to show a complete and certain portrait of their respective locations, leaving them free to go off the map and present a radically uncertain, non-homogenous version of place.

3. Modernism on the move

Wherever we place the geographical boundaries of modernism, it is clear that travel is a recurring concern in modernist literature – be it the fraught intra-continental journeys of Ford Madox Ford’s *The Good Soldier* (1915) or the constant movements to, from and across London in Virginia Woolf’s *The Years* (1937). This trend is not surprising: as Helen Carr explores in her essay “Modernism and Travel (1880 - 1940)”, the vast majority of what we now call modernist literature was produced in an era which enjoyed an unprecedented ease of movement.⁵⁷ Steamships and railroads provided swift means of access to destinations across Europe and overseas, as well as encouraging domestic day trippers to visit seaside towns. Naturally, as more people moved further, faster, conceptions of travel changed. Indeed, by the 1930s the motor car alone had fuelled its own brand of tourist. While Sue Bowden’s study of early twentieth century consumer behaviour notes that car ownership remained out of reach for the majority British families, by 1937 it “had become a necessity as a proper occupational asset amongst the professional male middle classes (e.g. doctors)”. This allowed a significant minority of the population to enjoy “a new form of leisure”, launching “the era of the ‘weekend’ drives to the countryside and the season, of travel in pursuit of leisure and entertainment”.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ It is worth here acknowledging Thacker’s essay “‘that trouble’: Regional Modernism and ‘little magazines’”, one of the few pieces of writing which also assesses the circulation of material forms in British regional space. (*Regional Modernisms*, ed. Neal Alexander and James Moran (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), pp. 22-43).

⁵⁷ Helen Carr, “Modernism and Travel”, *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. Peter Hulme. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp 70-86.

⁵⁸ Sue Bowden, “Consumption and Consumer Behaviour”, *A Companion to Early Twentieth Century Britain*, ed. Chris Wrigley (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p. 365.

Advertising from the period bears witness to how swiftly the car was integrated into the public's conception of leisure time. In Harris' *Romantic Moderns*, the posters commissioned by Shell-Mex in the 1930s to advertise Britain's landmarks – and, by extension, their own petrol as the means of reaching them – are read as exemplifying the early twentieth century travel industry's complex mediation of heritage landscapes and futuristic technology (on which more later). "Most of these posters", Harris writes, "featured views of the English countryside through which Shell hoped the new car-owning tourists would drive (thereby polluting that countryside, though this side-effect was not much mentioned)".⁵⁹ Virginia and Leonard Woolf bought their first car, a Singer, in 1927, after the publication of *To The Lighthouse*. A diary entry of Woolf's from that July documents a sense of anticipation which might have been cribbed directly from the Shell posters:

This is a great opening in our lives. One may go to Bodiam, to Arundel, explore the Chichester downs, expand that curious thing, the map of the world in one's mind. It will I think demolish loneliness, & may of course imperil complete privacy.⁶⁰

The Woolfs were not the only modernist writers who were seduced by the promise of travel. By the 1930s the intellectual classes were almost synonymous with the travelling classes; as Farley writes, "travelling itself became a much more common, almost obligatory, activity".⁶¹ Indeed, it can feel difficult to name a canonical modernist writer who remained long in the same place. Writers like Jean Rhys, Elizabeth Bowen and Ezra Pound not only travelled widely but made transience the subject of their work, from the itinerant lodgers of the boarding house (Rhys) to the pleasure-seekers of the seaside town (Bowen). Even the briefest consideration of what we now consider the central concerns of modernist writing makes evident how fruitful the subject of travel was. Imagining a possible future study on the subject in the conclusion to *Moving Through Modernity*, Thacker notes the relation between travel and modernism's aesthetics of renewal. "The development of new travel technologies", he writes, "is clearly a central feature of how modernity felt different for people living in the early twentieth century . . . technologies of transport signified a modernity of change, upheaval and possibility to modernist writers".⁶² The introduction to Farley's *Modernist Travel Writing*, in some ways the answer to Thacker's

⁵⁹ Harris, p.217.

⁶⁰ Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume 3: 1925-1930*, eds. Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth Press, 1980), p. 147.

⁶¹ Farley, p.2.

⁶² Andrew Thacker, *Moving Through Modernity*, p. 221.

call, takes up this line of argument. “Travel and travel writing”, Farley suggests, “transformed literary modernism as surely as they were transformed by it”.⁶³

The “upheaval” to which Thacker refers gestures towards a further aspect of travel. As Carr stresses, the same technologies which allowed leisure travel were initially mobilised in support of “empire building, trade expansion, and mass migrations”. “The years between 1880 and 1940”, she writes, “are perhaps best seen as the beginning of the era of globalisation in which we live today”.⁶⁴ Across the Western world, people and goods traversed international boundaries on an unprecedented scale. The movement of immigrants followed a distinct upwards trend during the 19th and early 20th centuries; around 52 million people were “recorded as having left European countries for overseas destinations between 1815 and 1930”, although the true figure is likely higher.⁶⁵ Within Europe, too, vast numbers of immigrants were on the move: as Frank Thistlethwaite elegantly puts it in his essay “Migration from Europe Overseas”, by the opening years of the twentieth century, the “centrifugal tendencies of European migration were [already] counterbalanced by centripetal tendencies”.⁶⁶ New warfare technologies and calculated strategies of genocide forced mass migration from countries as geographically disparate as Russia, Armenia, Serbia and Belgium. Modernist writers such as James Joyce, who saw out the war in Zürich,⁶⁷ and Gertrude Stein – who, with her wife Alice B. Toklas, assisted in the French war effort –⁶⁸ also emigrated owing to conflict.

It is no surprise, then, that both modernist literature in general and travel writing specifically display a recurring concern with the politics of place. Indeed, for Farley, much modernist travel writing is a means of interrogating changing geopolitics. “Already by the beginning of the twentieth century”, he writes, “the rise of tourism and travel as recreational activities was darkly paralleled by the rise and spread of global conflicts”.⁶⁹ Writers “saw travel writing as important for recording their impressions of a modern world

⁶³ Farley, p.1.

⁶⁴ Carr, p.73.

⁶⁵ Dudley Baines, *Immigration from Europe 1815-1930* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1995), pp. 2-3.

⁶⁶ Rudolph J. Vecoli and Suzanne M. Sinke, *A Century of European migrations, 1830-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), p. 35.

⁶⁷ Richard Ellman, *James Joyce* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 390

⁶⁸ “Introduction”, *Gertrude Stein: Selections*, ed. Joan Retallack (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), p. 58.

⁶⁹ Farley, p.7.

that was undergoing major upheaval”,⁷⁰ but also “employed travel genre as much for inquiry as for elegy”.⁷¹ These writers, he suggests, traversed Europe partially to track the geopolitical movements that led to the First World War and understand what they rightly intuited was the antebellum of a second. In an era when the political landscape of Europe was in rapid flux, accounts of movement became essential means of processing the changing continent – and narrative non-fiction, which makes claims to truth yet permits exploratory, intricate storytelling, became an increasingly significant mode of address.

Other accounts engage with a second recurring concern of modernist travel writing: the role of the traveller. Farley gestures to a correlation between modernist explorations of the self and travelogues when he suggests that travel writers survey foreign locales “with an effort and devotion similar to the effort and devotion with which they had rendered their own complex interior lives”.⁷² Although the comparison here is a matter of shared style and depth of attention, the observation might as easily refer to the significant number of travel books which are also journeys into the self.

Woolf is perhaps the most obvious example of a modernist writer whose travel writing is more attuned to inner boundaries than outer. Indeed, in the introduction to her monograph *Travels with Virginia Woolf* (1993), veteran travel writer Jan Morris is clear that Woolf decisively eschewed using her travel memoirs to “embark upon historical allusions. . . or political interpretations”, tending more towards “self-revelation” than “description”. “[I]t is above all”, Morris writes, “the intimate and introspective detail that forms the substance of these writings”.⁷³ The diary entry quoted above certainly supports Morris’ thesis; while Woolf begins by listing places she and Leonard may take their new vehicle, the brief invocation of actual places is quickly subsumed into a vision of possible mental voyages. The car is important because it might expand the “map of the world in one’s mind”, and Woolf even muses that it will “demolish” loneliness – a typically Woolfian choice of word which invokes the speed and power of the new transport even as its aural similarity to “diminish” suggests a gentler dissolution. What is clear is that the force of the car can be pressed into intimate service; going to the countryside is, for Woolf, also a means of transforming the self, with the collapsing of distance instigating the breaking down of

⁷⁰ Farley, p. 3.

⁷¹ Farley, p. 12.

⁷² Farley, p. 202.

⁷³ Jan Morris, *Travels with Virginia Woolf* (London: Hogarth Press, 1993), p.2.

intimate boundaries. In this way, Woolf's brief diary entry points towards rich possibilities for geographical travel as a way of igniting self-exploration. If, as recent books such as *Modernism and Autobiography* affirm, modernism's central pre-occupation is staging a sustained assault "on traditional notions of what a self, indeed what life, is",⁷⁴ the act of situating oneself in landscape allows a writer to map out not only the ground to be traversed, but also what version of self will traverse it.

Woolf's relationship to travel was, however, naturally more complicated than it might initially appear here. Her accounts of travel, whether they be for a public venue or given in private letters, display a certain tension between the established conventions of the "travelogue" and Woolf's own priorities and stylistics. As Morris explains,

She recognised that some of the greatest practitioners – Sterne, Kinglake, Borrow, Henry James – could maintain a proper balance between description and self-revelation, but it was evidently not a skill she herself aspired to. Time and again throughout her life, especially in letters to her sister Vanessa, she cut short her accounts of places, and laughed at herself when she succumbed to the temptation of writing them, or found herself listing sights in the Baedeker manner All of this was not only a literary distaste. It was also the fear of becoming that perennially grim figure of tourism, the travel bore.⁷⁵

Much like, as we shall see, Warner's writing, Woolf's accounts of her journeying self-consciously skirt around the lure of easy tropes – "the Baedeker manner" – which tempt the travel writer. Her wariness in this regard points to a larger questioning of mainstream travel narratives which impacted on novelists and non-fiction writers alike. For even as modernist literature documented the movements of the twentieth century tourist, certain aspects of travel sat uncomfortably with what we now recognise as modernism's core artistic strategies; namely, the dominance of the growing commercial leisure industry that had developed symbiotically with travel technology. Commenting on the "ease of locomotion" which Ford Madox Ford notes in *The English Novel* (1930), Carr recounts how

Ford dated the beginnings of the increased mobility to the 1840s, a decade in which railway trains were already reaching thirty-five miles per hour, the first propeller-driven iron steamship, Brunel's *Great Britain*, crossed the Atlantic (it cautiously carried a full quota of sails), Thomas Cook was already in business, and Karl Baedeker's famous guidebooks for travellers had been in circulation for over a decade.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ "Introduction", *Modernism and Autobiography*, ed. Maria DiBattista and Emily O. Wittman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. xii.

⁷⁵ Morris, p. 1-2.

⁷⁶ Carr, p. 70.

Inseparable from the material technologies that underwrote their work, the frequently anti-commercial strategies of modernism were forced to constantly negotiate the dominance of this commercial culture.

The character “Burbank” from T. S. Eliot's poem “Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar” is one obvious sufferer of the travel guide disease. Generally noted more for its anti-Semitic overtones⁷⁷ than its symbolism, little critical attention has been given to the title of Eliot's poem. The appearance of a Baedeker guide is telling, however. In a poem which is, as Stan Smith reminds us,⁷⁸ sceptical about global travel, the Baedeker stands for manufactured and – crucially – unexamined attitudes to journeying. The travel of Burbank, who at the start of the poem is said to have “crossed a little bridge / descending at a small hotel”⁷⁹, is ill-fated – obviously a tourist figure, he is often interpreted as “romantic” and “naïve”.⁸⁰ Within this context, the Baedeker acts as a prominent, knowing symbol; a shorthand for Burbank's unconsidered romanticism. The Baedeker fulfils an equally significant role in another modernist title. Mina Loy's *Lunar Baedeker* (1923) was her debut collection of poetry,⁸¹ with the book here a parasynonym for “guide”. (Indeed, one contemporary review in a 1923 issue of *Poetry* simply paraphrased Loy's title for its own: “Guide To the Moon”.)⁸² Placing the Baedeker in a strange, literally out-of-this-world setting teases out an idea of travel as exploration, while simultaneously hinting at the unexpectedness of the commercial, mainstream Baedeker making an appearance in such a setting. For a “Luna Baedeker” to exist would be for the moon to become open to travel – an otherworldly tourist site. In Loy's imaginative hands, therefore, the lucrative guide book series also helps gesture to new, radical possibilities, even as it simultaneously invokes its own normality.

⁷⁷ See e.g. Ron Schuchard, “Burbank with a Baedeker, Eliot with a Cigar: American Intellectuals, Anti-Semitism, and the Idea of Culture”, *Modernism/modernity* 10:1 (2003): 1-26.

⁷⁸ Stan Smith, “Burbank with a Baedeker: Modernism's Grand Tours”, *Studies in Travel Writing* 8, no. 1 (2004): 1-18.

⁷⁹ T. S. Eliot, “Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleinstein with a Cigar”, in *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), p.43

⁸⁰ George Williamson, *A Reader's Guide to T.S. Eliot: a Poem-by-poem Analysis* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1998), p. 103

⁸¹ “Introduction”, in *The Lost Lunar Baedeker: Poems of Mina Loy* ed. Roger L. Conover (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1996), p. 172.

⁸² Harriet Monroe, “Guide to the Moon”, in *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* (October-March 1923-24), p.100.

4. A guide to guides

Each of these works uses guidebooks as a point of reference, with their engagement limited to allusion. To understand how Sylvia Townsend Warner, Hugh MacDiarmid and Lewis Grassic Gibbon manipulate the guide book form, however, requires a deeper understanding of the books themselves than Eliot or Loy demand.

As with many commercial objects, the form of the twentieth century guide book had its roots in the nineteenth century, when the traveller began to seek authority and legitimacy. Jaś Elsner and John-Paul Rubiés describe a “rhetorical attempt to claim authority as a direct observer – perhaps the fundamental literary mechanism of legitimation in the genre of travel literature”.⁸³ This effected the form of the travel guide; as Nicholas T. Parsons’ impressively comprehensive monograph *Worth the Detour: a History of Guide-books* explains, there was a corresponding interest in the guide book as an educative object. Parsons outlines how, in the nineteenth century, the guide book reached unprecedented levels of popularity. Certain key brands came to prominence, chiefly based on their ability to inform their reader: The British equivalent to the Baedeker, John Murray’s guidebooks, came into print in 1936. The Baedeker, meanwhile, became an “indispensable travel aid for the *Bildungsbürgertum*”.⁸⁴ For Parsons, these new, stridently factual guides are linked to notions of self-improvement. They rose rapidly in popularity, and went into multiple reprints driven by the demands of Victorians, wishing to educate themselves:

... the middle class educational journey, for which the Handbooks of Murray and Baedeker were to cater, was a phenomenon that expanded within twelve years of their first guides being published to encompass the lower middle and eventually the working class.⁸⁵

With this new broad audience receiving instruction from the guides, the distinction between the tourist and the learned traveller began to emerge; quickly, “to be well travelled was to be well informed”.⁸⁶ As travel guides became items intended to educate, and elevate, their reader, the tone of the guides became focused on teaching, feigning to induct the reader

⁸³ Jaś Elsner and Joan Pau Rubiés, “Introduction”, in *Voyages and Visions: Towards a Cultural History of Travel* (London: Reaktion, 1999), p. 3.

⁸⁴ Nicholas Parsons, *Worth the Detour: A History of the Guide book* (Stroud: Sutton, 2007), p. xii

⁸⁵ Parsons, *Worth the Detour*, p. 187.

⁸⁶ Parsons, *Worth the Detour*, p. 187.

into the arcane details of each site. Stylistically, this often meant a “combination of inventory and description, narrative and reference, but also ultimately of fact and (supposedly objective) opinion”, designed to convince the traveller that their arrangement of space is the correct one (and therefore, we can extrapolate, the one worth spending money on).⁸⁷ As Parsons notes, “the air of apodictic good sense and authoritative information in a ‘Murray’ may ultimately be seen as a literary mask like any other”.⁸⁸ If guides did not, like Greene’s, convincingly present their claim to provide a complete picture of a place, they nevertheless made sure that their contents exuded a sufficient air of confidence so as to suggest they might.

Following the path of the guide book into the twentieth century leads us to an object similar to that of the preceding decades. In *Romantic Moderns*, Harris introduces the *Shell* guides as a series opposed to the “Victorian guides of the ‘Highways and Byways’ variety” on which their chief instigator, John Betjeman, had been raised. While Victorian guides, Harris argues, “were intent on taking the reader on a quest for the authentic”,⁸⁹ the *Shell* guides, by contrast, allowed “Old England ... to be also a modern lived-in country”.⁹⁰ While this may be true for some of the series, such as Harris’ example of John Piper’s *Oxfordshire* (1951), other examples suggest the *Shell* series was not as entirely forward-thinking as Harris argues. Paul Nash’s *Dorset* (1936), for instance, contains a dedication to “all those courageous enemies of ‘development’ to whom we owe what is left of England”.⁹¹ Throughout the volume, Nash advocates for an old Englishness which he sees as threatened: he includes a recipe from Thomas Hardy’s housekeeper (“Mrs. Caddy”) above a list of “Ferry Times and Tolls”,⁹² creating an unusual juxtaposition of the homely and the bureaucratic, and finishes the book with these lines:

When you go to an inn ask for English food. If you are given badly cooked so-called French food kick up a row.

[...]

Protest, if you live in a town, against all unnecessary spoliation of period buildings.⁹³

⁸⁷ Parsons, *Worth the Detour*, p. 185.

⁸⁸ Parsons, *Worth the Detour*, p. 183.

⁸⁹ Alexandra Harris, *Romantic Moderns*, p.220.

⁹⁰ *Ibid* p. 211.

⁹¹ Paul Nash, *Dorset* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939), np.

⁹² *Ibid* pp. 42-3.

⁹³ Nash, *Dorset*, p. 44.

Other guides are similarly political, focussing on the countryside as a site at which national values may be preserved. This trend is symptomatic of a broader need to locate Englishness in rural space. In *Worth the Detour*, Parsons outlines what he identifies as certain prejudices about the twentieth-century guidebook, suggesting that “[g]uidebook writers are probably resigned to brickbats that have been inspired by anything from social and intellectual snobbery to ideological distaste”.⁹⁴ Yet he concedes that these reactions, while often kneejerk, have a point. Guidebooks, he explains, “epitomized [the] cultural preoccupations of an age” – which, in the case of the early-to-mid twentieth century, included an interest in preserving a sense of Englishness in rural space. I have noted above how restrictions on overseas travel helped prompt an interest in domestic tourism. It should also be pointed out, however, that the rise of British holidays occurred alongside a broader cultural interest in regional space, which peaked – in the literary world, at least – during the inter-war years. K.D.M. Snell’s study of the regional novel, for instance, uses a line graph to show how the number of such texts published rose sharply after the First World War, and declined in number during the second.⁹⁵ Many of these novels, he notes, “had a nationalist purpose at the root of their loyalties, a pre-emptive ‘nationalism’ tied to particular regional cultures”.⁹⁶ Faye Hammill calls this the “national ideology of the rural idyll”, and argues that it caused regional writing to be “accorded a special prestige during the interwar years”.⁹⁷ We can locate a similar “pre-emptive” cultural mythos, specifically grounded in regional (and particularly rural) spaces, in the period’s guidebooks. Aside from Nash’s asking that travellers request English food, there are also numerous explicit references allying “Englishness” with rurality: the Blue Guide’s *England*, for instance, contains a passage on the true nature of the Englishman which declares him “at heart a countryman”.⁹⁸ Parsons, meanwhile, quotes a *Times* review which explains that “[t]he Englishman trusts his MURRAY as he would trust his razor, because it is thoroughly

⁹⁴ Parsons, p. 181.

⁹⁵ K.D.M. Snell, “The Regional novel: themes for interdisciplinary research”, *The Regional Novel in Britain and Ireland, 1800-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 25.

⁹⁶ Snell, p. 16.

⁹⁷ Faye Hammill, “Stella Gibbons, ex-centricity and the Suburb”, *Intermodernism: Literary Culture in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain*, ed. Kristin Bluemel (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 77.

⁹⁸ Findlay Muirhead, *England* (London: MacMillan; Paris: Librairie Hachette & Cie., 1920), p.8.

English and reliable” –⁹⁹ hinting at the way the guide book itself became symbolic of national sentiment, whether it was guiding the traveller at home or overseas.

It is the interplay between these two aspects of the guide book – its being a source of useful authority, and an object imbued with patriotic values – which the later *Somerset* and *Scottish Scene* appropriate, question and develop. To do so, they draw on the specific means by which twentieth-century guidebooks perform their instructive mandate. In his essay “Journey With Maps: Travel Theory, Geography and the Syntax of Space”, Thacker suggests that “[t]ravel writing is perhaps always a form of mapping”, a way of arranging space that breaks from “that endorsed by various cartographic regimes”.¹⁰⁰ “Travel writing”, Thacker notes, “is a representational space, in Lefebvre's terms, a set of discourses that imagines space in a certain way, often at odds with official representations of space (although they can easily be complicit with them)”.¹⁰¹ In this way, representations of space are always already politicised. To understand the way travel writing constructs the space it interprets, even as it is shaped by it in turn, we must pay attention, Thacker asserts, to “how it is that social space shapes and exercises an influence upon the spatial form of the text”.¹⁰² In the guidebooks of the early twentieth century, this is encoded in distinct formal features. These recur across different publishers (and regions), and include both stylistic aspects of the books’ prose and what Jerome McGann refers to as “bibliographical codes” –¹⁰³ a term which encompasses a variety of details but can be most easily understood as meaning a work’s “physical features” rather than its “words”.¹⁰⁴ The “set of discourses” which the guidebooks promote – their specific ways of framing and shaping space – is codified in their maps; in their technical prose style; in their commercial and practical features; and in their division of landscape and information into discrete sections. Naturally, not every guide typifies each of these features – yet each feature is sufficiently widespread as to constitute a trope of the guide book in the first half of the century, perfectly poised for modernist play.

⁹⁹ Parsons, p. 185.

¹⁰⁰ Andrew Thacker, “Journey With Maps: Travel Theory, Geography and the Syntax of Space”, *Cultural Encounters: European Travel Writing in the 1930s* (Oxford: Berghan Books, 2002), p. 24.

¹⁰¹ Thacker, “Journey With Maps”, p. 24.

¹⁰² Thacker, “Journey With Maps”, p. 25.

¹⁰³ For McGann’s discussion of these ‘codes’, see Jerome J. McGann, *The Textual Condition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

¹⁰⁴ George Bornstein, *Material Modernism: The Politics of the Page* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 7.

The commercial focus of the guides is also represented in textual features. T.C.F. Brochie's *The Borderlands of Glasgow: Tramway Guide to the Countryside Around the City* (1923) was commissioned by the Tramway Department of Glasgow, hoping "to induce the citizens to take full advantage of the splendid opportunities offered by our trams".¹⁰⁵ Some of these commissioned guides are unusual, such as a curious book created by the Great Eastern Railway Company: falling somewhere between travel guide and real estate manual, their *By Forest and Countryside: Charming Residential Districts on the Great Eastern Railway*¹⁰⁶ (1912) attempts to sell the growing commuter belt around London as an attractive place to live.

Guides commissioned or sponsored by commercial bodies bring to the fore the question of who is constructing this particular vision of space, which in turn brings us back to the question of travel guides as opposed to other travel writing. Fussell suggests that guides are for "those who plan to follow the traveller".¹⁰⁷ Whether or not this is strictly true in all cases, this at least ostensible purpose shapes the form and content of such volumes. Travel guides are not usually the record of a journey or exploration, or a reflection on a new place; they are written by an author who knows the location well and is able therefore to make informed choices regarding what information he or she includes. As such, there is a certain command over place in the travel guide not necessarily present in other travel writing. The preface of Nash's *Dorset*, by way of example, outlines a methodology which is "designed to give the most straightforward view of the county's resources".¹⁰⁸ Subsequently, even when its descriptions give way to a dreamy, impressionist tone, its use of the second person and frequent recourse to imperatives give it an instructive edge: ". . . the object must be to stimulate curiosity rather than to satisfy it. You have wheels, you have eyes, what I have seen you can find. . ." ¹⁰⁹

Other guides, such as *By Forest and Countryside*, are more overt. "The information appearing in this volume", it assures the reader, "has been compiled with great care, and every opportunity has been taken to get the details verified by the local authorities" –¹¹⁰ an

¹⁰⁵ T. C. F. Brochie, *The Borderlands of Glasgow. Tramway guide to the countryside around the city.* Glasgow Corporation Tramway (Glasgow: Tramway Department, Corporation, 1923) p. v.

¹⁰⁶ B. Row, *By Forest and Countryside* (London: Homeland Association, 1913).

¹⁰⁷ Paul Fussell, "Travel Books as Literary Phenomenon", p. 105.

¹⁰⁸ Nash, *Dorset*, p. 7.

¹⁰⁹ Nash, *Dorset*, p. 17.

¹¹⁰ Row, *By Forest and Countryside*, p. 2.

invocation which draws on the power of a respected organisation to lend credibility and authority to its claims. The taxonomy of place which follows, dividing its “Table of Contents” into such headings as “Alphabetically Arranged Data of the Special Features of Towns and Districts”, reflects this sense of specialised attention. Similar divisions occur across a wide variety of guides, whose pages configure space into discrete units for the traveller to enjoy, rarely mentioning the process by which such divisions were decided upon. Such taxonomies are not only determined by established boundaries, such as county borders. Rather, each reflects the specific framing offered by the book as a whole, dividing places into either specific sub-locations (e.g. “The Chilterns and the Vale”; “The Northants Uplands, Bedfordshire, etc”; “Between Stamford and Stafford”)¹¹¹ or thematic chapters (e.g. “Persons and Places”; “Interesting Routes to the North”).¹¹² Some books, such as those in the *Blue Guide* series, even provide their readers with “practical routes” which instruct them on how to take in a certain number of “chief points of interest” during a manageable period of time.¹¹³ If the fact each region’s pleasures may inconveniently refuse to conform to official county or town borders poses a problem for the traveller, the performative authority of the guide book offers a series of seemingly simple solutions.

The final feature worth mentioning is the inclusion of maps. As studies of cartographic discourse in the context of empire remind us, the map has a particular power to reshape space (and enforce its new geographical and ideological borders),¹¹⁴ appearing mimetic when in fact it is heavily symbolic. Several of the guides imbue their maps further, such as in this extract from *By Forest*:

We are frequently asked by those who are contemplating setting down for a good map of the district. There are no better maps than those of the Ordnance Survey, and we have (for the first time in our publications) added to each descriptive section a note of the most useful sheets of the one-mile-to-the-inch map. . .¹¹⁵

In his *Journey With Maps*, Thacker writes that “it is curious how a map functions as a form of textual representation that alters how we read works of travel writing”.¹¹⁶ Of course,

¹¹¹ Reginald Wellby, *Road Touring in Central England* (London: E. J. Larby, 1914). N.p.

¹¹² Wellby, *Road Touring*, np.

¹¹³ Muirhead, *England*, p. v.

¹¹⁴ See James R. Akerman, *The Imperial Map: Cartography and the Mastery of Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009) p.13, and Matthew H. Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765-1843* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

¹¹⁵ Row, *By Forest and Countryside*, p. 7.

¹¹⁶ Thacker, *Journey With Maps*, p. 11.

maps in travel books effect how we read the book and understand the place it describes. The visual immediacy of the map is a compelling piece of evidence in such mediation. Maps that show railway routes – such as in *By Forest and Countryside* – bolster guides which promote the railway as an easy, efficient method of travel; maps which prominently display historic landmarks – such as in Wellbye’s guide – enable a county to appear a particularly rich site for historically-minded tourists. The geographical scopes of maps collaborate in dividing places into discrete sub-regions, reinforcing boundaries established in the text of the guides. More broadly, the presence of a map generally lends an air of objectivity to a guide book, emphasizing its completeness and use to the traveller (if Liberia had been mapped by the time of Greene’s journey, one presumes there would have been a map of it in his guide book). Their appearance is therefore not only related to the guide book as a practical item, but as an item which packages space in a certain way.

The guidebooks I have examined here approach their respective locations in different ways: they range from highly practical to reactionary, from technical to romantic. All of them, however, seek to market a certain vision of place. Their different versions of landscape are supported by various textual and bibliographic features, whether they be road maps, taxonomising tables of contents, or the inclusion of relevant historiographical or literary details. It is these formal features which MacDiarmid, Grassic Gibbon and Warner appropriate for their own, less straightforward, constructions of place – orientated not towards the needs of the traveller, but elsewhere, to a more ambiguous audience concerned not with journeys, but ideas.

That this appropriation has a political dimension is to be expected. MacDiarmid and Warner are often named together in studies of the far-left intelligentsia of the early twentieth century: Duncan Glen’s introduction to a 1970 edition of the *Selected Essays of Hugh MacDiarmid*, for instance, names Warner as one of the “communist and near-communist politicians, writers and artists” with whom the poet was friendly.¹¹⁷ Their names also appear side-by-side in James Smith’s study *British Writers and MI5 Surveillance, 1930-1960* as examples of “some of the most notable recruits to the British Communist

¹¹⁷ Duncan Glen, “Introduction”, *Selected Essays of Hugh MacDiarmid* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), p. 22.

Party” in the 1930s.¹¹⁸ “MacDiarmid”, Alan Norman Bold writes, “was familiar with [Warner and her partner Valentine Ackland’s] political work as well as with Warner’s writing”, and notes that Warner reviewed books by MacDiarmid.¹¹⁹ Their working relationship went beyond reciprocal writerly interest via their involvement in the *Left Review*, of which both were, according to Margot Heinemann, part of the “founding group”. The *Left Review*, a left-wing magazine that “did much to define the beginnings of a more, open, historically-minded kind of Marxism”, was “concerned with ideas as an active force in history rather than simply a reflection of economic conditions, and with culture as a central aspect of social change”.¹²⁰

It is this notion of culture as an active agent in its own right, capable of changing society, which energises Warner and MacDiarmid’s guidebooks. In fact, both texts can be understood as attempts to translate the ambiguity and difficulty of their respective authors’ politics – not forgetting, in the case of *Scottish Scene*, Lewis Grassie Gibbon’s – into such a form as to stage an intervention in the public sphere. Their texts are as much concerned with exploring the potential of their respective sites as they are with describing each locale in its present moment – the demand usually made of travel guides. They teach us not how to travel around such places, but how to think about them, centring literary and cultural ideas within the political developments they propose for each site. Through its ambivalent relationship to the guide book form, they perform an uncertainty which opens up each site to several possible readings. In this way, they bring something of the tenor of their respective fictional writings to these ostensibly non-fictional items. While they are, like more mainstream guidebooks, broadly concerned with instruction, then, it is a specific form of instruction: one focussed less on constructing a certain portrait of a location than in destabilising what they understand to be problematic, and problematically simple, narratives of place and space.

Yet if both texts are concerned with complicating the prevailing account of the sites they profile, the specifics of their respective arguments are worth considering separately. Equally attentive to regional space as a site of rupture, and indeed equally difficult to

¹¹⁸ James Smith, *British Writers and MI5 Surveillance, 1930-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), P.3.

¹¹⁹ Alan Norman Bold, *The letters of Hugh MacDiarmid* (London: Hamish & Hamilton, 1984), p. 616.

¹²⁰ Margot Heinemann, “*Left Review, New Writing and the broad alliance against Fascism*”, *Visions and Blueprints: Avant-garde Culture and Radical Politics in Early twentieth-century Europe* ed. Edward Timms and Peter Collier (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p. 118.

contain within our current understanding of literary modernism, the appropriations of form they undertake nevertheless include several revealing differences. In Warner's work, for instance, the traveller is exposed to spectral invasions from the past embedded in the landscape, with Somerset's real and mythological histories encroaching on the present to destabilise any sure account of the landscape as it exists today. MacDiarmid and Grassie Gibbon undertake the opposite gesture: they advocate exorcising Scotland's "stage ghosts", contrasting the country's romantic image with the reality of its social conditions. Similarly, while both writers use the techniques of literary modernism to challenge the false simplicity of the mainstream guide book, Warner does so by enacting strange tension between innovation and romanticism, whereas MacDiarmid rails against the romantic mode. Plotting her course through the landscape of Somerset, Warner adopts what James, in reference to her fiction, calls "the outsider's perspective",¹²¹ whereas MacDiarmid and Grassie Gibbon seek to express the difficulty of the insider who wishes to reform the very geographical entity within which they are contained. Similarly, while both texts seek to usurp mainstream discourses around place and identity, *Scottish Scene* is more engaged with what we might call "capital P" politics, including nationalist ones. It is by bringing these two divergent approaches into conversation that this chapter seeks to explore genre appropriation as a means of staging a disruptive intervention within specific sites.

Reading the two texts together therefore opens up space to consider the scalability of modernist non-fiction, bringing into focus the ways that a reappropriation of form is used to respond to prevailing cultural discourses as they arise in, or in relation to, specific, bounded sites. In this way, *Somerset* and *Scottish Scene* stand to challenge our perceptions of regional modernism as it compares to the national and global – or, in the case of those who understand "regionalism" as vaguely analogous with "rural", as it compares to the metropolitanism of the modernist city – and focus our attention on the distinct interplays of global form, global ideology and local form, landscape and context as they arise at the fringes of literary modernism.

5. *Somerset* and the guide book

Uncharacteristically for a travel guide, *Somerset* opens with confusion:

¹²¹ James, "Capturing the Scale", p. 106.

At the start I must admit that I have never been able to decide whether Somerset is a flat county with a quantity of hills in it or a hilly county of which a great deal is as level as a pavement. Like a shot silk, it depends which way you look at it. Since I can't find a definition, I must begin with a general impression; that one cannot travel through Somerset without feeling that one is being handed on from one set of hills to another, and that each set of hills has its own physiognomy.

It is a surprising start for a book which purports, at least in form and focus, to account for a place. Warner begins the volume expressing doubt over her ability to provide an objective, sure account: the character of Somerset's landscape, her first lines seem to imply, is something of which a person cannot quite be sure, and one is forced instead to offer a personal "impression" of the place, relying on feeling rather than fact.¹²² This is, in blunt terms, the conceit at the heart of *Somerset*. Where other guides valorise authority and usefulness, Warner's writing prioritises the intangible and complicated. Her style embodies a complex series of tensions between romanticism and scepticism, nostalgia and modernity, fact and fiction and self-versus-landscape in a prose style shot through with an emotive sensuality that would be anathema to most guidebooks.

It is no coincidence that the passage above contains the word "impression" – a noun which signals towards her artistic strategy. Ford Madox Ford's 1913 essay "On Impressionism", in fact, provides an ideal route into her work. An account of his own literary methods, Ford's essay describes a way of writing which combines precise, revealing details with casual or "impressionistic" description. This he contrasts with disinterested, journalistic prose, pronouncing that the two styles of writing develop from two types of writerly "ego":

The impressionist gives his own views, expecting you to draw deductions, since presumably you know the sort of chap he is. The agricultural correspondent of the *Times* . . . [offers] the factual observations of a new grass of himself and of as many as possible other sound authorities.¹²³

Of the two accounts of a "new grass" which Ford uses to illustrate his idea, it is the impressionist's which gets closer to the true nature of the object. After reading the *Times* account, Ford suggests, one would likely be ill-equipped to identify the false sea-buckthorn discussed in the article correctly: "I doubt whether . . . you would very willingly recognise that greenish-grey plant, with the spines and the berries like reddish amber, if you came

¹²² Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Somerset* (London: Paul Elek, 1949), p. 7.

¹²³ Ford Madox Ford, "On Impressionism", *Critical Writings of Ford Madox Ford* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), p. 34-5.

across it".¹²⁴ Rather than follow the correspondent's model, then, Ford advocates writing only what one can see and access first-hand. The writer may incorporate memory and history if necessary – one can, indeed, be "intensely haunted" by them – but all fragmented through the writer's eye view, "like so many views through bright glass".¹²⁵

The contrast Ford draws between these two writing styles might be describing Warner's relationship with conventional travel guides. Indeed, in what follows, it will become apparent that Warner's writing is deeply impressionistic in style, with the subjectivity, emphasis on the sensory and attention for detail which characterise impressionist writing.

6. A Vision of England

The specific details of her writing are best understood in the context of the guide's provenance. Little has been written about Paul Elek's *Vision of England* series – a less prominent group of books than the Baedeker guides or Shell series. Produced between 1946 and 1959, the series includes volumes on different parts of the British Isles, from *The Scilly Isles* (1948) to *Norfolk* (1948). As a 2009 article in *Apollo* magazine puts it, the *Vision* books are "clearly inspired" by the Shell guides: "each was written by a different author and the books were illustrated with well-chosen photographs".¹²⁶ Unlike the Shell guides, however, each contributor to the *Vision* series was encouraged to give a personal account of the place in question. Their artistic scope was wide: illustrations were provided both by commercial painters like James Arnold, and by more abstract artists such as Rowland Suddaby.¹²⁷ A 1948 *Spectator* review of *Sussex* (1947) highlights the idiosyncratic colour which many of the volumes shared, describing a "special", "intimate" touch which "gives the . . . volume great charm". The "thirty two-pages of illustrations are quite outstanding", the reviewer explains, and the inclusion of maps, drawings and photographs "all make up a much more than ordinarily attractive volume".¹²⁸

In drawing attention to the visual details of the book, the *Spectator* reviewer touches on an aspect of the series that makes it especially resistant to interpretation. While the

¹²⁴ Ford, p.35.

¹²⁵ Ford, p.41.

¹²⁶ Gavin Stamp, "A Vision of England", *Apollo* (April 2008), p.62.

¹²⁷ See J.H.B. Peel, *The Chilterns* (London: Paul Elek, 1950) and Olive Cook, *Suffolks* (London: Paul Elek, 1948) respectively.

¹²⁸ "Sussex. By Reginald Turnor. (Paul Elek. 9s. 6d.)", *The Spectator*, 27 Feb 1948, p.26. No byline.

Shell guides were clearly intended to be “used” in the practical sense – we might recall Nash’s line “[y]ou have wheels, you have eyes, what I have seen you can find” –¹²⁹ the purpose and even genre of the *Vision* series is less clear. This ambiguity is played out on a material level: while many of the *Vision* books’ bibliographic aspects point to a practical purpose, for instance the Ordnance Survey maps included in most of the series, other features suggest the opposite. Cloth-bound and featuring gilt lettering on their covers, the *Vision of England* books are too large to be pocketed, and the reproduction of outdated or floridly artistic maps that appear in many of the volumes similarly points to the pleasurable rather than practical. Even the title of the series gestures to a more nebulous item; indeed, Phoebe Fenwick Gaye’s *Essex* (1949) invokes the name “Vision of England” while justifying the subjective – even impressionistic – nature of her prose: “The name I have given to each [chapter] is not necessarily the best topographical one, but since this is a part of a Vision of England I have preferred to give the mind’s-eye name rather than any other”.¹³⁰ Warner’s *Somerset* shares a basic format with the rest of the *Vision* series. Its chapters are structured much like any other travel guide of the early twentieth century – being divided into geographical regions including “The Mendips, Glastonbury and Wells”, “Inland from the Severn Sea” and “The Quantocks and Exmoor” – but its large size and impractical cloth covers suggest that it was not to be taken into the field.

If *Somerset* has an uncertain relationship to the guide book, however, it is forthright – even performative – in its uncertainty. Indeed, in her introduction to the volume, Warner addresses the conventions of such books explicitly, explaining why she has not produced a straightforward guide:

If this were a history of Somerset, Glastonbury would be the place to begin it (for that matter, it would be a pretty good place to begin a history of England, too). But it is to be that much more uncertain thing, a book about Somerset; and though it cannot resemble a guide book, since I am constitutionally incapable of being a guide, an err-and-stray book would be nearer my measure, I must not outrage convention by beginning in the middle of my subject. Even an err-and-stray book should start somewhere near a county boundary.¹³¹

Rather than saying what *Somerset* is, Warner is more interested in defining it by what it is not: a history of the county, or a guide book proper. Her playful, wry description tells us

¹²⁹ Nash, *Dorset*, p.17.

¹³⁰ Phoebe Fenwick Gaye, *Essex* (London: Paul Elek, 1949), p10.

¹³¹ Warner, *Somerset*, p.8.

only that it is a “much more uncertain thing” – a volume that cannot be easily defined, except as “a book about Somerset”. Like Ford’s impressionist, Warner lets us know “what sort of chap” she is, inviting us to judge what follows as the work of one who is “constitutionally incapable of being a guide” and writing close to her “measure”. In fact, we might even consider that there is something dismissive in Warner’s aside explaining that she is “constitutionally incapable of being a guide”, and ironic in her justification of the decision to adopt the county boundary as a starting point, which, she claims, she does so as not to “outrage convention”. Ambiguity, we might suspect, is here to be used tactically, as a way of providing commentary on the mainstream rather than being the product of genuine confusion. Yet, whether Warner’s confusion is genuine or a pose, it is clear from the outset that she intends to reject the logic of efficiency and mastery which define other guides. Hers, we discover, is to have a personal, rather than authoritatively disinterested, approach to place.

7. Sylvia Townsend Warner: writing and politics

For those familiar with Warner’s other writing, her production of such a book is unsurprising. Born in 1893 and spending much of her life in Dorset, Warner is often perceived as a writer who sits awkwardly on the edge of modernism. Critical studies voice difficulty in situating her work: while Jane Dowson asserts that “including [Warner] in the chronicles of modernism is not over-stretching the boundaries”,¹³² Jane Marcus has declared that Warner profoundly “unsettles definitions”.¹³³ Her combination of cosmopolitanism, avant-garde style and non-urban locations is one for which modernist studies still lacks a critical vocabulary. “To carve out a place within the canon for Warner’s previously marginalised texts”, Jane Garrity argues, will “necessarily alter our notions of canonicity” and force us to consider how modernism’s “experimental” aesthetic is “challenged by her inclusion”.¹³⁴ Warner’s books show an acute awareness of the tensions involved in representing place in the age of modernity. Her works, including *Somerset*, bear witness to the various difficulties and resistances encountered by a writer whose

¹³² Jane Dowson, *Women, Modernism and British Poetry, 1910-1939: Resisting Femininity* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), p.212.

¹³³ Jane Marcus, “Sylvia Townsend Warner” in *The Gender of Modernism*, ed. Bonnie Kime Scott (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 531.

¹³⁴ Jane Garrity, *Step-Daughters of England: British women modernists and the national imaginary*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003, p. 148.

poetics fit awkwardly with her politics (although *Somerset* is less overt in its politics than some of her other writing). A communist who fought in the Spanish Civil War, Warner attempts to marry aesthetic and political radicalism with the “provincial” countryside in which she lived, without, as Maud Ellman puts it, “sacrificing art to spin”.¹³⁵ In this respect, there is little to differentiate her fiction from her autobiographical writing. For James, Warner, and her contemporary Storm Jameson, “align with and extend a tradition of regional realist fiction that predates the advent of modernist experimentalism” yet avoid “setting themselves in some kind of stark Orwellian opposition to the perceived political weakness of modernism’s subjectivist aesthetics”.¹³⁶ Her prose style is neither straightforwardly modernist nor romantic, and oscillates between sentimentality and modernist self-ironisation, enacting a complex mediation between nostalgic local recuperation and global radicalism.¹³⁷ While Warner’s works display anxiety over this tension, they also bear witness to the productive friction which arises from forcing different thematic elements to coexist in the same textual space without relinquishing their identities.

To appreciate how this spatial dialogue plays out in *Somerset*, it is worth briefly drawing a comparison with Warner’s 1936 novel *Summer Will Show* – perhaps the most significant forerunner in terms of both Warner’s stylistics and her approach to, and organisation of, space. The novel, which follows its protagonist Sophia as she moves from fraught motherhood in Dorset to political activism in Paris, contains at its heart a geospatial (and geopolitical) dialectic which resembles, in turns, the writing of Thomas Hardy and James Joyce. In *Summer Will Show*, what appear to be deeply personal questions of how one should be in space – the status of the self, how to navigate and describe, what geographical story one tells – become profoundly political. Sophia surveys the Dorset landscape with what Kitty Hauser terms the “archaeological gaze” – a way of looking which

¹³⁵ Maud Ellman, “Sylvia Townsend Warner.” Online Research Review, in “Transitional Writers.” *Oxford Handbook of Modernisms*, Ed. David Trotter (Oxford University Press, 2016). <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935338.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199935338-e-31>

¹³⁶ David James, “Capturing the Scale”, p.106.

¹³⁷ It is perhaps the sheer complexity of Warner’s spatial poetics that have encouraged criticism to by and large restrict itself to studies of her gender, politics and musicality of form; indeed, at the most recent Sylvia Townsend Warner conference held at the University of Exeter in 2012, none of the accepted papers focussed on space and place.

encourages one “to see the invisible events of history”.¹³⁸ This strategy, which examines what lies beneath a landscape, is one which Hauser identifies as being borrowed from earlier literary works and reappropriated to serve an age characterised by “a tide of apparently irrevocable modernisation”.¹³⁹ In *Summer Will Show*, the Dorset countryside is yoked to the past in such a way as to preclude literal or mental fecundity. Considering her home county, Sophia is aware that, though “she liked it for acquaintance’ sake”, the landscape is ugly: “The land was poor, its bones showed through, its long history of seed-time and harvest had starved it”.¹⁴⁰ On a trip to expose her consumptive children to the fumes of a lime-kiln, the buried landscape promises respite as she attempts to “[draw] out of the earth, out of the past, the nourishment which should feed and forward her ripening children”.¹⁴¹ Yet her excavations are ultimately as fruitless as the similar appeals to deep ground which prove menacing in Hardy’s *The Return of the Native*, when Eustacia Vye appears, prophetically, atop a barrow of bones at the opening of the novel.¹⁴²

How long did it take a child to die of smallpox? A week, perhaps, or longer. Everything would go on, the fields be reaped, the fruits ripen, meals appear and be taken away. The grass would grow, stealthily the grass would grow, as it grows on lawns, as it grows on graves.¹⁴³

The chiasmus of this passage is almost ostentatiously reminiscent of that at the close of Joyce’s “The Dead”, in which the snow, “falling faintly . . . faintly falling”, covers “treeless hills”, and the “crooked crosses and headstones” of a graveyard.¹⁴⁴ It is just one moment in the novel where distinctly modernist formal techniques rise to the surface of Warner’s prose. Gazing on the lime-kiln, Sophia’s thoughts are interpolated with a narrative voice, jarringly demarcated by a pair of ellipses which occur nowhere else in the novel: “... a fancy, and she disliked fancies ...”.¹⁴⁵ Elsewhere an easy hand with free indirect discourse makes it difficult to identify the author of different thoughts, with every perspective offered equal weighting. Each of these techniques adds to the sense that Sophia’s relationship

¹³⁸ Kitty Hauser, *Shadow Sites: Photography, Archaeology and the British Landscape 1927-1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 31.

¹³⁹ Hauser, p. 34.

¹⁴⁰ Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Summer Will Show* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1936), p.10.

¹⁴¹ Warner, *Summer Will Show*, p. 69.

¹⁴² Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native* (London: Wordsworth Classics, 2000), p.12.

¹⁴³ Warner, *Summer Will Show*, p.59.

¹⁴⁴ James Joyce, *Dubliners* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), p. 225.

¹⁴⁵ Warner, *Summer Will Show*, p. 17.

with landscape, and with those who inhabit it, is an uneasy one. It is against this backdrop that her flight to Paris comes to blur the lines between political action and personal growth.

There are stylistic and thematic parallels to be drawn between *Summer Will Show* and *Somerset*, which although grounded in one location is unquestionably the work of a cosmopolitan author. There is one brief caveat that is necessary here: where *Summer Will Show* contrasts Sophia's unsettled residence in Dorset with a later flight to Paris, which offers her both exposure to new, radical politics and sexual freedom, *Somerset* instead turns away from questions of scalability, exchange and conflict. Writing on *Summer Will Show*, James outlines how, "in the context of international conflict", regional writing becomes not irrelevant "so much [as] it demands, on the contrary, an adjusted vocabulary that enables critics to appreciate how writers move on that new axis between local and international concerns".¹⁴⁶ Yet if the impact of conflict on regional writing, and particularly on the stature and tone of regional novels and guidebooks alike, is an unavoidable context of *Somerset*, the book remains grounded in local space – in fact Warner, as we shall see, even goes so far as to obfuscate post-war developments in the landscape deliberately, preferring to locate her vision of the county in history and myth than in the transnational geopolitics which elsewhere energise her work. (In this sense, its geography, as opposed to its style, might be more readily compared with the 1926 *Lolly Willows* – whose heroine finds her way to the Buckinghamshire village where she eventually becomes a witch by, as it happens, the purchase of a guide book and map.)¹⁴⁷

While *Somerset* is not positioned on the same "axis" as the Dorset of *Summer Will Show*, however, Warner's narratorial voice displays a similar scepticism towards rural space, and particularly towards the unconsidered veneration of that space in which many commercial guides indulge. "Just as we preen ourselves on beautiful villages", she writes, "we preen ourselves on old inns; and often as questionably".¹⁴⁸ The Baedeker bombs may be reduced to a footnote – more on this later – but the degree of complexity which Warner's invocation of Dorset offers up is itself a form of political act. Just as simplifying the landscape and encoding one's authority over it is used to bolster ideology in other travel guides, Warner proposes nuance as a means of disrupting it. In a letter to her friend

¹⁴⁶ James, "Capturing the Scale", p. 108.

¹⁴⁷ Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Lolly Willows* (London: Virago, 2012), p. 75.

¹⁴⁸ Warner, *Somerset*, p.10.

Paul Nordoff in 1946, Warner lambasts existing guides while recounting “a commission to write a small book about Somerset”:

Just now I am in the midst of reading the many books about Somerset which have already been written. I am consoled for the numerousness by not finding one among them that I can enjoy. They all hurry like anxious Satans over the face of the earth, and never once do these breathless authors stop in a wood and smell the smell of the country. I hope I shall manage to do better.¹⁴⁹

The mix of uncertainty and decisiveness in this letter – of Warner’s “hope” and of her conviction that there is not “one among” the guides she can enjoy – prefigures *Somerset’s* mediation of the authority usually found in guidebooks with Warner’s deeply personal view of the county. The book oscillates between unapologetic revelry and a knowing irony; Warner’s tendency towards the romantic is tempered by self-awareness and other, often more “modernist”, aspects of her stylistics, with the effect that *Somerset* repeatedly invokes the “rural idyll” valorised by nationalist accounts of Britain during the interwar years only to undermine it. The texture of Warner’s writing might tend towards the emotive, dreamy visions of romanticism –

For the hundred people who travel with eyes there are perhaps thirty who travel with ears, and remember among the events of a journey the ring of a forge, the mock-turtle sobs of a draining pump, the Sunday burst of hymnody (so much like the gush of juice when one cuts open a rhubarb tart) from church or chapel.¹⁵⁰

– but Warner’s indulgence in such evocative imagery does not come without irony:

West of the Quantocks, Somerset becomes a new county, at once rougher and richer. If one were an artist one would re-set one’s palette, and choose new brushes with a shaggier stroke. If one were a musician, one would re-balance one’s orchestra, charging horns and adding several bass-clarinets. To the writer, it is not so easy. I have said it is rougher and richer, I am on the brink of saying that it is more romantic. Round the rougher rumples the richer romanticism ran – how many more Rs to express the fanfares of spring leafage in the Exe valley and the Horner Water?¹⁵¹

The musicality of Warner’s prose, given charge by her use of alliteration (not only the troublesome “Rs” but also “shaggier stroke”) is onomatopoeic – yet not adequate, she suggests, to describe what she finds. The impossibility of representing the sounds of the countryside finds release in Warner’s humour: recognising that she is “on the brink of saying that it is more romantic”, Warner withdraws from description and pushes her

¹⁴⁹ Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Letters*, ed. William Maxwell (London: Chatto and Windus, 1982), p.92.

¹⁵⁰ Warner, *Somerset*, p.50.

¹⁵¹ Warner, *Somerset*, p. 60.

alliteration to a ludicrous degree, asking “how many more Rs” will be needed to express the Somerset landscape. (In Warner’s letters, amusingly – and revealingly – the word “romantic” most often appears alongside the word “ruins”, accompanied by the same arched brow which one senses here.)¹⁵²

Elsewhere, irony and humour are used to undercut what might be called “touristic” encounters with points of interest. Although Warner includes photographs of buildings which tourists may like to visit, her image captions make a mockery of these heritage sites, ensuring that a dose of scepticism offsets any sanctimony. Throughout *Somerset*, Warner maintains a tone of what Jane Marcus has termed “bleak pastoral irony” – one of the means by which, Marcus contends, “in the age of metropolitan modernism, Warner politicises the pastoral”.¹⁵³ A photograph of the Abbot’s Fish House at Meare, for instance, comes with a note explaining that “there is no abbatial significance in the upper window”.¹⁵⁴ A photo caption for the St George Inn at Norton St Philip calls the building “[a] worthy temple for the patron saint of England” –¹⁵⁵ a joke whose target, we can ascertain through the reference to St. George, is not only the Murray and the Baedeker’s insistence on guiding travellers towards certain sites, but the habit of charging those sites with patriotic importance. Writing on Roman Bath, Warner postulates that “the pigs bathed. In all probability the Britons bathed. They were heathens, and heathens are usually given to bathing”,¹⁵⁶ an amusing take on Bath’s spa town reputation which also pokes fun at the national history embedded in the site. Indeed, few prominent sites are allowed their place without being modulated through irony, however fondly; straightforward, touristic adulation is not permitted. These post-scripts allow an escape route from the guide book’s authority, and indeed from Warner’s own authority as narrator (or curator). Tempering romanticism with self-ironisation and sightseeing with jokes, *Somerset* is able to have it both ways: both to evoke the pleasures of the countryside, and to avoid falling prey to either the disinterested prose found in the majority of mainstream guidebooks or the po-faced adulation of “Englishness” found in the remainder.

¹⁵² Sylvia Townsend Warner to Ben Huebsch, June 7, 1942, and to William Maxwell, April 29, 1950 in *Letters*, n.p.

¹⁵³ Jane Marcus, Introduction to “Sylvia Townsend Warner”, p.533.

¹⁵⁴ Warner, *Somerset*, p. 79 (photograph 62).

¹⁵⁵ Warner, *Somerset*, p. 37 (photograph 10).

¹⁵⁶ Warner, *Somerset*, p. 13.

8. Imagined countrysides

Dorset's topography, history and myth are detailed using much the same strategy. Firmly refusing "usefulness" as an organising principle, Warner's *Somerset* playfully dismantles the hierarchy of information which guides its mainstream counterparts by self-consciously attending to both the present and the past, the real and imagined. In her biography of Warner, Clare Harman suggests that the discourse of radical equality to which the author subscribed had a structural impact on her use of form, with, for instance, the lack of central protagonist in her novel *After the Death of Don Juan* (1938) constituting "Marxism even in its method".¹⁵⁷ Similarly, *Somerset* encourages a breakdown of the formal hierarchies which order places, memories and observations. The sound of the water-pump, for instance, is as important as music from the chapel. So, too, is the landscape organised democratically: just as Warner does not begin with Glastonbury, electing instead to outsource her choice via an appeal to "convention", she does not read the countryside in relation to the nearest city, Bath, or in relation to train travel from London – likely routes of access for the tourist. Her own thoughts and impressions are as important as factual details, and what one could potentially find in a place is as important as what one actually does.

The most obtrusive and visible symptom of this dissembled hierarchy is the inclusion of imaginative vignettes. Warner's section on Bath, for instance, opens with a description of the town which is more fancy than fact:

Some towns are indifferent to the quarters of the compass. Approach them as you please they will turn you much the same face – usually a rather dull one. Others, like Edwardian beauties, have a right or left profile. One of the pleasures of becoming on intimate terms with such towns (as perhaps with Edwardian beauties) is the discovery of the charms of an uncelebrated aspect. But this is all geography and masonry. History has a word to say also. A wind out of the past rustles the pages of the guide book, and if one is to arrive properly one must have that wind behind one.¹⁵⁸

Here, the different facets of Bath are compared to an "Edwardian beauty"; a personification of the town which allows Warner to include a wry comment while praising the town's appearance. Even the available means of approaching the town are narrated in almost mystical terms: the pages of the guide book are disruptively "rustled" by history,

¹⁵⁷ Clare Harman, *Sylvia Townsend Warner: A Biography*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1989), p. 175.

¹⁵⁸ Warner, *Somerset*, p.12.

reminding us of the necessity of acknowledging the past if we are to “arrive properly”. Immediately after, Warner cites a justification for attending to Bath from *The Pickwick Papers*, in which Mr. Pickwick chooses to take his club there with the simple explanation: “I think none of us have been there”. This, she winks, “seems a shocking admission for a reputable grown-up English gentleman with a taste for travelling” – although admits “when Mr. Pickwick spoke, Bath was falling into its nineteenth century sleep”. Although Warner follows this reference with a more considered history of the city, it is these two contrasting vignettes – of an “Edwardian beauty” and of Mr. Pickwick’s visit – that open the chapter, suggesting that impressionistic and historic details, shot through with irreverence, are as important as whatever the guide book celebrates. In fact, her imaginative flight proves that each aspect must be given due regard as one approaches Bath. The actual masonry and location of the city are important, but so, too, is the historical pathway that takes one there and the general impression of a place – the “charms” one discovers. Such moments not only blur the lines between the romantic and real, but also interpolate fiction into non-fictional writing in such a way as to destabilise further the already precarious status of *Somerset’s* genre.

In a similar vein, *Somerset* displays a general reluctance to engage with authoritative sources. Unlike most guidebooks, which include cultural details to lend interest and colour, Warner consistently blurs the lines between informative details and cultural ones, undermining the implicit hierarchy of facts and ideas. As in the case of Bath, even when factual details are given, references are often juxtaposed with literary, mythological or impressionist comments, as if to remind the reader that their value is no greater than any other means of accounting for landscape. Two particularly striking examples stand out in this regard. Comparing the “sombre majesty” of the buildings around Bath train station with “Dublin’s Belisarius slums” – an arch line; the *Belisarius* being a ship on which many Irish citizens emigrated to America –¹⁵⁹ Warner includes an endnote explaining that her description has been moved “into the past tense” because of a Baedeker air raid on Bath. Given how relevant the Baedeker raids are to Warner’s subject matter – not only taking their name from a guide book series, but being a point of rupture in which the conflicts of the early twentieth century began to impose themselves on the

¹⁵⁹ Brendan O’Grady, *Exiles and Islanders: The Irish Settlers of Prince Edward Island* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004), p.100.

English countryside – this gesture is tantamount to deliberate concealment. Relegating this moment in the history of the city to a footnote forces the reader to turn to the back of the book in order to find the most up-to-date information, making a clear statement about the type of information most important for one’s reading of the city: in this case, the nature of the buildings is more important than the method by which they were recently destroyed, or, indeed the fact that a “standard” user of *Somerset*, using the guide book to plan their travels, would not be able to visit them. Returning to James’ notion of the transnational “axis” brought into play by the threat of conflict, we can recognise this gesture not only as an obstinate refusal to be useful – evading the “guiding” duties of the guide book – but also as a means of reorienting our perspective on the landscape. In relegating the Baedeker raids to a footnote, Warner resists the dialectic of “idyll” and “target” which gives charge to inter- and post-war nationalist accounts of regional space (and which, indeed, the raids were designed to exploit). Her reading therefore frames Somerset not within scalable, potentially nationalist discourses, but through the eyes of a traveller from the recent past – although a recent past which resists the lure of nostalgia. As such, turning away from the bombing campaign also constitutes a small, but significant, means of turning away from the suspect ideologies of mainstream texts.

The second significant juxtaposition, in the section “Inland from the Severn Sea”, occurs in a description of the Somerset coast. Again, Warner invokes the past, and again – unlike Nash’s *Dorset*, with its call for the preservation of old buildings – her invocation is not nostalgic, but aimed at neutralising the distinction between the past and present. Here, Warner refers to the Ordnance Survey map, which “draws no boundary line to show where the Bristol Channel becomes the River Severn, but . . . indicates that this change takes place near where the prehistoric fort of Worlebury Hill rears morosely above the amenities of Weston super Mare”. Aside from following up the reference to the Ordnance Survey with a subjective, impressionistic nod to the “morose” Hill, Warner goes on to turn from the official boundaries to a more individualistic, localised quotation from Anglo-Manx poet T.E. Brown, who though a “very mongrelly poet” has managed a good account of the “lovely ghost” of the Channel.¹⁶⁰

Again, the word “ghost” might be a deliberate clue. Of course, the way landscape is shaped by past events is detailed in other guidebooks, but Warner’s account seems to go

¹⁶⁰ Warner, *Somerset*, p.30-1.

further, employing understated but undeniably experimental techniques to represent the complicated relationship between history and modernity. Indeed, it is negotiating the link between Somerset's past and the county as it is now which gives rise to the most "modernist" passages in *Somerset* as a whole, as different points in time are telescoped together. At these moments, the past seems to haunt the landscape tangibly:

No one resorts here now. Trees have grown up within the fortifications of this earthen castle, and in autumn they brim over like an arrangement of gigantic dahlias. On Christmas Eve King Arthur's knights ride two by two through the wood.¹⁶¹

It is not only the reference to mythology-made-real – through what one can only assume is a mumming group – that makes this passage so dreamlike, but the absence of information which might identify whether the knights, who are described in the present tense, are members of, say, a re-enactment group or an echo of the past superimposing itself on the present. This technique recurs throughout *Somerset* – a temporal version of the spatial confusion which characterises the "Wandering Rocks" chapter of *Ulysses*, in which events across Dublin interrupt the book's textual accounts of each other with no warning or explanation. Mythology, and fantasy, play a part in many of Warner's works – from the witches of *Lolly Willowes* to the late satirical fairy tale short stories in *The Kingdom of Elfin* (1977). Here in *Somerset*, however, the presence of fantasy, and particularly of the Arthurian legends traditionally associated with south west England,¹⁶² is set in a more complex register. In this book *Archipelagic Modernism*, John Brannigan sketches out the relationship between such "folk mythologies" and modernity as one which permits these apparently contradictory modes to co-exist without either relinquishing their individual characteristics. "It is not that modernity has overcome folk mythologies", Brannigan writes, "but rather that they might co-exist and contradict one another".¹⁶³ In *Somerset*, this relationship becomes one of chronological as well as conceptual simultaneity, rooted in the specifics of individual locations. For Warner, it is the sites at which different moments in the past come into contact that are the most compelling places: at Glastonbury, for instance, it is a "double antiquity, the beginning of our antiquity laid in the lap of further antiquity yet" which "endears Glastonbury in the mind". Potential histories which did not

¹⁶¹ Warner, *Somerset*, p.8.

¹⁶² Lister M. Matheson, "The Chronicle Tradition", *A Companion to Arthurian Literature*, ed. Helen Fulton (London: Blackwell, 2012), p.61-4.

¹⁶³ John Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism: Literature in the Irish and British Isles, 1890-1970* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p.54.

come to pass also haunt Warner's account, countering the commercial developments for which she holds a deep antipathy. "Even if this landscape of the seaward end of the Quantocks", Warner writes, "had been swallowed up by the sea or nineteenth century seaside resorting, it would still be one of the glories of the English scene".¹⁶⁴

What is most striking about these moments is not only how Warner juxtaposes events from different time periods, but how her authorial voice seems to speak at their behest. The word "mind" is almost a cypher in this regard, pointing to a permeable boundary between the traveller's internal hinterland and the area she traverses. In a turn entirely contrary to most guides, every possible source of authority in *Somerset* finds itself subjected to, rather than master of, the landscape's fragmented history. Nowhere is this as evident as in *Somerset's* maps. What is normally a key means of encoding authority is radically usurped in *Somerset* by the inclusion of other maps which serve no purpose in helping the reader navigate landscape, such as one of "Pre-Georgian Bath"¹⁶⁵ and a full-page, colour map of the county from 1683.¹⁶⁶

This exemplary symbol of how the past of *Somerset* is given equal weighting with the present is also – as well as being another genre marker gone rogue – a hint towards the fact that *Somerset* is a project over which the landscape, not the author or cartographer, has ultimate control. At another point in the text, Warner describes a topographical map of Somerset as being haphazard and fragmented: the county, she writes, "lies on a geological hotchpotch . . . The geological map, expressing this in its shade-card of strata, looks as if some one with a taste for bright colours had emptied out a rag-bag".¹⁶⁷ Far from the technical precision which maps normally codify, the impressionistic map Warner describes is implicated, like everything else, in the uncertainty and complexity of the county. At other points, Warner seems to delight in the idea that the map-maker's authority can be overruled by the movement of the land: "It is one of the pleasures of map-reading", she writes, "when the sea invades the map and the nomenclature of hill and valley goes under water".¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Warner, *Somerset*, p.20.

¹⁶⁵ Warner, *Somerset*, p.15.

¹⁶⁶ Warner, *Somerset*, p24-5.

¹⁶⁷ Warner, *Somerset*, p.7.

¹⁶⁸ Warner, *Somerset*, p.30.



Figure 1: Somerset's 18th century map.

9. The impressionist traveller

This conceit cuts to the heart of Warner's project. If Warner's *Somerset* sets out to replace the performative authority of the early twentieth century commercial guide with a series of shifting tensions – between romantic and modern, historical and present, and most notably the will of the author versus the reality of place – then she must also undermine the power of her own narrative voice. Earlier, we saw the combination of confidence and uncertainty with which Warner introduces her book, warning that she is “constitutionally incapable” of being a guide. Later in the text, this dyad is complicated further as Warner frames her account as one at the mercy of landscape itself. *Somerset's* narrator is both agent and passenger in her spatial voyage, unable to decide what the county is really like but game to navigate it – literally and textually – nevertheless. Narrator and traveller thus fuse into a single figure, in a way which partially undoes Fussell's distinction between travel writing and guidebooks: *Somerset* is both a book designed to teach the reader about the county, and a dispatch from the front lines of regional exploration. This sense of slippage is heightened by a continual blurring of pronouns and perspectives throughout *Somerset*.

Sometimes Warner refers to “I”, sometimes to “you” and often to “one” (“one realises that”, “one must hear”, “one seems to be looking”).¹⁶⁹ “Visitors who come” to Glastonbury Abbey are fused into a single chorus which “[remarks] with one accord”.¹⁷⁰ At other points, the text is haunted by potential travellers (and their potential routes). “Even if one did not know”, Warner writes enigmatically about West Sedgemoor, “one would begin to think of people over those heights. / But of course one does know”.¹⁷¹ She imagines how she might encounter Burring Combe “if [she] were a suspicious person”, and, as in her description of Bath, frequently mentions the possibility of travellers taking different paths: “Whichever way one climbs to this plateau of the Mendips, there is the same impression of being very high up and in a locality that keeps itself to itself”.¹⁷²

In conspicuously relinquishing her power as guide and traveller simultaneously, Warner is able to suggest that the landscape itself is the true authority. The places in her book are not just personified in language – the buildings in Bath have “prudent” bricks; the trees around the city “emerge” –¹⁷³ but frequently insist on being viewed a certain way. “If Wells rewards a keeping of unusual hours”, Warner cautions, “Cheddar Gorge demands it”.¹⁷⁴ Likewise, Warner is comforted to discover that a river has the same effect on all travellers who visit it:

When I heard the guide in Wookey Hole say that the river Axe rises under Priddy I felt I was not the only person to feel the impact of Priddy’s personality, and that if I had been induced to make too much of it, I was not alone in my weakness.¹⁷⁵

By confessing that she is subject to the whims of the landscape, Warner locates the guide book’s authority not in herself as author, but in the county. It is the wishes of Somerset itself, she suggests, that order perspective; she is merely a conduit. Where Woolf uses travel to explore different versions of the self, then, Warner invokes a similar image of a person effected by landscape to assess the environment. Like a finger held up to check the direction of the wind, Warner sacrifices the self as a test subject, through which the true nature of the landscape can be felt. Unlike guide book narratives which – as Parsons

¹⁶⁹ Warner, *Somerset*, p.23.

¹⁷⁰ Warner, *Somerset*, p.21.

¹⁷¹ Warner, *Somerset*, p.58. As Warner goes on to explain, the ghosts who haunt the top of Sedgemoor are Coleridge, and Dorothy and William Wordsworth.

¹⁷² Warner, *Somerset*, p. 27.

¹⁷³ Warner, *Somerset*, p.15.

¹⁷⁴ Warner, *Somerset*, p.23.

¹⁷⁵ Warner, *Somerset*, p.28.

puts it – make rhetorical claims as a “direct observer”, the status of the observer here is not an authoritative one, but one directly exposed to the forces of landscape.

Just as her decision to reduce the Baedeker raids to a footnote shifts the focus of *Somerset* from conflict to aesthetics, this gesture attempts, paradoxically, to render the guide book itself secondary. After all, implicit in Warner’s assertion that Cheddar Gorge “demands” uncertain hours, and that she was not the only tourist who “felt the impact” of Priddy’s “personality”, is the idea that any traveller would be subject to the same effects and demands – regardless of whether they had read *Somerset* or not. Where most other examples of the genre attempt to shore up the authority of their author in order to give credence to whichever version of place they represent, Warner conspicuously renounces her authority, freeing up textual space to enact the complicated tensions which characterise her geographic writing.

Yet while *Somerset* ostensibly resigns itself to the land, there is no avoiding the fact that Warner’s version of place – complicated and ambivalent as it may be – is also intended to be instructive in its own way. Her prose is assured in its uncertainty: where her authority is downplayed, we still understand that her counsel is not to be ignored. At the end of the book, for instance, Warner reflects again on her relationship to guides. “I wrote at the beginning that I am unfit by nature to compose a guide book, and by now I must have made that clear”.¹⁷⁶ She names the things “left out” from the book, which seem to be measured against what she imagines to be the necessary clichéd contents of a “proper” guide: “Cheddar cheese and Exmoor ponies”. In the end, however, it is not these tourist attractions which prove the most significant omission, and there is only one that “must be set right”. “I have said nothing”, Warner writes, “of the melodious oddity of Somerset’s place names. Let them speak for themselves”. And thus *Somerset* ends with a litany of the county in its own voice: “Temple Cloud, Orchard Portman, Bason Bridge, Cradle Bridge, Queen’s Camel, and Compton Dando”.¹⁷⁷ This final list, which Warner privileges over the sights one might expect to hear of in a guide to Somerset, both refers to the guide book and defies it, continuing the complex interplay of the guide book as an object which simultaneously orders space, and is *ordered by* space, to the end.

¹⁷⁶ Warner, *Somerset*, p.85.

¹⁷⁷ Warner, *Somerset*, p.23.

10. Scottish Scene

To explore this complex dyad further, it is useful to turn to MacDiarmid and Grassic Gibbon's *Scottish Scene: The Intelligent Man's Guide to Albyn* – a text at once more strident and more fragmented than Warner's. Just as Warner closes *Somerset* with a litany of place names, *Scottish Scene* begins with them. MacDiarmid's "Prelude", a verse poem with a far more conventional use of language than that MacDiarmid is usually known for, opens with a contrast between the municipal names given to "streets and bungalows" and those by which Scotland's natural features are known:

Just think how terrible it would be
 If the people who name
 The Housing Scheme streets and bungalows
 Could play the same game
 With the things in Scotland that really matter
 – Its peerless glories of land and water!

Canty, Ethie, Usan, Catterline,
 Pennan, Crovie, Embo, Forse,
 Clyth, Sarclet, Staxigoe, Keiss
 – We know our Scotland well, of course¹⁷⁸

The Housing Scheme names are not given in the poem – one presumes because they do not "really matter" – but the Scots place names with which they are contrasted are remarkable, being derived from Norse and Gaelic names and thus carrying a distinctly un-Anglican tenor. "[T]hank God our place-names", MacDiarmid writes, "antedated our Anglicisation".¹⁷⁹ The division of names is also used to demarcate insiders from those who rely on the "official" account – hinting that this is a book which speaks to Scots as much as it is a book about them. As in *Somerset*, the place names are invited to speak for themselves, but there is also an additional sense here that these names are already known as a shared point of reference – "[w]e know our Scotland well, of course" – which immediately signals the text's insider status (as opposed to Warner's outsider exploration). "The names of all the Shetland Isles" are "[l]ike coloured balls in an abacus", and the insider can "rattle [them] off like lightning".¹⁸⁰ These already-known names divide the official, Anglicised account of the country from the superior knowledge of the local, with

¹⁷⁸ Lewis Grassic Gibbon and Hugh MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene: The Intelligent Man's Guide to Albyn* (London: Jarrolds, 1934), p. 13-4.

¹⁷⁹ Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, p.13.

¹⁸⁰ Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, p.14.

MacDiarmid closing a stanza on the exclamation: “No fool among us but in his mind / Better than an ordnance survey sees!”¹⁸¹

The opposition here between the authorised account offered by the map and the way that landscape is actually known is reminiscent of *Somerset’s* attempt to recount the county as one encounters it, rather than as a “proper” guidebook might. Indeed, many of the questions which drive *Scottish Scene* are analogous with those raised in *Somerset*. *Scottish Scene* was first published in 1934 by London publisher Jarrold & Sons, the same house that had, two years previously, produced Grassic Gibbon's novel *Sunset Song*¹⁸² and the publishers of many other guidebooks for the commercial market.¹⁸³ Where Warner's *Somerset* mentions the guide book from the outset, however, MacDiarmid and Grassic Gibbon's publication is more ambiguous. Its own introduction gives us little information about either its origins or purpose, telling us only that “Mr Lewis Grassic Gibbon proposed the scheme of this book to Mr Hugh MacDiarmid”,¹⁸⁴ with the two then working separately on portions of the volume. Its most salient aspect is undoubtedly its political focus: MacDiarmid considered *Scottish Scene* part of his “more general works on Scottish matters”¹⁸⁵ and the author's fraught nationalism is a recurring theme in the book, counterpointed by Grassic Gibbon's less strident – but no less significant – concern for the country's socio-political development. Critical studies that mention the work have so far focused solely on this political aspect. “In it”, Gillian Carter claims, “MacDiarmid, canonised as the key literary figure of this period, emphasises the process of the revaluation of Scottish history”.¹⁸⁶ Ellen-Raïssa Jackson and Willy Maley similarly take the work's political slant as key, summarising it as a “collection of essays attacking the cultural and political institutions of the day and castigating the Anglocentric focus of much social and creative effort”.¹⁸⁷

While these prior readings of *Scottish Scene* are undoubtedly valid, they give too limited an explanation to account for the text properly. Much as MacDiarmid's own remark

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *Sunset Song: A Novel* (London: Jarrolds, 1932).

¹⁸³ See e.g. “Jarrold's History - 1940s-1950s”, Jarrold (<http://www.jarrold.co.uk/about-jarrold/history/1940s-1950s>), 15 April 2017.

¹⁸⁴ Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, p.ii.

¹⁸⁵ Hugh MacDiarmid, *The Letters of Hugh MacDiarmid*, ed. Alan Bold (London: Hamilton, 1984), p. 533.

¹⁸⁶ Gillian Carter, “‘Domestic Geography’ and the Politics of Scottish Landscape in Nan Shephard's *The Living Mountain*”, *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* (8:1), 2001, p. 28.

¹⁸⁷ Ellen-Raïssa Jackson and Willy Maley, “Celtic Connections: Colonialism and Culture in Irish-Scottish Modernism”, *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, (4:1) 2002, p. 72.

might encourage us to consign *Scottish Scene* to a footnote, there is something remarkable and specific in the book's form which deserves more sustained analysis. Like Somerset, *Scottish Scene* is a work which disallows straightforward interpretation, with a formal ambiguity and intricate idiosyncrasy that is difficult to pin down. As I shall demonstrate over the remainder of this chapter, *Scottish Scene* combines different types of writing to produce a multi-layered portrait of the country, subversively employing the form of the guide book to do so by placing its structure in ironic juxtaposition to a fragmented narrative. Like Warner, both MacDiarmid and Grassie Gibbon are attuned to the political, and keenly aware that they are writing at a moment of change, both for Scotland and the international community. The nation they present in *Scottish Scene* is one at a crossroads between past and future, localism and internationalism, and as such many of the tensions which *Somerset* modulates also arise here. The negotiation between the romantic and modern which Warner's work embodies, for instance, is simulated by the two voices which compose the text: broadly speaking, Grassie Gibbon tends towards a complex version of romanticism (as any reader of the bleakly pastoral *A Scots Quair* trilogy might expect)¹⁸⁸ and MacDiarmid towards a more formally radical, self-consciously modernist mode of expression. Similarly, the question of not only what Scotland is but also what it means to narrate the landscape in a certain way is at the forefront of *Scottish Scene*, and, like Warner, both authors profess doubts about their own ability to encapsulate the place they describe, ultimately opting for a complex, diverse account over a straightforward one.

In defiance of forces which might threaten to homogenise and fictionalise Scots identity, *Scottish Scene* performs a familiar series of mediations – between myth and reality, local and international, urban and rural – which attempt to reveal the narrow, culturally-sanctioned accounts of Scottish culture as flawed. The book's intent is not to present a certain version of place, but to open up a textual space in which all totalising structures are called into doubt and the question of Scotland's culture and politics can be debated without preconceptions. The carefully modulated structure of the commercial travel guide is invoked only to be subverted by a series of unstable, shifting forms – which range from gathered news clippings and "Sketches" to poetry, fiction and even plays – which mock any attempts to taxonomise the nation. It is only from this multi-faceted

¹⁸⁸ Comprised of *Sunset Song* (1932), *Cloud Howe* (1933) and *Grey Granite* (1934).

perspective, we learn, that a new version of Scotland can come into view. While both *Somerset* and *Scottish Scene* are concerned with subjectivity and possibility, then, the latter is more obviously orientated towards the future. Where Warner's text is permeable to intrusions from the past, and from literary and cultural knowledge, *Scottish Scene* is concerned with what may yet come to pass – particularly with regards to Scotland's literary and social climate. Simultaneously, however, it also extends Warner's pose of ambivalence. In fact, in what follows I will suggest that where one may expect *Scottish Scene* to develop an alternative vision of the country – albeit, perhaps, one similar to the complex, shifting vision presented in *Somerset* – it instead calls the poetics of the Scottish literary movement, which both Grassie Gibbon and MacDiarmid posit as a potential means of expression, into doubt. Not only does its breaking down of the guidebook form signal the breakdown of prevailing ideas, but the text refuses to propose an alternative.

This raises several questions concerning the scalability, and instructive value, of modernism's spatial non-fictions. Where Warner's focus is on a county whose landscape, for all its different textures, is relatively homogenous, *Scottish Scene* seeks to address a nation. As such, its authors are more attentive to the question of state politics, particularly concerning the ways in which the wider forces of conflict across Europe come into contact with the everyday lives of the Scots people. The general political leanings of both MacDiarmid and Grassie Gibbon are well known, with MacDiarmid in particular noted for his outspoken nationalism. In her 1979 interview with the author for *Contemporary Literature*, MacDiarmid's biographer Nancy K. Gish explains that he “[had] spent a lifetime writing scathing, often bitter attacks on anything sentimental, mediocre, weak or wrongheaded in Scottish life, letters, and politics, and on everything English”.¹⁸⁹ He is not, however, inward-looking in his politics – as his communism, and engagement in the *Left Review*, make clear. Writing on MacDiarmid and Edwin Muir, Paul Robichaud has suggested that “the cosmopolitan and international dimension of European modernism was often paradoxically bound up with acute concern with local and national cultures”.¹⁹⁰ This is certainly the case in *Scottish Scene*, where MacDiarmid and Grassie Gibbon both maintain an eye to Scotland's place in a changing cosmopolitan Europe, although each adopts a different emphasis. In the introduction to *Smeddum: A Lewis Grassie Gibbon*

¹⁸⁹ Nancy K. Gish, “An Interview with Hugh MacDiarmid”, *Contemporary Literature*, 20: 2 (1979), p. 135.

¹⁹⁰ Paul Robichaud, “MacDiarmid and Muir: Scottish Modernism and the Nation as Anthropological Site”, *Journal of Modern Literature*, (28:4), 2005, p.136.

Anthology, Valentina Bold suggests that Grassie Gibbon was “uncomfortable with intellectual chit chat”, leading him to dismiss “the rhetorical of nationalism, MacDiarmid’s favoured Douglasism, as well as Fascism, Anarchocommunism . . . and socialism”.¹⁹¹ She also notes his willingness to give credence to the English notions of “decency, freedom, justice” and other “ideals innate to the minds of man”. Nevertheless, as becomes clear in *Scottish Scene*, Grassie Gibbon retained a degree of wariness regarding the effects of colonial power on Scots people and artists. In what follows, I will suggest that, ultimately, both MacDiarmid and Grassie Gibbon had more confidence in Scotland’s establishing itself among a continental community than among an archipelagic one.

With this in mind, we can understand *Scottish Scene* as a work which points in two directions. The book looks both outwards to global trends and inwards to potential forces at work in Scotland, with a sense that citizens may be subject to either force. This is a point of tension in the book: for while MacDiarmid, in particular, often advocates for a cosmopolitan nation, the miasma of conflict is constantly visible, complicating the vision of global solidarity which his politics might naturally point him towards. In this way, the interplay between the local and global becomes a source of discomfort, as MacDiarmid, like Fussell’s travelling writers, attempts to discern the conditions that might result in another war. He is particularly wary of Scottish politicians’ engagement with Europe, worried that negotiations may be going on behind closed doors – at one point, he asks whether “the babble of voices concerned with the future of Scotland are to-day no more than a smoke screen beneath which over-riding factors . . . are at work on schemes for which no popular mandate would ever be forthcoming?”¹⁹² Scotland, MacDiarmid theorises, may have “nameless monsters” operating behind the scenes, who cannot be held to account. In fact, MacDiarmid raises the spectre of a Scottish equivalent to “Fritz von Holstein”, a German diplomat famous for managing to exert a great deal of influence on foreign policy without much of a public profile.¹⁹³ “If a Holstein could exist unknown, before the War, and create a situation out of which the War arose,” he writes, “there is no guarantee that a similar obscure power is not to-day creating a situation which will result ‘inevitably’ in another conflict”.¹⁹⁴ There is also a suggestion of press collusion. A collage

¹⁹¹ Valentina Bold, *Smeddum: A Lewis Grassie Gibbon Anthology* (London: Canongate, 2011), p. xic.

¹⁹² Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, p.37.

¹⁹³ See G. Richter, *Friedrich von Holstein: Politiker im Schatten der Macht* (Güttingen u.a., 1969).

¹⁹⁴ Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, p.37.

of unflattering press clippings – which together form *Arcades Project*-style “Newsreel” sections – together evidence, MacDiarmid writes, “a lack of serious concern with Scottish affairs”. This, the conspiracy-minded author suggests, is “no accident”.¹⁹⁵

Having raised the possibility that both politicians and the press are failing to reveal, or even deliberately concealing, forces of conflict, it is not surprising that *Scottish Scene* reads art as a potential agent of political resistance, in line with the tenets of the *Left Review*. Rather than focus on the benefits of cultural change, however, MacDiarmid and Grassic Gibbon stress the importance of creative endeavours by outlining the way they are threatened by English colonialism. Even the imagination of the Scottish people is compromised. The country’s Anglicized cultural lexicon, *Scottish Scene* contends, is both obstructive and also, ultimately, empty of meaning: it is an alien influence whose reductive imposition stifles the vibrancy of Scottish art. Indeed, the struggle against English influence is for MacDiarmid “a species of psychological *kulturkampf*”.¹⁹⁶ Elsewhere in the volume, he declares that Englishness has influenced the erasure of the Gaelic language¹⁹⁷ and prompted the outbreak of “loutish wars”.¹⁹⁸ Even Grassic Gibbon, who describes himself as a nationalist “only opportunistically”, is wary of those who come “patronizing Northwards”.¹⁹⁹ Indeed, he opens “The Antique Scene” by dividing Scotland’s history into phases of “Colonization, Civilization and Barbarization”. “That the last word is a synonym for Anglicization”, he writes, “is no adverse reflection of the quality of the great English culture” – it is just that such a culture is not suited to the “alien” Scotland, and should not be imposed upon it.²⁰⁰ Likewise, while by MacDiarmid’s own admission any analysis of Scotland is complicated by the nation’s heterogeneous character – “[i]t is said that one cannot indict a whole nation” –²⁰¹ the country is nevertheless demarcated by the process of colonial annexation: “in Scotland the trouble is that one cannot do anything else – except, perhaps, call the offending nation England instead of Scotland”.²⁰² Unlike Warner’s *Somerset*, which addresses the multiple ways “Englishness” is read into the landscape of the county, *Scottish Scene* deals not with the local presentation of national character but

¹⁹⁵ Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, p.40.

¹⁹⁶ Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, p.44.

¹⁹⁷ Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, p.50.

¹⁹⁸ Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, p.24.

¹⁹⁹ Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, p.282.

²⁰⁰ Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, p.19.

²⁰¹ Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, p. 81.

²⁰² Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, p.81.

the difficulty of discussing that national character without it dissolving in the face of the heterogeneity that its constituent local spaces demand. In this sense, defining “Scotland” in opposition to “England” provides a relatively straightforward baseline from which more complex questions of the nation’s future identity can be posed (if not necessarily answered). With this in mind, “newness” quickly becomes its own virtue. In his sister essay to Gibbon’s “The Antique Scene”, “The Modern Scene”, MacDiarmid highlights how the imposition of English culture which has led to the misinterpreting of Scots art. Luckily, he explains, the “Scottish Movement” is now undertaking a separation and “process of reevaluation”.²⁰³ “Whatever may be any reader’s view . . . it can scarcely be denied that the net result has been new and fruitful angles of approach”.²⁰⁴

To address the broader question of Scotland’s future, he suggests, requires that these “new angles” be developed. The demand for a new national literature, in particular, recurs throughout the book, expounded upon both in a dedicated chapter entitled “The Literary Scene” and via strands embedded in discussion of other Scottish matters. Indeed, MacDiarmid claims that “[m]odern Scotland . . . is a nation almost entirely lacking a Scottish literary output”²⁰⁵ and attempts to formulate one are, at best, nascent. In “The Modern Scene”, MacDiarmid notes the continued difficulty of “embodying” Scots culture, and references undiscussed “deeper issues” including “the profit of Scotland’s attachment to England, Europe and the Empire respectively” as well as “the search for a master idea or sense of a historical national mission which will bring Scottish genius right into the mainstream of modern consciousness”.²⁰⁶ There is a sense that, in the past, Scotland’s creative exchange with Europe was a productive one: “Scots civilisation of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries”, *Scottish Scene* boasts, “absorbed its great cultural impulses from the Continent” and thus already had “a great literature” while England had “little more than a maundering of a poetising host of semi-illiterates”.²⁰⁷ Yet, as with MacDiarmid’s discussion of politics, relations between Scotland and the wider world are by no means a sure route to a cultural renaissance. The question of how precisely Scotland is to formulate

²⁰³ Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, p.43-4.

²⁰⁴ Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, p.45.

²⁰⁵ Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, p.199.

²⁰⁶ Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, p.46.

²⁰⁷ Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, p.29.

and promote its national literature, and what relationship that literature will bear to the cultural character of other nations, ultimately remains an open one.

If *Scottish Scene* reaches no resolution in this regard, however, it is nevertheless possible to discern something of MacDiarmid and Grassie Gibbon's shared priorities when it comes to future possible formulations for Scottish culture. Dialect is one such focus. By the time of the book's publication, both writers had already worked to create their own distinct registers through which, they hoped, Scotland might speak for itself. In his essay "Demotic Modernism in Modern Scots Writing", Roderick Watson posits that Grassie Gibbon and MacDiarmid's two "synthetic" blends of Scots dialect are a means of mediating between Scottish vernacular and English formalism, citing the "sometimes easy and sometimes highly creative coexistence of Scots, Gaelic, Anglo-Scots and English modes of expression".²⁰⁸ Combining strands of existing speech patterns allowed each writer to formulate a dialect which resisted the colonial hegemony of English while remaining intelligible to those who had no Gaelic. Taking his cue from Joyce, MacDiarmid sought to outline an "early modernist program for Scots expression"²⁰⁹ which could use semantic experiment to slip the nets of Anglicization. Thus "innovation and modernity", Watson explains, "were central to MacDiarmid's programme for the revival of Scots"²¹⁰. Similarly, the invented dialect of *A Scots Quair* provided the means for Grassie Gibbon to solve "a perennial problem of narrative voice in Scots fiction, which was how to unify diagenetic and mimetic discourse – to narrow the gap, in other words, between description in English and reported dialogue in broad Scots".²¹¹ For both MacDiarmid and Gibbon, these linguistic struggles are always already national ones. If, as Watson puts it, "there is another strand of modern poetry in Scots where the emphasis might be said to be more on the aesthetic-cultural, rather than sociocultural side", then "it must be emphasised that the two elements . . . are both 'political' and cannot and should not be entirely separated from each other".²¹²

These attempts to provide a register for Scottish writers lead us to a further, related problem: the way Scotland is imagined in literature. The culture of Scotland, *Scottish Scene* suggests, has been reduced to a series of emblems which preclude any legitimate

²⁰⁸ Roderick Watson, "Demotic Modernism in Modern Scots Writing", *The Yearbook of English Studies*, vol.25, *Non-Standard Englishes and the New Media* (1995), p. 146.

²⁰⁹ Watson, "Demotic Modernism", p.152.

²¹⁰ Watson, "Demotic Modernism", p. 144.

²¹¹ Watson, "Demotic Modernism", p.146-7.

²¹² Watson, "Demotic Modernism", p.151.

account of the country's history or present, and part of writing on Scotland involves first banishing these reductive mythologies. Much of MacDiarmid's essay on "Edinburgh" is occupied with trying to do this. Despite writing that "I do not know that even in my most savage moods I could ever have been tempted to reduce the time-honoured fantasy of Edinburgh in the way that [journalist] Charles Graves does",²¹³ he nevertheless describes an imaginary companion with whom he would wish to explore the city as one specifically untainted by preconceived notions:

I have often wished that I could meet someone, preferably a highly intelligent person, who, from some inconceivable cause (since it is difficult to imagine anyone, any highly intelligent person at all events, in the world who has not however vaguely the traditional conception of 'mine own romantic town' 'the grey metropolis of the North', even if only some notion of its outline resembling the saw-backed graph on a fever-chart) had never heard of Edinburgh, and go round it with him, or her. . .²¹⁴

To do this, MacDiarmid writes, "would compensate for me the hopeless preconceptions which vitiate almost all impressions" of the city. The journey, he supposes, might allow the poet and his companion to arrive "at some conception of the whole phenomenon" – or, more likely, "fail to do so" once unencumbered by "all the guide book chatter . . . of historical tittle-tattle and miscellaneous facts".²¹⁵ To encounter the city as if for the first time, and be permitted not only to discover a new version of it but no longer reduce it to a single conception, is MacDiarmid's dream of the Scots capital.

It is possible to read the text as a conscious act of resistance against this empty, emblematic version of Scotland. The presence of the words "intelligent" and "guide" in MacDiarmid's writing on Edinburgh hints towards the full title of *Scottish Scene* – raising the possibility that the "intelligent man" of the title of one who, while not ignorant, has managed to remain untainted by the mythology which colours conceptions of Scottish culture. The "guide", then, sets out not to instruct its reader in the exact nature of Scotland – much less to provide them with a typical, tourist's introduction to the place – but to propose some initial steps towards constructing an alternate national vision from a radical blank slate. Like *Somerset*, *Scottish Scene* is concerned as much with possibility as in actuality. Yet, where Warner is energised by the presence of histories real and mythic, MacDiarmid and Grassic Gibbon seek to cleanse Scotland of historic fictions. Large

²¹³ Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, p.80.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, p.80-1.

portions of the book are occupied with tearing down cultural orthodoxy.

In the self-consciously titled “The Antique Scene”, for instance – note the use of the word “antique”, instead of, say, “historic” – Grassic Gibbon warns the reader of what he sees as a widespread reductive mythologizing of the country. This vision, he suggests, must be rescinded if Scotland is to develop.

Few things cry so urgently for rewriting as does Scots history . . . The chatter and gossip of half the salons and drawing-rooms of European intellectualism hang over the antique Scottish scene like a malarial fog through which peer the fictitious faces of heroic Highlanders, hardy Norsemen, lovely Stewart queens, and dashing Jacobite rebels. Those stage-ghosts shamble amid the dimness, and move and mow in their ancient parts with an idiotic vacuity but a maddening persistence.²¹⁶

The metaphor of “malarial” fog suggests that Scottish culture is infected by these myths, and that they are disease-like: self-propagating, fluish and slow-moving. The Jacobite rebels and heroic Highlanders who populate the “fog” are pantomimes of resistance who offer little hope of actual progress. These fanciful ghosts, Grassic Gibbon argues, must be exorcised if Scotland is to attain not only artistic freedom but also structural equality.

There followed [after Culloden] that century and a half which leads us to the present day, a century through which we hear the wail of children in . . . night-time slums, the rantings of place-seeking politicians, the odd chirping and cackling of the bastardised Scots romantic schools in music and literature.²¹⁷

To romanticise Scottish culture is at best impotent; at worst, outright damaging. Using the example of a “modern” viewing the Jozef Israëls’ painting *Frugal Meal* (c1876) with “a proper aesthetic detachment”, Grassic Gibbon diagnoses in such “detachment” an enjoyment of “the hunger and dirt and hopelessness”. Praise for “the chiaroscuro, the fine shades and attitudes” reveals the critic to be “merely an inhibited little sadist” who uses romanticism to “conceal a voracious consumption of poverty”.²¹⁸ To romanticise – to prioritise artistry over truth – is tantamount to violence.

Nowhere is this, and therefore the urgency of a search for a cultural grammar, more evident than in *Scottish Scene*’s treatment of Glasgow. During the early years of the twentieth century, Scotland’s cities included areas of extreme poverty, often contrasted by Scots writers with the rustic delights of a bucolic past. Newspapers from the time feature

²¹⁶ Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, p.19.

²¹⁷ Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, p.36.

²¹⁸ Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, p.24.

worried articles on the “Conditions in Glasgow”,²¹⁹ and even as late as the 1950s Glasgow was to have the highest rates of tuberculosis in Europe.²²⁰ Many Scots authors therefore positioned the countryside as a space for potential respite. Living in Glasgow as a young man after a move from the Orkney Isles, Edwin Muir's *Autobiography* (1954) tells of his walk to work through the city's particularly impoverished neighbourhoods south of the Clyde:

These journeys filled me with a sense of degradation: the crumbling houses, the twisted faces, the obscene words casually heard in passing, the ancient, haunting stench of pollution and decay, the arrogant women, the mean men, the terrible children . . . the slums seemed to be everywhere around me, a great, spreading swamp into which I might sink for good.²²¹

Faced with the terrifying possibility of this “swamp”, Muir describes how his father began to long for his home of the countryside: “for a glimpse of the sea and the fields”, a phrase which evokes images of pure, untainted simplicity when compared to the adjective-laden horror of Muir's Glasgow. Ralph Glasser's memoir, *Growing Up in the Gorbals* (1986), similarly shows the earlier conditions in the city and a subsequent longing for the countryside. “I had never seen Loch Katrine”, Glasser writes of the body of water to the city's North, “but the name had magical power”. The loch reminds Glasser of “*The Lady of the Lake*, remembered from English lessons at school, gothic scenes of wild crags and dark groves full of mystery”.²²² This romantic landscape, tinged with both nostalgia and a hint of the sublime, is anathema to Glasgow, which “in dour contrast” displays its simple motto ironically “in gold letters beneath the coat of arms”: “Let Glasgow Flourish”.²²³

This dyad of urban horror and rural idyll receives careful treatment in *Scottish Scene*. The book approaches the Scots cities of the 1930s with a similar sense of horror to Muir's – Grassie Gibbon's essay on “Glasgow”, for instance, opens by anthropomorphising Scotland's urban centres:

Glasgow is one of the few places in Scotland which defy personification. To imagine Edinburgh as a disappointed spinster, with a hare-lip and inhibitions, is at least to approximate . . . So with Dundee, a frowsy fisher-wife addicted to gin and infanticide,

²¹⁹ “Conditions in Glasgow”, *The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, West Yorkshire, Sat 24 Jan 1931, p. 9.

²²⁰ “Britain since the 1930s”, *BBC School Radio*, 14 Nov 2010

(http://www.bbc.co.uk/schoolradio/subjects/history/britainsince1930s/society/slum_conditions_2)

²²¹ Edwin Muir, *An Autobiography* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1993), p. 82-3.

²²² Ralph Glasser, *Growing up in the Gorbals* (Skipton: Magna Carta Large Print, 1986), p. 35.

²²³ Glasser, *Growing up*, p. 35-6.

Aberdeen a thin-lipped peasant-woman who has borne eleven and buried nine. But no Scottish image of personification may display, even distorted, the essential Glasgow. One might go further afield But one doubts anthropomorphic representation at all. The monster of Loch Ness is probably the lost soul of Glasgow, in scales and horns, disporting itself in the Highlands after evacuating finally and completely its mother-corpse.²²⁴

Like Warner's "Edwardian lady" of Bath, these Hogarthian portraits are tinged with irony. But they also reveal a genuine sense of revulsion. The exact opposite of the modern's viewing of the *A Frugal Meal*, which romanticises poverty, Grassic Gibbon's grotesque descriptions of infanticide and monstrosity are flanked by a fierce indictment of Glasgow's social conditions. "In Glasgow", he writes, "there are over a hundred and fifty thousand human beings living in such conditions as the most bitterly pressed primitive in Tierra del Fuego never envisioned".²²⁵ Referencing Jack London's famous 1903 survey of social conditions in turn of the century East London, Grassic Gibbon calls these residents "those people of the abyss":

The hundred and fifty thousand eat and sleep and copulate and conceive and crawl into childhood in those waste jungles of stench and disease and hopelessness, sub-humans as definitely as the Morlocks of Wells – and without even the consolation of feeding on their oppressors' flesh.²²⁶

Grassic Gibbon's exoticist "jungles of stench" are reminiscent of Muir's "swamp", and his unpunctuated list of activities conjures up a sense of an unrelenting urban life which is somehow "sub-human" – reduced to the basic functions of life: eating, sleeping, and reproducing. Yet unlike Muir – and unlike the English guidebooks which seek to anchor their sense of nationhood in the countryside – Grassic Gibbon is unable to recommend rural living over the urban. In this respect, the reference to H.G. Wells' novel *The Time Machine* (1895) is not incidental; the invocation of the Morlocks, the sub-surface creatures who populate Wells' futuristic English countryside, is characteristic of this refusal to venerate rural life. In his essay "The Regionalism of Lewis Grassic Gibbon", Graeme Whittington suggests that Grassic Gibbon's "love/hate relationship for the land, which is all-pervading in *Sunset Song* and stated quite clearly for himself in *Scottish Scene*", may "spring from the soul of the urban-based Grassic Gibbon".²²⁷ Yet it may be more accurate

²²⁴ Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, p.136.

²²⁵ Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, p.137.

²²⁶ Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, p.137-8.

²²⁷ Graeme Whittington, "The Regionalism of Lewis Grassic Gibbon", *Scottish Geographical Magazine* 90:2 (1974), p. 72.

to say that, here, Grassic Gibbon recognises the pastoral to be a feint. As in *Sunset Song*, the short fiction in *Scottish Scene* evidences plenty of regard for the Scottish landscape – but the lives of those working there is not romanticised as they are in other accounts of Scotland.²²⁸ The workers in the Highlands, for instance, toil much the same as those in the city. “[I]t came on me”, Grassic Gibbon writes in a later “Sketch”,

that all over Great Britain, all over Europe this morning, the mean fields of France and fat pastures of Saxony and the rolling lands of Romania those rulers of the earth were out and about, bent-backed at plodding toil, the world's great Green International awaiting the coming of its Spartacus.²²⁹

If this nod towards a possible uprising global solidarity remains a dream,²³⁰ however – and here we might refer back to MacDiarmid’s anxiety concerning war in Europe – then its Scottish iteration is also one which elects to be charmed by the false lure of popular rural mythology, rather than face the reality of urban poverty. As the essay on “Glasgow” has it: “A hundred and fifty thousand . . . and all very like you or me or my investigator sitting appalled on the banks of Loch Lomond (where he and his true love will never meet again).”²³¹ The quotation from “Loch Lomond”, a Scottish song which praises the natural beauty – the “bonny, bonny banks” – of the water, is inserted here with bitter irony. “I cannot play with those fantasies”, Grassic Gibbon writes, “when I think of the hundred and fifty thousand in Glasgow”.²³² Staging the conversation between the pitiful living conditions of the city and a romanticised literature which elevates the countryside, *Scottish Scene* finds both inadequate.

11. Caledonian antiszygy

The challenge for MacDiarmid and Grassic Gibbon, then, is to create an alternative. Yet, as we have already seen, the struggle to create a cultural grammar for modern Scotland resolves in *Scottish Scene* only into insoluble irresolution. “The time for national

²²⁸ Indeed, *Scottish Scene*, as a book attuned to the practicalities of how a nation functions, recognises the importance of the city space for cultural production (“If anything of Scottish literature is to be done”, MacDiarmid writes in his essay on “Edinburgh”, “it will be done by young writers living in Scotland . . . and if one is to live in Scotland it is necessary to live in Edinburgh. There is no other place”.) *Scottish Scene*, p. 94.

²²⁹ Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, p.296-7.

²³⁰ The Green International, as a piece in a 1925 edition of *The Century* explains, advocated for agrarian and peasant interests. Josiah Gilbert Holland, Richard Watson Gilder, *The Century: A popular quarterly* 110 (1925), pp. 173-176.

²³¹ Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, p.138.

²³² Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, p.140.

synthesis”, MacDiarmid writes early on in the text, “is not yet. We are still more concerned with the breakdown of old traditions than the consolidation of new”.²³³ In this sense, the book's hermeneutic is one of radical uncertainty – a commitment to uncertainty framed, and enabled, by the guide book form.

Returning to the volume's table of contents, it is easy to survey the variety of items on offer in a layout which notably takes its structure, but not its contents, from the popular conventions of the twentieth century guidebook. The sections share certain features: most obviously, each contains an essay on a city. Yet other contents do not follow this formula, and different portions of the book are also arbitrarily titled “section the first”, “section the second” and so on – emptying its regimented layout of import. Throughout the volume, MacDiarmid and Grassie Gibbon resolutely oppose any reductive reading of Scotland, disavowing the prevalence of myths, the veneration of the countryside, the narrow-mindedness of politicians and the oppressive veneration of English artistry. Yet each of these diagnoses comes with no cure; and while the book's prose can strike a polemical chord more frequently sounded in manifestos, ultimately the only strategy outlined is one of flux. In this respect, the use of guide book codes acts as a negative cypher. What at first glance appears to be a series of criticisms accrue meaning as the two authors repeatedly deny any resolution, deliberately withholding the easy answers of the commercial guide book towards which their use of its structure gestures.

This subversion of the guide book genre continues on the level of individual features. Even the types of pieces included seem not to be taken entirely seriously: writing on Scotland's cities doesn't come under the rubric of an “essay”; instead, they are “sketches”, a word which suggests something rougher and more subjective. With this in mind, the inclusion of fiction, which would be anathema to the aims of most guidebooks, makes sense, providing an open forum to stage discussions using invented characters (and in MacDiarmid's case, literal plays).

This fundamental turn towards an open rather than insular nationalism lies at the centre of *Scottish Scene*. Indeed, for MacDiarmid, an innate tendency towards difference is inseparable from Scots identity, a notion he had already outlined before the creation of *Scottish Scene* in his 1930s essay “The Caledonian Antisyzygy and the Gaelic Idea”. Here, MacDiarmid argues that Scotland is quintessentially dialectic in nature. For this

²³³ Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, p.47.

irreducible quality he borrows the term “Caledonian antisyzygy”,²³⁴ a phrase introduced by G. Gregory Smith that bears testament to a series of tensions central to Scottish culture: Highlander and Lowlander, Protestant and Catholic, rural and urban. While each of these dyads has given rise to notable flash points in Scottish history, for MacDiarmid the disavowal of consensus has the potential to be emancipatory. Lambasting “the stupidities of ‘democracy’”; “the false ‘internationalism’ of the labour movement” and other attempts at establishing consensus,²³⁵ MacDiarmid defines “Scottish genius” as “[f]reedom – the free development of the human consciousness”.²³⁶ This dialectic approach is the only means by which Scotland can find its own cultural register: “Nothing that can be so foreseen or guided”, MacDiarmid writes, “is worth a curse; Scotland needs a great upwelling of the incalculable”.²³⁷ The “Curtain raiser” which introduces *Scottish Scene* upholds the tenets of this Caledonian Antisyzygy, explaining that “[v]iewing the Scottish Scene from such different angles, cultural and geographical, may give the better composite picture” than an attempt to guide the reader in any other fashion.²³⁸

In this way, the series of unresolved tensions which constitutes *Scottish Scene* is deliberate. In its structured medium lies the message: if *Scottish Scene* does not provide the answers as to how Scotland might develop a fruitful culture, then its ambiguity is nevertheless a methodology by which one is encouraged to proceed. This is the handbook for MacDiarmid’s “upwelling of the incalculable”. MacDiarmid and Grassic Gibbons’ decision to use, and deliberately misuse, this structural device is telling. Employed with a sense of irony, the gesture is one which takes other guides’ indulgence in taxonomising and uses it as a symbolic representation of the “easy” narratives of place which it seeks to disrupt. Where Warner’s relationship with the guide book is one of performative ambivalence, MacDiarmid and Grassic Gibbon’s is more straightforward. Returning to Thacker’s notion of “textual space”, we can see how *Scottish Scene* treats Scotland, and the guide book genre, in equivalent fashion. In each case, the essential form of the thing is retained – Scotland as nation; guide book as instructive, guiding object – but received notions about content, order and message are refashioned to suit the authors’ radical

²³⁴ Hugh MacDiarmid, “The Caledonian Antisyzygy and the Gaelic Idea”, *Selected Essays of Hugh MacDiarmid* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 58.

²³⁵ MacDiarmid, “Caledonian Antisyzygy”, p.59.

²³⁶ MacDiarmid, “Caledonian Antisyzygy”, p.57.

²³⁷ MacDiarmid, “Caledonian Antisyzygy”, p. 73.

²³⁸ Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, p.11.

ends. Just as the guide book form is able to contain the disrupted, heterogeneous contents of *Scottish Scene*, it is hoped that the form of Scotland will be able to contain each of its various geographical, social and artistic elements without any individual part of the country relinquishing its unique characteristics to the homogenizing force of English colonialism – or Scots myth.

Returning to the matter of a new cultural register, we can now see how this ambivalence extends even to the methodologies of *Scottish Scene*'s authors. "The Irish literary revival, the *Aufklärung* in Germany, [and] the development of the latest of all great literature in Russia", MacDiarmid reminds us, were preceded by "a long period of preparation".²³⁹ *Scottish Scene* proposes that "in another fifty years or so a Scots Virginia Woolf will astound the Scottish Scene, or a Scots James Joyce electrify it".²⁴⁰ MacDiarmid's "synthetic Scots" is posited as one potential means of achieving a modern national idiom, and the author makes several coy references to the possibility of a "Scottish counterpart of *Ulysses*".²⁴¹ Yet even the dialects which Grassie Gibbon and MacDiarmid employ in their work – themselves already formulated by collage – are called into question. If *Scottish Scene*'s prognosis is generally optimistic about literary experiment, there is always the chance that its own brand of experimentation might be bettered, as an unusually self-referential passage in Grassie Gibbon's essay "Literary Lights" reveals:

The technique of Lewis Grassie Gibbon . . . is to mould the English languages into the rhythms and cadences of Scots spoken speech . . . His scene so far has been a comparatively uncrowded and simple one – the countryside and village of modern Scotland. Whether this technique is adequate to compass and express the life of an industrialised Scots town in all its complexity is yet to be demonstrated; whether this peculiar style may not become either intolerably mannered or degenerate, in the fashion of Joyce, into the unfortunate unintelligibilities of a literary second childhood is also in question.²⁴²

This detached, self-ironizing turn gently hints back to the intricacies of Grassie Gibbon's "Glasgow" sketch, while also bringing into play the possibility that his synthetic dialect will ossify into something "intolerably mannered", in a similar manner to the "stage ghosts" of myth, or the nostalgia of "Loch Lomond". The question of how the Scottish Scene will

²³⁹ Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, p.49.

²⁴⁰ Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, p.197.

²⁴¹ Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, p.44.

²⁴² Gibbon and MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene*, p.205.

develop, it seems, is still in flux; and even the strategies used here may not be the best. At the risk of sounding repetitive, then, it is worth stressing once again the extent to which *Scottish Scene* is concerned with opening up possibility rather than advocating tactics – even, we realize, if those tactics are those employed by its authors. Each tension embodied by *Scottish Scene* is explored in the pursuit of clearing a textual space to discuss questions of Scots identity, whether it be Grassie Gibbon attempting to extract a workable past from accounts tempered by fantasy or MacDiarmid attempting to coax Scotland's international literary past into bearing modernist fruit.

12. Contours of modernism

Following the interplay of form and content to this end, we can see how, like *Somerset*, *Scottish Scene* is a work which disallows straightforward interpretation, with a structural ambiguity and intricate idiosyncrasy that is difficult to pin down. It not only combines different types of writing to produce a multi-layered portrait of the country, but also subversively employs the form of the guide book to do so, placing its structure in ironic juxtaposition to a fragmented narrative. If it is too trite to suggest that concerns about national infrastructure inform the structured-yet-heterogeneous scope of *Scottish Scene* (while Dorset's wild countryside, we might suppose, encourages a more free-form, roughly textured book) then the "dialogic" relationship between social spaces and literary form which Thacker identifies in modernist fiction is nevertheless undoubtedly at play. The split between *Scottish Scene*'s form and content is a political one: its radical uncertainty, the unresolved chord that sits at its core, is an act of rebellion in a country whose history has seemingly been reduced to an accretion of easy, totalising myths. The series of relationships the text mediates – between, like Warner, romantic and modern, past and present, urban and rural – are each part of this process of revision.

I mentioned above that *Scottish Scene* was published by a company, Jarrold and Sons, who also published mainstream guidebooks. Leading up to the publication of *Scottish Scene*, Jarrold's produced a series of guides to different counties, a series of "Jarrold's Holiday Guides" and even ran a "Luncheon and Tea Room" in Cromer. *Scottish*

Scene sold well – or, at the very least, well enough to elicit a reprint in 1974.²⁴³ And so, as with *Somerset*, this book so opposed to the reductive readings of place on which travel guidebooks trade itself became a marketable commodity for a commercial publisher. It is worth mentioning this not to undermine either *Somerset* or *Scottish Scene*, nor cynically charge them with hypocrisy, but as a reminder of how tightly these books are imbricated with the travel industry. Their commissioning, production and sale is a potentially fruitful area for future research.²⁴⁴ Further work, for instance, might assist in developing general studies of guide-books, particularly the *Vision of England* series, of which Warner's text is the most radical example, but by no means the only interesting one in terms of what it reveals about writing place in the twentieth-century. The reception of *Scottish Scene* and *Somerset*, too, might be further investigated; for while positive newspaper reviews exist for each text, their broader afterlife is difficult to trace. What is undeniable, however, is that both texts not only borrowed from the popular form of the guide book, but became their own contributions to the genre in turn, even as they co-opted its properties only to give form to radical uncertainty.

If we are to extend the discussion of how modernism represented the geopolitics of travel to discuss non-fictional texts, this is an important point to consider. For, subversive as *Scottish Scene* and *Somerset* are, they are undoubtedly both intended to be instructive; not only a commentary on the point at which the changing technologies and politics of the twentieth century effects how space is interpreted on a local level, but an intervention in such representations. Their ambiguity is not to be mistaken for passivity, nor the guide book form as merely a rhetorical gesture. In this way, they undermine not only the generic distinctions that Farley outlines between travelogues and guidebooks, but also the popular understand of literary modernism as, if not uninterested, broadly disinterested in mainstream commercial forms.

As such, both texts offer us an alternative strand of focus for regional modernism – one which not only reads the relationship between the local and global (or local and national), but additionally understands regional, and rural, spaces as sites of rupture in their own right. If Fussell's assertion that "no travelling" occurred during the duration of the First World War reminds us of the popularity of foreign travel as a topic of scholarly

²⁴³ Hugh MacDiarmid and Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *Scottish scene; or, The intelligent man's guide to Albyn* (Bath: Chivers, 1974)

²⁴⁴ I have contacted Jarrold seeking further information but, as of yet, have had no luck.

interest, then *Somerset* and *Scottish Scene* prompt an alternative. Their similarly ambivalent meditations on nationality as it occurs, or is imagined through, local sites prompt us to consider discourses of Englishness and Scottishness figured not through the foreign traveller but via a reading of native locales. As such, they stand to draw our attention to specific literary and ideological genealogies embedded in spaces that were, until recently, considered outside the purview of modernist scholarship, requesting that we read regional space not against more familiar urban strains, but in the context of specific twentieth-century configurations of the county, or the constituent nation within the union (at least, for now).

This is not to say, of course, that questions of scalability, or the dialectic between the local and the global, ought to be ignored, or do not appear in *Scottish Scene* and *Somerset*. Reading Warner's guide book against its more mainstream counterparts, we can see how *Somerset* responds to a trans-regional configuration of the English countryside, which reads rural space as a nostalgic idyll in which national values may be preserved. It is in light of this wider configuration of space that Warner grapples with the situatedness of Somerset, providing a backdrop against which various tensions are self-consciously played out: between the lure of romanticism and the possibilities afforded by avant-garde style; between surety and self-ironizing ambiguity; between the landscape and the text. Warner's own performative discomfort regarding her task has a wry edge, but also gestures to the genuine difficulty of accounting for regional space. Techniques such as her deprioritizing of recent changes to the landscape, while allowing myth and history to intrude on the present day, is just one of the ways in which the ostensible purpose of the guide book is disrupted – used both to introduce a sense of uncertainty and self-effacement, and to draw attention to the subjective experience of the figure in landscape. That it is this landscape itself which forces certain emotions in those who traverse it, and has the power – if only in Warner's narrative – to reconfigure the maps which elsewhere work to enshrine guidebooks with a sense of authority, is equally a response to the problem of mediating rural bounded sites. If *Somerset* turns to the landscape's real and imagined past, then MacDiarmid and Grassie Gibbon approach their related problem by turning to the future. Centred on the question of how Scotland should think about itself so that it may be free from the yoke of English influence – and how, if given that freedom, it might develop its national character – *Scottish Scene* is similarly forced into a question of

scalability, caught between the country's heterogeneity and the desire to understand it as a distinct entity on the global stage. Although in many ways their tactics are the inverse of Warner's – for instance, seeking to banish, rather than appropriate, myth – their disruption of the guide book form nevertheless serves a similar purpose: to destabilise prevailing attitudes towards place, replacing them with a studied ambivalence which settles only into a state of ongoing possibility. If, as Fussell writes, travelogues often “reveal themselves as inquiries into how to write literature in the twentieth century”, then *Somerset* and *Scottish Scene* are inquiries into how to configure space.

Earlier in this chapter, I quoted Thacker's assertion that “literary texts represent social spaces, but social space shapes literary form”. At this point, we can see how Warner, MacDiarmid and Grassie Gibbon attempt a move which might be specifically designed to add to this formulation, one in which changes to a literary form are used to plot changes to social space. As I intimated in the introduction to this thesis, non-fiction focusses us on the question of intentionality. Oriented to real-world truths, in this context *Somerset* and *Scottish Scene* encourage us to acknowledge localities not merely as themes or motifs, but as locations in which social, political and artistic changes might be instigated. Applied to non-fiction, the generic assaults of literary modernism provide a means of exploring this process of fragmentation and destabilisation. Alongside the fact that neither text is oriented towards the present – almost novelistic in their refusal to subscribe to the guide book's usual edicts of describing a place as *it currently exists* – and the tensions and ambiguities summarized above, then, it is the appropriation of the guide book's form which most clearly enunciates the problems and complexities of providing a bounded, taxonomising account of space. We have seen that Warner, MacDiarmid and Grassie Gibbon are all torn between authority and uncertainty when it comes to their own registers – whether it be Warner's self-conscious enactment of the struggle between her romantic strains and the innovation of literary modernism, or Grassie Gibbon's musing on the possibility that his version of Scots will become outdated. The winking, subversive use of the guide book genre enacts this deliberate confusion. In the decision to include antiquated maps (with no contextualizing explanation), in opening a book with a paragraph doubting one's own methods, in the insertion of fictional and theatrical vignettes and in the amused sub-title *The Intelligent Man's Guide*, *Somerset* and *Scottish Scene* perform their

ambivalent relationship with their own instructive value – invoking the common tropes of the guide book form only to manipulate its supposed values.

We have seen how, taken together, these texts reveal some of the difficulties of being a twentieth-century writer dealing with new configurations of space. In turn, their shared concerns invite us to consider further problems. How, for instance, might we best recognise these difficulties while also recognizing the local development of ideas and cultures, and, more specifically, the details of how modernist rupture is located in these spaces? How might the use of non-fictional genres – to return to Franco Morretti's trio of "foreign form, local material ... and local form" – invite us to dwell on the way formal space interacts with geographical space in the modernist imagination? Certainly, we can see how *Somerset* and *Scottish Scene* pose a challenge to the increasingly unpopular but nevertheless still troublingly pervasive association of regionalism with aesthetic realism in their attempt not only to represent, but intervene in regional space. As such, they also raise another, related problem: how do we read works which are torn between stylistics we recognise as "modernist" and forms, and features, which are generically "other"?

The next chapter of this thesis pursues these, and related, questions through a reading of two texts which similarly draw on established forms to interrogate the relationship between place, identity and conflict. Turning from the leisure of travel to the pleasure of cuisine, I will consider Alice B. Toklas' *The Alice B Toklas Cook Book* and F.T. Marinetti's *The Futurist Cookbook* through a reading of their interest in, and subversion of, eating as a part of the everyday. In doing so, I hope to extend the generic enquiry into modernism's use of non-fiction, while also further clarifying questions centred on geography and society – helping to outline new contours in modernist scholarship around form, place and politics.

Recipes for war: the everyday politics of the avant-garde cookbook

Of the several essays in Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* which focus on food – from "Wine and Milk" to "Steak and Chips" – it is his musings on "Ornamental Cookery" that can best help us understand the modernist cookbook. In the essay, Barthes considers what he calls the "ornamental" cuisine of *Elle* magazine, writing:

The weekly *Elle* (a mythological treasure) gives us almost every week a fine colour photograph of a prepared dish: golden partridges stuffed with cherries, a faintly pink chicken chaudfroid, a mould of crayfish surrounded by their red shells, a frothy charlotte prettified with glacé fruit designs, multicoloured trifle, etc.²⁴⁵

If this cornucopia suggests excess, it is an excess limited to the visual realm. Evocative as Barthes' description of the pinks, reds and frothy puddings are, they speak only to what one can see on the page. But this, Barthes explains, is the point: in fact, "[t]he 'substantial' category which prevails in this type of cooking is that of the smooth coating". The recipes in *Elle* are covered in glazes, ornamental mushrooms, "motifs of carved lemon", "silver pastilles" and other flourishes that resemble "a kind of frenzied baroque".²⁴⁶ Kept from the reader at arm's length – they are "never [shown] . . . except from a high angle".²⁴⁷ The dishes are all surface; in fact, they are not intended to be cooked at all. "Cookery in *Elle*", Barthes explains, is "an 'idea' – Cookery". The working-class readers of *Elle* are, he suggests, unlikely to actually make the dishes, and so "the genteel tendency of the magazine precludes it from touching on the real problems concerning food", adding, "(the real problem is not to have the idea of sticking cherries into a partridge, it is to have the partridge, that is to say, to pay for it)". Unlike the readers of the middle-class *L'Express*,²⁴⁸ to whom one can "suggest real dishes", the ornamental cooking of *Elle* is "the very dream of smartness" – emphasis on the dream.²⁴⁹

Through Barthes' reading of this myth, we can begin to identify a series of binaries that – as will become evident in what follows – come into play again and again in discussions of food during the twentieth century. If food is reduced to the realm of fantasy in *Elle*, while *L'Express* contains recipes that its audience can try out in real life, the pair exemplify a more general division: between food as symbol and as substance; between the theoretical and haptic; the visual and edible; abstracted and material – at heart, between ideas and objects.

To this series of dyads, we might add another dialectic on a different axis – or rather, re-introduce one discussed in the previous chapter. The interplay of innovation and tradition has long been identified by critics as a defining context for twentieth century

²⁴⁵ Roland Barthes, "Ornamental Cookery", *Mythologies* (St. Albans: Paladin, 1973), p. 78.

²⁴⁶ Barthes, "Ornamental Cookery", p. 79.

²⁴⁷ Barthes, "Ornamental Cookery", p. 79.

²⁴⁸ Barthes, "Ornamental Cookery", p.80.

²⁴⁹ Barthes, "Ornamental Cookery", p. 79.

literary modernism, and is worth unpicking specifically in relation to the period's food cultures. Just as Lewis Grassie Gibbon, Hugh MacDiarmid and Sylvia Townsend Warner self-consciously use their travel guides to examine a range of shifting tensions between the romantic and modern, so the same contradictory impulses appear in commercial cookbooks responding to the various pressures put on the domestic cook in the early half of the twentieth century. Aside from the food crises caused by the two World Wars – whose effects were keenly felt across Europe and eventually, although to a lesser extent, in America –²⁵⁰ household cooks also had to contend with an economic depression which,²⁵¹ for the class to which many of the writers we now think of as “the modernists” belonged, potentially meant the loss of household staff. Woolf's 1924 “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” may have used “the character of one's cook”²⁵² as a wry example of the shift from Victorian to Georgian sensibilities, yet by the time her essay was published households were increasingly finding themselves without a cook at all. As a result, the balance of labour in middle-class homes rapidly tilted towards female heads of households. Commercial literature was quick to adapt: in 1926, *Country Life* magazine produced a book entitled *Cooking Without a Cook*, whose subtitle promised to teach the housewife to deliver “simple, appetising and economical dishes for every season of the year”.²⁵³ As well as photographs, a glossary of terms and even a guide to the French mother sauces,²⁵⁴ the book contained chapters on relatively specialist topics like “cooking for invalids”,²⁵⁵ so that every aspect of running a kitchen – from presentation to welfare – was covered, enabling the housewife to complete the duties required of her without outside help.

As well as producing new volumes such as *Cooking Without a Cook*, the cookbook industry also published new editions of more established brands, updated to account for

²⁵⁰ See Amy L. Bentley, “Uneasy Sacrifice: The Politics of United States Famine Relief, 1945-1948”, *Agriculture and Human Values* 11:4 (Fall 1994): pp. 4-18.

²⁵¹ For an illuminating study of the trans-Atlantic effects of the 1929 depression, see K. Brunner's *The Great Depression Revisited* (Boston: Kluwer, 1981)

²⁵² Virginia Woolf, “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown”, in *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*, ed. Michael McKeon, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000), p. 746.

²⁵³ *Cooking Without a Cook: Selected Recipes from “Homes and Gardens” providing Simple, Appetising and Economical dishes for every season of the year* (London: Country Life, 1926)

²⁵⁴ Interestingly, the five “mother sauces” of French cuisine - *béchamel*, *espagnole*, *velouté*, *hollandaise* and *sauce tomate* - were only defined at the beginning of the 20th century, in Auguste Escoffier's *Le guide culinaire*. See *Le guide culinaire, aide-mémoire de cuisine pratique* (Paris: au bureau de “l'Art culinaire”, 1903).

²⁵⁵ *Cooking Without a Cook*, p.3.

changes in the household. The 1923 edition of *Mrs. Beeton's Family Cookery*, for instance, dedicates a chapter to "Labour-saving in the Home", explaining that:

The continued shortage of domestic labour and high wages have forced very many housewives to take a much larger part in the work of the house themselves. Many women who formerly used to employ three or four servants now find themselves with only one, or, possibly, only a charwoman.²⁵⁶

To ameliorate the loss of servants, *Mrs. Beeton's* recommends that women invest in certain "labour-saving devices" (other cookbooks, such as the 1910 *Cooking by Gas*, are entirely given over to such inventions).²⁵⁷ But this modern equipment does not prevent *Mrs. Beeton's* from upholding its rustic, down-to-earth, traditionalist sensibility when it comes to "the 'oldest industry'" of housekeeping.²⁵⁸ Similarly, *Cooking Without a Cook* draws primarily on culinary techniques long known to the English housewife, including the prescription of beef tea for household members who have "difficulty in swallowing", and seasonal eating.²⁵⁹

This integration of old tricks and new technology is one example of how the broad conflict of ideologies around food, described most clearly by Alexandra Harris in her 2010 monograph *Romantic Moderns*, can play out on a micro-level. Harris defines this rivalry, generally speaking, as being between the sentimental and the modern: typified by, on the one hand, the "anti-domestic modernity" of streamlined kitchens designed by architects like Le Corbusier and Wells Coates, and on the other a yearning for the wisdom of the past. (As with the rest of Harris' book, there is a spatial tension hinted at here, too, between the cosmopolitan and the local). Le Corbusier's kitchens are particularly illustrative of a forward-looking, minimalist simplicity which enjoyed a fashionable moment around the same time as *Mrs. Beeton's* was being updated for the now-solo cook. In line with the architect's tendency to strip away individual idiosyncrasy in pursuit of maximum efficiency, his designs feature a strictly uniform order. The Villa Savoye, built on the outskirts of Paris between 1928 and 1931,²⁶⁰ is exemplary in this regard, featuring Purist kitchens decked in white tile. Reflecting Le Corbusier's famous dictum that a house should

²⁵⁶ *Mrs. Beeton's Family Cookery and Housekeeping Book* (London, Melbourne: War, Lock and Co Ltd, 1923), p.25.

²⁵⁷ *Cooking by Gas* (London, New York, Toronto and Melbourne: Cassell and Company Ltd, 1910)

²⁵⁸ *Mrs. Beeton's*, p.17.

²⁵⁹ *Cooking Without a Cook*, p.1.

²⁶⁰ Penny Huntsman, *Thinking About Art: A Thematic Guide to Art History* (London: Wiley, 2016), p.144.

be a “machine for living in”,²⁶¹ the kitchens are geared towards mechanised productivity: the size and layout of the rooms allows the homeowner to move easily between various countertops; the sliding cabinet doors are designed not to intrude on the available space.²⁶²



Figure 2: Promotional material for the Lawn Road flats

Coates' 1934 Lawn Road flats in Hampstead take this utility one step further. Although each flat features an electric cooker and refrigerator, the block also provided meals in a central kitchen, removing the burden of cooking entirely from its residents. Posters advertising available flats boast of a “very full domestic service” in which “everything [is] done for you” and include testimony from those already living there. The dishes available, “at your flat or in the club”, include such international delights as “Turkish Kebabs” and “Chicken Isobar”. The mood is far from that of *Mrs. Beeton's*.

The same tension which Harris identifies motivates the two books which form the basis for this chapter: *The Alice B Toklas Cook Book* (1954) by Alice Toklas and FT Marinetti's *The Futurist Cookbook* (1932). The former, which combines the cookbook genre with memoir, records how Toklas fused American and French culinary techniques new practices adapted to meet the pressure of circumstance in wartime France, resulting in a highly individualised cuisine which crosses national boundaries to maintain creative

²⁶¹ Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2014), p. 95.

²⁶² Photographs of the Villa Savoye are available in Jacques Sbriglio's guide, *Le Corbusier: the Villa Savoye* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2008).

pleasure in the face of hardship. *The Futurist Cookbook*, meanwhile, uses a melange of genres – including newspaper clippings, manifestos, straightforward narrative and of course recipes – to propose a cuisine in which a form of nationalism rooted in the material meets a futuristic vision of global exchange. (Much of the tension in this latter book, we shall see, is centred on translating this emerging food culture into a specifically Italian idiom.) Since both are, as Michel Delville writes of *The Futurist Cookbook*, partially about “the dangers and attractions of mixing life and art”,²⁶³ it is fitting that the dynamic, fraught relationship between local food traditions and the possibilities – and limitations – of the present transnational moment mirror what can be broadly identified as the chronological and spatial concerns of late modernism.

1. An avant-garde sociology

The recent surge in scholarship on modernism and food is attentive to this tension. Bringing together modernism’s “material turn” with the geographical attentiveness which is a trait of the “new modernist studies”, this scholarship considers what readings of food in literature might offer to studies of place and space – particularly as they relate to conflict and identity. In her introduction to a 2014 special issue of *Resilience: A Journal of Environmental Humanities* entitled “Tasting Modernism”, J. Michelle Coghlan notes how food studies “has become a vital side of interdisciplinary critical enquiry” in the past two decades.²⁶⁴ In modernist scholarship, however, the appetite is more recent, a fact which one of the collection’s standout essays, Catherine Keyser’s “An all-too-moveable-feast”, attributes to the predominance of the image as a point of focus in modernist studies. In the essay – on Ernest Hemingway’s engagement with the concept of *terroir* –²⁶⁵ Keyser explains that taste has been “an underrated somatic register and underhistorized sensory feeling”. While critics have long accepted that modernism “was constituted by sensory overload and upheaval” – overwhelmed by technological and aesthetic innovation – this “crisis of perception . . . has most often been figured in the *visual sense*”.²⁶⁶ It is with this in

²⁶³ Michel Delville, *Food, Poetry, and the Aesthetics of Consumption: Eating the Avant-garde* (London: Routledge, 2011), p.109.

²⁶⁴ J. Michelle Coghlan, “Tasting Modernism”, *Resilience: A Journal of the Environmental Humanities* 2:1 (Winter 2014), n.p, accessed 08-06-2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5250/resilience.2.1.001>

²⁶⁵ The word literally refers to the set of local natural factors which influence a specific crop.

²⁶⁶ Catherine Keyser, “An all-too-moveable feast”, in “Tasting Modernism”, *Resilience: A Journal of the Environmental Humanities* 2:1 (Winter 2014), n.p, accessed 08-06-2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5250/resilience.2.1.001>

mind that “Tasting Modernism” seeks to provide a means of “reattuning ourselves to modernism’s gustatory designs”.

Such work constitutes an exciting and necessary addition to the field, one which has the potential to instigate a shift in modernist studies towards the haptic generally and taste specifically. Yet it is also worth considering its potential blind spots. For even in the challenge Coghlan poses, a conventional rubric of food writing persists. She notes, for instances, how modernist writers

experimented with . . . emerging food cultures and the global food politics of their day, even as an array of mid-twentieth-century food writers, most notably M.F.K. Fisher and Alice B. Toklas, adapted modernist techniques for their culinary designs.

If it is overreaching to draw much from “even as”, then the series of questions which follow display a similar understanding of modernist writing as distinct from “culinary” writing. “How does literature archive or refashion our pleasures or ambivalences about what and why we eat?”, asks Coghlan – and then, relatedly but separately: how do non-fictional genre items, including cookbooks, “reflect – or intervene in – wider debates on literary taste, cultural ideologies, and food politics?” Literature, Coghlan gently suggests, experiments with and refashions the real world; food writing attends to it.

This is a minor note, and not one which distracts from Coghlan’s argument. Yet the prevalence of this distinction in literary scholarship and, particularly, modernist scholarship is still worth attending to. In that the books this chapter examines are liminal texts, on the border between cookbooks and other non-fiction writing, they might also prompt us to question the usefulness of such distinctions which, while correct in the broadest generic terms, need not correlate to distinct stylistic or indeed ideological practises. If we seek to interrogate how modernism engaged with the culinary contexts of its age, it is also necessary to question the subtle formulations which place cookbooks and other non-fictional culinary texts as synchronous with, rather than as a part of, the period’s literary experiment.

In what follows, I will show how these categories are more imbricated than we might at first suspect. For while scholarship has recently enjoyed a new crop of writing on cooking in modernist fiction, the modernist cookbook has proved a more unwieldy subject. This is not surprising: if modernism has long been understood to be, in the most basic terms, a radical break from the practices of late nineteenth-century realist fiction, then genres which refer necessarily, repeatedly and emphatically to the material, “real” world

pose a challenge. It is certainly difficult to make the aesthetic play of “modernist” cookbooks, especially their avant-garde culinary strategies, coalesce with what we know about either twentieth-century food cultures or modernism’s approach to “realism” – particularly in that cookbooks are not just mimetic texts, but part of an instructional genre which refers to real-world praxis (or at least feigns to). Yet it is precisely because of this difficulty that a reading of modernist cookbooks is not only necessary, but urgent.

The books discussed in this chapter are attentive to the economic and geopolitical structures of modernity as they are represented on the kitchen table. The ways they elect to represent the items on the table – and how those items get there – reveal how seemingly banal, everyday acts are in fact part of vast systems of financial, political and social power. Significantly, they also intervene in the culinary marketplace themselves, with Toklas’ cookbook in particular enjoying a wide readership among the general public, and becoming part of many people’s domestic world.²⁶⁷ As such, it is useful to consider them not only in relation to recent work on food in modernist fiction, but also the wider field of “everyday studies”, which focuses on the habits and limitations of daily life, especially as they relate to broader, sociocultural trends – a critical field which itself is partially responsible for progressing studies of modernism and food towards broader questions of how commodities and ideas circulate on local, national and global scales.

Ben Highmore’s *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction* makes a lucid case for the way in which the relationship between the divergent meanings of “the everyday” provides us with the means to consider modernity as a lived condition. Everyday life, Highmore reminds us, “signifies ambivalently”: both towards habitual practices, the literal dailiness of things, and to the quality of “everydayness” which we attach to the repetitive, quotidian and banal.²⁶⁸ (In what follows, I will show how part of Marinetti’s task, and to a lesser extent Toklas’, is to disrupt the relationship between these two things.) “This ambivalence vividly registers”, Highmore writes, “the effects of modernity”:

If the ‘shock of the new’ sends tremors to the core of the everyday, then what happens to the sense of the everyday as familiar and recognisable? In modernity the everyday becomes the setting for a dynamic process: for making the unfamiliar familiar; for

²⁶⁷ See e.g. Sandra Newman’s description of the book as a “popular aesthetic and countercultural touchstone” in *READ THIS NEXT: And Discover Your 500 New Favourite Books* (London: Penguin eBooks, 2010), n.p.

²⁶⁸ Ben Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p.1.

getting accustomed to the disruption of custom; for struggling to incorporate the new; for adjusting to different ways of living.²⁶⁹

This does not necessarily mean, however, that everyday life is simply a repository for the effects of broader forces which come to bear on individual lives. As Highmore is keen to stress, most theorists of the everyday refuse “to reduce everyday life to an arena for the reproduction of dominant social relations Much more stress is placed on the everyday as a site of resistance, revolution or transformation”.²⁷⁰ Everyday life, then, which already contains an internal tension between its chronological and qualitative aspects, also exists in a wider dialectic with these “dominant social relations”, in that the configuration of people’s daily lives has the potential to effect change beyond the scale of the individual. “*Something like an avant-garde sociology*” [Highmore’s emphasis] can be fashioned when the everyday is taken as “the central problematic” – an observation which might apply to both the study of Toklas and Marinetti’s cook books,²⁷¹ and the texts themselves.

Happily, for the purposes of this chapter, a rich body of scholarship exists which identifies food’s everydayness as the “central problematic” which charges it with narrative significance. Exemplary of this are studies like Annette Cozzi’s *The Discourses of Food in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*, which describes how “[t]he sheer mundanity of eating conceals deeply embedded power structures. Like ideology, food is neither innocent or neutral, nor is it merely nourishing fuel; rather, it allows for an assortment of associations and attachments to be swallowed with it”.²⁷² Even recent scholarship which does not explicitly engage with the concept of “the everyday” is increasingly attuned to the sociological aspects of everyday life. Work like Thomas M. Wilson’s introduction to a 2006 special issue of *European Studies*, focussed on “Food, Drink and Identity in Europe”, suggests that people are defined by the foods they eat, partially due to the sheer volume of eating that we all must do. “Eating and drinking”, Wilson notes, “are central concerns in many narratives of local, regional and national cultures”.²⁷³ It is this centrality of food in culture that allows it to embody a range of meanings at different levels of sociological

²⁶⁹ Highmore, p.2.

²⁷⁰ Highmore, p.17.

²⁷¹ Highmore, p.22.

²⁷² Annette Cozzi, *The Discourses of Food in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 2010), p.4.

²⁷³ Thomas M. Wilson, “Introduction. Food, Drink and Identity in Europe: Consumption and the Construction of Local, National and Cosmopolitan Culture”, *Food, Drink and Identity in Europe, European Studies* 22 (2009), p. 13.

signification. Wilson's introduction identifies "overlapping themes and focuses" in the cultural significance of food – for instance, food and drink as commodities, as signifiers of group culture and identity, and as items which "figure prominently in many diverse private and public social behavioural processes".²⁷⁴

2. Cooking the books

"Cookbooks are indisputably indispensable for the welfare of the human race, and they sell very nicely."
– 1942 *New York Times* review of M.F.K Fisher's *How to Cook a Wolf*²⁷⁵

If it is eating's ubiquity as an everyday act which makes it such a rich cultural signifier, cookbooks necessarily circumscribe cuisine. It seems obvious to state that, like travel guides, a cookbook can only aim to provide a relatively specific account of food; yet, as with travel guides, it is precisely this limitation, coupled with repeated examples of the genre which nevertheless claim to provide a totalising account of cuisine, which makes cookbooks a compelling topic of inquiry. Perhaps more so than any other genre examined in this thesis, cookbooks also demonstrate the radical capacity of staging an intervention in everyday life: one can survive without travelling, reading newspapers or listening to the radio, but one cannot survive without eating. As such, cookbooks mediate between the personal, domestic space of the family home and specific approaches to cuisine effected by wider economic and geopolitical forces. Their ingredient suggestions, to give just one example, have the potential to instigate broad shifts in the demand for material goods. In the 1970s, Delia Smith's praise for a brand of lemon zester causes shortages of the tool; by the turn of the century, the BBC began to send warning lists of ingredients to food producers in advance of her television shows.²⁷⁶ Other examples of cookbooks' influence are more serious: wartime guides, for example, had the capacity to change how families were nourished and even, through encouraging sparing use of some ingredients and free

²⁷⁴ Wilson, "Introduction", p.12.

²⁷⁵ Orville Prescott, "Books of the Times", *The New York Times* (22 May, 1942). N.P., <https://www.nytimes.com/books/98/01/18/home/fisher-wolf.html>, accessed 02/09/16

²⁷⁶ Claire Cozens, "Hot Stuff - Delia's top 10 hits", *Guardian*, January 20, 2003. <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2003/jan/20/bbc.broadcasting>

deployment of others, to positive broader changes to food pathways, on a national or even transnational scale.²⁷⁷

These relatively specific interventions highlight the way cookbooks capture the more general difficulties we encounter when we seek to analyse culinary culture. Like each act of eating, cookbooks operate in a dialectic of the general and specific, pointing both to the banal and the exceptional. Even books which promise to provide their reader with a suitably broad knowledge so as to equip her for standard, quotidian family cooking still often indicate what is special about the dishes they contain: cooking might be for daily use, but few cookbooks would advertise their recipes as banal. As such, they engage simultaneously with the two meanings of “the everyday”. While this dual-signalling, as I shall demonstrate, is something both Toklas and Marinetti toy with in their appropriations of the cookbook form, critical analysis has struggled to recognise its generative ambiguity. In what follows, I will show how scholarship has largely underestimated the aesthetic and ideological radicalism of Toklas’ modernist, autobiographical cookbook, and simultaneously overlooked the importance of the banal when reading Marinetti’s. In fact, I will show, both books grapple with, and embody, a similar series of tensions (including those signalled by Barthes): between the general and the particular; the banal and the spectacular; the historical and repetitive; the theoretical and haptic.

3. A note on the gastronomic

Acts of eating are not always “everyday”, even as they embody dailiness – breakfast, nightcaps, one’s daily bread – and repetition: the regular shopping list, the routine of a morning coffee or lunchtime sandwich. Food in literature frequently serves as a barometer of the exceptional precisely because it is embedded in the quotidian; it is its very ordinariness which allows deviation from food norms to indicate something special (in a positive sense or otherwise). And while these moments are frequently signalled by the inclusion of an exotic food or special recipe, so too are they sometimes indicated by the way food is served or eaten. The deliberate miscategorisation of food, even if it simply a matter of food being served in the wrong way or at the wrong time, can be a powerful literary device: the selected-for-the-right-day kidney that gets burnt because one is

²⁷⁷ See, for instance, Marguerite Pattern’s *The Wartime Kitchen: Nostalgic Food and Facts from 1945-54* (London: Hamlyn, 2004)

worrying about the letter one's wife has tucked under the pillow; the tea-time party that continues indefinitely because time runs askew in Wonderland; the jam you are forced to make in excessive quantities after your mother's failing health profanely gifts you her entire crop of apricots. We are not just what we eat, but how when we eat it. And food is never just about food.

How To Cook A Wolf was first published in 1942, during the height of American wartime austerity, and is a useful antecedent to both Toklas and Marinetti's texts, being as much a meditation on the condition of hunger as a practical guide for dealing with it. It includes not only cooking tips and recipes for ascetic meals, but also recipes to salivate over that showcase scarce ingredients, framed by dry, first-person prose which tempts the reader while retaining a degree of irony. It is the best known of a series of books by Fisher which play with the cookbook genre – its immediate predecessor in her bibliography, for instance, is *Consider the Oyster* (1941), which muses on the ingredient from a variety of perspectives which include cultural, historical and autobiographical tales. *How To Cook A Wolf* likewise follows a strategy of collage, integrating literary quotations, storytelling and a mix of different styles – from the garrulous to the parataxic – in its prose. (Toklas' comfort with genre play, and perhaps her publisher's, we might suppose, owes something to Fisher's pioneering efforts.) With this kaleidoscope of genres, the book makes a demand for pleasure, even in trying times, both in the kitchen and on the page.

Yet if, as Arlene Voski Avakian and Barbara Haber write in the introductory essay to their 2005 collection *From Betty Crocker to Feminist Food Studies: Critical Perspectives on Women and Food*, "the most important legacy left by Elizabeth David and M.F.K Fisher is the convincing case they make for food as a worthy and dignified area of study",²⁷⁸ it is only recently that scholars have begun to consider the book's form. Fisher – like most food writers – was mostly, initially, studied by feminist scholars who sought first and foremost to make the case for her work as a valid area of study at all.²⁷⁹ It is only in recent years, as work on food and literature has become more mainstream and wide-ranging, that scholars

²⁷⁸ Arlene Voski Avakian and Barbara Haber, "Feminist Food Studies: A brief history", in *From Betty Crocker to Feminist Food Studies: Critical Perspectives on Women and Food* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), p. 6.

²⁷⁹ The history of food studies as a modern literary discipline is short and mostly female. Despite - or because of? - eating being something we all do daily, it has largely to feminist critics to make the case that writing about it has scholarly value.

have developed the links between the aesthetics of the time and Fisher's stylistic radicalism.

Allison Carruth's work is of particular note in this regard. In her essay on "War Rations and the Food Politics of Late Modernism", Carruth explores how M.F.K Fisher's work engages with a wider poetics of food austerity, specifically Anglo-American rationing.

In the context of transatlantic literary culture, the wartime politics of food animates a wide range of modernist writers. By the same token, food writers such as M.F.K Fisher and Elizabeth David adapt modernist aesthetics to the project of instructing home cooks on how to prepare gourmet meals out of scarce resources and black market ingredients.²⁸⁰

How to Cook a Wolf, Carruth writes, is not best described as a "work of 'culinary modernism'", as writer and publisher Max Rudin terms it, but rather as "an intervention in both culinary literature and literary high modernism".²⁸¹ Yet food writing in the interwar period which "[treats] food aesthetically" does not attempt to avoid the "real world" politics of food. "[M]odernist writers", she suggests, do not "resist the culture of consumption nor disavow the 'social life of things' to cite Fredric Jameson and Arjun Appadurai respectively" – rather, they "squarely confront the global market in the practices and ideologies that fuel the food economy".²⁸² Thus even the relatively insignificant pleasures Fisher's books offer – insignificant when compared to the global cost of war – enact a complex politics of resistance, one which frames the war as not being decisively anti-totalitarian so much as a symptom of capitalism. "If an earlier generation of high modernists and haute gourmards neglected domestic cuisine," Carruth says, "Fisher imagines a kind of dissident home cuisine that resists both state food controls and 'capitalized kitchens'".²⁸³

This chapter will broaden and deepen these and other existing critical perspectives via its reading of Marinetti and Toklas. Placed alongside existing scholarship on *How To Cook A Wolf*, these texts facilitate a new way of considering radical reformulations of the cookbook genre. Like Fisher, both are engaged with avant-garde stylistics. Both, however, engage more self-consciously with the relationship between food and art, with their respective uses of the cookbook form skewed accordingly. In what follows, I will show how

²⁸⁰ Allison Carruth, "War Rations and the Food Politics of Late Modernism", *Modernism/modernity* 16, no. 4, (2009), p. 767.

²⁸¹ Carruth, "War Rations", p. 777.

²⁸² Carruth, "War Rations", p. 768.

²⁸³ Carruth, "War Rations", p. 780.

comparing these divergent ways of representing cuisine in text throws into relief the methods by which each author re-formulates the conventions of cookery books to present their radical proposals for cooking and eating. In *The Alice B Toklas Cookbook*, recipes are interpolated in an ongoing autobiographical narrative, formally reflecting the way Toklas situates her text at the intersection of storytelling and instruction. *The Futurist Cookbook*, meanwhile, includes manifestos, newspaper clips and even photographs from restaurants alongside its chapters of recipes – a generic underline to Marinetti’s ambition for the book to form part of a broader program for Futurist living. In each case, this chapter demonstrates, the intermingling of different genres, and their attendant aesthetic practices, is used to mediate the various sets of tensions embodied not only by food as an everyday material, but also by experimental literary techniques which respond to the shifting political and artistic forces of post-war Europe.

The practice of including narrative and other items in cookbooks was not as popular in the early twentieth century as it is now,²⁸⁴ and in both Toklas’ case and Marinetti’s, this formal melange provides a useful starting point for considering the way each text represents real-world food cultures as practiced by the authors – and, potentially, by their readers. Far from being designed to ease the housewife’s burden, these books are willing to complicate existing culinary practises, even to the extent that we might question whether they intend for their instructions to actually be carried out at all. (On that note, it is no coincidence that neither Toklas nor Marinetti make any mention of cooking for children, unlike the books mentioned earlier in this chapter.) Unlike Fisher, Toklas and Marinetti include experimental recipes in their publications which require long preparation times and sometimes – particularly in Marinetti’s case – the acquisition of bizarre ingredients.

As such, each signals towards the ambivalent concept of the everyday: for if both acknowledge, as we shall see, the repetitive nature of cooking, neither text is willing to allow their recipes to be “banal”. Yet by including items such as manifestos and autobiographical accounts alongside their recipes, the texts also force our attention onto how their creative food suggestions relate to, respectively, political ideology and personal lived experience; the relationship which, Highmore suggests, lends the everyday its political function. Read in light of recent work on the everyday, *The Alice B Toklas Cook*

²⁸⁴ See, for instance, Susan H. Gordon’s recent survey of the genre in “A Hunger Satisfied: Life Stories As Told Through Cookbooks”, *Signature*, 12 September, 2012, <http://www.signature-reads.com/2012/09/a-hunger-satisfied-life-stories-as-told-through-cookbooks/>, accessed 10 March 2017

Book and *The Futurist Manifesto* therefore invite us to reconsider the avant-garde's complex relationship to the quotidian as it is situated in specific geographies, represented self-consciously through the polemic use of the cookbook's instructive form.

4. The Alice B Toklas Cookbook

Although their form differs, Fisher and Toklas' texts have much in common: both are in the first person, both deal with scarcity, and both maintain a delicate balance between a wry tone and frank testimony of the pressures which colour their respective memories of life during conflict. In their different ways, both also show how cooking provides a means of defiance through pleasure. Years before second-wave feminism popularised the term "the personal is political", Toklas and Fisher demonstrate how wider geopolitical forces come to bear on domestic space, and how cooking, and writing about cooking, can be acts of resistance. Like many of the texts in this thesis, Toklas' eponymous cookbook was intended for mass audiences. In fact, it is one of the bestselling cookbooks of all time,²⁸⁵ with a popular appeal derived as much from its hashish fudge recipe as from the fact it is the memoir of Gertrude Stein's wife.²⁸⁶ Yet the cookbook differs in form to most of its contemporaries, most obviously in that it is largely composed of Toklas' memoirs, written in a dry, witty prose style.

This is not merely a case of the genre acting as a commercial Trojan Horse. In her essay on Hemingway, Keyser identifies a sympathy between modernist aesthetics and the localised properties of *terroir*, writing that

The modernist style innovated by Hemingway, Williams and Gertrude Stein – characterised by minimalism, parataxis, and the vernacular – shares with *terroir* the aspiration to reshape the individual's relationship to a global commodity system through the rigorous testing of the palate and retraining attention on the local terrain.²⁸⁷

If the stylistic difficulty of Hemingway, Williams and Stein is designed, like *terroir's* culinary practices, to force attention to specific, localised details, then Toklas' style encourages irreverence – to form and geography. Her approach to eating and writing is personal and

²⁸⁵ John Sutherland and Stephen Fender, *Love, Sex, Death and Words: Surprising Tales From a Year in Literature* (London: Icon Books, 2011), p.99.

²⁸⁶ In recognition of Stein's use of the word "wife", and in the tradition of lesbian scholarship which recognises Stein and Toklas as being a married couple in such essentials as were available to them, I have elected to use the term rather than "life partner" - which seems to me a limp and needlessly cautious anachronism.

²⁸⁷ Keyser, "An all-too-moveable feast", n.p.

idiosyncratic: the instructions for recipes, for instance, are formally subordinate to the text's autobiographical aspect, being indented from the main prose and given a title, but not otherwise demarcated. (In fact, even these are disrupted, with autobiographical comments and other observations frequently appended to the end of the instructions). At points, several pages go by with no recipes at all, including Toklas' account of the days in America which she describes as "my ideal of happy house-keeping" – the fruits of which were, apparently, not worth sharing with her readers.²⁸⁸ Similarly, rather than employ the taxonomies usual to cookbooks at the time – where recipes might be divided by ingredient, by meal, or by season – Toklas' chapters are themed around memories, such as "Food to which Aunt Pauline and Lady Godiva [the couple's cars] led us", or "Murder in the Kitchen". As her title – so unlike Fisher's – makes clear, Toklas herself is the book's organising principle. Writing on the cookbook for a *Guardian* article to mark a 2007 reprint, Janet Malcolm summarises thus: "The Cook Book itself sits in a kind of bath of reminiscence about Toklas' life with Gertrude Stein, from which its own literary virtue derives."²⁸⁹

While correct in essence, however, Malcolm's quote does not tell the full story. Toklas' cookbook is, undoubtedly, the intensely personal text other critics have interpreted it as; yet it is also an outward-looking record of eating, and living, in a certain time and place – specifically, the scarce years of wartime Europe. It demands, therefore, that we read it in a historical context as much as a formal one. Like M.F.K Fisher's, Toklas' cookbook details her strategies for eating well, or at least as well as possible, in wartime; unlike Fisher's, it also exhibits a self-conscious artistry – both stylistically and in the cooking it describes – doubtless developed in dialogue with the experimentalism practiced by its author's wife and their friends. Its account of Toklas and Stein's life shows how domestic labour was shaped not only by the couple's relationship, but by various artistic and social groupings which form part of an imbricated transatlantic network of both culinary and artistic exchange. "I wrote it for America", Toklas says in her introduction, a declaration which she follows with a helpful table of comparative quantities for American and British audiences. It is clear from textual codes such as these that the cookbook form is not merely window-dressing. Rather, it allows Toklas to recast her reminiscences as

²⁸⁸ Alice B. Toklas, *The Alice B Toklas Cook Book* (New York:Serif, 1998), p.131.

²⁸⁹ Janet Malcolm, "The odd couple", *Guardian* (27 Oct 2007), n.p.

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/oct/27/featuresreviews.guardianreview31> [accessed: 02/09/16]

something other than simple autobiography. The use of the cookbook form is significant not only because it suggests Toklas is doing something deliberately ambiguous with memoir, but also in that it allows her to situate herself simultaneously as an agent within the gastronomic and creative marketplaces. Rather than seeking to draw out simply its autobiographical elements, then, it is worth balancing these against what we might, for want of a better term, call the “sociological” aspects of the texts: specifically, the ways Toklas uses the cookbook genre to reflect not just on her life with Stein, but also on the craft of domestic cooking as it relates to art, place and politics.

In the opening passages of “Murder in the Kitchen”, Toklas makes it clear that her genre play is self-aware, while simultaneously making explicit the link between her culinary life and the wider politics of the French Occupation:

Cook-books have always intrigued and seduced me. When I was still a dilettante in the kitchen they held my attention, even the dull ones, from cover to cover, the way crime and murder stories did Gertrude Stein.²⁹⁰

If cookbooks were a pleasurable read for Toklas, akin to the murder mysteries enjoyed by her wife, they were not, however, instructive. In fact, she describes how learning to cook “suddenly and unexpectedly became a disagreeable necessity . . . when war came and Occupation followed”. It was at this time, Toklas writes, that “murder in the kitchen began”.²⁹¹ This mix of fun and necessity points us to the central dynamic of the text: one in which Toklas uses the cookbook form to situate her personal recollections playfully against the backdrop of the Occupation. Her deeply individual account of food exists only in dialogue with the impersonal forces of conflict. The ways Toklas and Stein’s transnational lifestyle adheres to, and deviates from, the various publicly-sanctioned components of heterosexual domesticity invite us to consider the rapidly-shifting codes of the twentieth-century domestic sphere as located in an international context. As opposed to the brutish experimental strategies of *La Cucina Futurista*, *The Alice B Toklas Cook Book* presents cooking as a process of constant refinement, by which one is able to maintain a quality of life which meets one’s personal and cultural expectations in spite of material setbacks.

Although the general facts of Toklas and Stein’s shared biography are well-known in modernist studies, certain details bear restating here. The pair met for the first time in

²⁹⁰ Toklas, *Cook Book*, p.37.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

September 1907, on Toklas' first day in Paris,²⁹² with Toklas later moving in with Stein and her brother Leo at the famous 27 rue de Fleurus.²⁹³ It was here that Toklas began cooking, as she recounts in the *Cook Book*:

When in 1908 I went to live with Gertrude Stein at the rue de Fleurus she said we would have American food for Sunday-evening supper, she had had enough French and Italian cooking; the servant would be out and I should have the kitchen to myself. So I commenced to cook the simple dishes I had eaten in the homes of the San Joaquin Valley in California—fricasseed chicken, corn bread, apple and lemon pie. Then when the pie crust received Gertrude Stein's critical approval I made mince-meat . . . [my repertoire] expanded as I grew experimental and adventurous.²⁹⁴

By both Stein and Toklas' accounts, their life together was one framed by their friendships. An early patron of Pablo Picasso and Henri-Émile-Benoît Matisse, Stein's famous Saturday-night salons formed the core of a Left Bank social circle composed of painters, writers and, naturally, their wives – among whose number Stein counted Toklas.²⁹⁵ A 1952 interview given by Toklas to the Bancroft Library's Regional Oral History Office recounts visits to other salons, too, as well as plentiful dinner parties, heady lunch parties and frequent visits to stay with friends overseas.²⁹⁶ Many of these trips are described in detail in her 1963 autobiography *What Is Remembered* (not to be confused with the 1933 Stein-authored *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*), including travels to Spain, to Britain, around France and of course back to America, during the course of which Stein would demand unusual foodstuffs, including, on one trip, a daily meal of “oysters and honeydew melon”.²⁹⁷ Neither woman, evidently, was fearful of appearing idiosyncratic – or, just as significantly, of leveraging their social connections to obtain particular freedoms or goods during the war years.²⁹⁸

The *Cookbook* does not make a meal – so to speak – of this relatively charmed life. Yet it is undeniable that the couple's experience was rare. For Toklas, gifted with both

²⁹² Linda Simon, *The Biography of Alice B. Toklas* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), p. 61.

²⁹³ Howard Greenfeld, *Gertrude Stein: a biography* (Danvers, MA: Crown Publishers, 1973), p. 50.

²⁹⁴ Toklas, *Cook Book*, p. 29.

²⁹⁵ See Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (London: Penguin, 2001), p.18.

²⁹⁶ Alice B. Toklas, (1877-1967) The Bancroft Library Interview conducted by Roland Duncan in 1952, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2012.

²⁹⁷ Alice B. Toklas, *What Is Remembered* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), p. 144.

²⁹⁸ As two Jewish women who remained in France during the Occupation, Toklas and Stein have inevitably been subject to some scrutiny when it comes to the specifics of their survival (and successes) during the war. See James Mellow's *Charmed Circle* for a biographical account of the women's dealings, particularly in relation to Bernard Fäy, who is widely held to have helped protect the pair, and Renate Stendhal's thoughtful “Why the Witch-Hunt Against Gertrude Stein?” published by *tikkun.org*, for an account of these years.

American friends and a wife with the income, and charisma, to retain a relatively privileged lifestyle during the Occupation – “Gertrude Stein”, she writes, “when no one else did would return from a walk with an egg, a pound of white flour, a bit of butter” –²⁹⁹ many of the technological innovations which provide the means for twentieth century expansionism and conflict also provide a means of resistance. Hers is a cuisine which stubbornly maintains its international character even as conflict between nation states circumscribes the free movement of goods and people on a continental and local level both: railways, cars, boats and even passports are all instrumentalised to gain access to food and other resources. Similarly, the *Cook Book* recounts how the couple’s multiple overseas trips allowed Toklas’ cuisine to renew its transatlantic flavour. Indeed, if the core of Toklas’ cookbook is concerned with sustaining an interesting, creative and pleasurable domestic life in spite of the difficulties occasioned by war, then it is her transatlantic culinary knowledge which provides the chief means of sustenance (and therefore resistance). Her initial move to Paris brings these American cooking practises, which she fuses with local forms in the form of ingredients like gelatine – a popular ingredient for desserts for those Americans trying to ration sugar³⁰⁰ – and catsup³⁰¹ (although, as we shall see, Toklas avoids ketchup in her own cooking).

It is this international inheritance, and that of the couple’s similarly international network of friends and employees, which fuels many of the *Cook Book*’s most inventive recipes. Where many cookbooks published during the ‘boom years’ of the genre in America focus on national cuisine – of which the most famous example is surely Julia Child’s 1961 *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, with plentiful instances of Italian-American cookbooks³⁰² as well as Dutch,³⁰³ Viennese,³⁰⁴ and even Chinese offerings –³⁰⁵ the geography here is personal. Nor is Toklas unaware of this fact: rarely is a recipe, ingredient or indeed person referenced in the cookbook without it or their origin being

²⁹⁹ Toklas, *Cook Book*, p.207.

³⁰⁰ See, for instance, the section entitled “Halve your sugar and have your cake”, *American Cookery* (Whitney Publications, 1944), p.9.

³⁰¹ See the pleasingly-named *Pure Ketchup: A History of America’s National Condiment, with Recipes* by Andrew F. Smith (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996).

³⁰² John Mariani, Galina Mariani and Laura Tedeschi, *The Italian American Cookbook: A Feast of Food from a Great American Cooking Tradition* (Boston: Harvard Common Press, 2000), p.18.

³⁰³ *Holland’s southern cookbook: cooking with a southern accent* (Atlanta: Tupper and Love, 1952)

³⁰⁴ Lillian Langseth-Christiansen, *Gourmet’s old Vienna cookbook; a Viennese memoir* (New York: Gourmet, 1959)

³⁰⁵ Harry Caleva, *Chinese cookbook for quantity service; authentic professional recipes* (New York: Ahrens Pub Co, 1958)

mentioned. The geographical rootedness of certain ingredients and traditions is a particular point of fascination for the globally-mobile Toklas. Amused references to national habits pepper the text: “[M]eals in French homes”, for instance, are sufficiently homogenous to her outsider’s eye that “in a very short time they become indistinguishable”.³⁰⁶ This is not “a reproach from a guest”, but rather an acknowledgement that the national cuisine is limited “to what the French consider suitable”.³⁰⁷ Toklas is therefore confidently able to pass on recipes as ‘authentic’, writing that they are intended to “add variety to American or British menus” although they are “no longer novelties” in France. These include a recipe for “The Real Right Way for French Fried Potatoes” – presumably a winking reference to American “French fries” – and a recipe for fish in *meurette* sauce, allegedly “to Burgundy what the Bouillabaisse is to Marseilles”.³⁰⁸ Her familiarity with French cuisine is such that Toklas is able to shift her cooking into a French register when appropriate: when preparing items from her own vegetable garden, for instance, she rarely uses a sauce unless she has French guests, in which case she may make the straightforwardly-named “Green Peas a la Française”.³⁰⁹

Many recipes in the book come from friends of the couple; indeed, a chapter entitled “Recipes from Friends” is dedicated to them. Here, Toklas includes not only the name of the friend who contributes each recipe, but also where they come from, embedding each recipe spatially. In doing so, the chapter comes to represent a geographical network, which is a product of the mobile artistic and social class to which she and her wife belong: one which takes in not only New York and Paris but also London,³¹⁰ Orgival³¹¹ and Dallas³¹² (and elsewhere). Equally, recipes often incorporate the results of different “national kitchens”, so that a recipe from a friend in Paris may carry other spatial inflections, as is the case with “Chinese eggs”, “Gnocchi Alla Piemontese” or the “Pork ‘Alla Pizzariola’ of Calabria” that comes from New York composer (and Stein collaborator) Virgil Thompson.³¹³ Lady Rose, herself a resident of both “Nice and London”,

³⁰⁶ Toklas, *Cook Book*, p.25.

³⁰⁷ Toklas, *Cook Book*, p.144.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁹ Toklas, *Cook Book*, p.267.

³¹⁰ Toklas, *Cook Book*, p.249.

³¹¹ Toklas, *Cook Book*, p.251.

³¹² Toklas, *Cook Book*, p.261.

³¹³ Toklas, *Cook Book*, p.230-1.

sends “a Corsican dish”,³¹⁴ Harold Knapik sends a Turkish kebab recipe (although one “*considerably modified*” [Toklas’ emphasis]).³¹⁵ A number of foreign servants who pass through the house – on whom more detail later – also contribute their local cuisines to Toklas’ culinary repertoire, from the Polish-American who makes “a Polish, not a Russian, Borscht, Polish and not Russiak Piroshke” to Jeanne, who provides Toklas with several local potato recipes.³¹⁶

This sort of culinary code-switching is a feature of the *Cook Book*. Aside from the couple’s own travels, Stein and Toklas’ social circle allows not only for their transnational taste to be further ramified but also provides a forum for Toklas’ culinary creativity. Both Toklas’ autobiographical accounts and the *Cook Book* itself allude to the close relationship between the couple’s eating and their social life, as many scholarly accounts of the Stein-Toklas salons also prove.³¹⁷ What is less commonly noted, however, is Toklas’ creativity in providing for these occasions. I wrote earlier in this chapter that it is often as much the way food is served as what is eaten that demarcates a meal as ‘special’. The *Cook Book* may be specifically designed to illustrate this principle. Dishes are presented with a story explaining when, and to whom, Toklas served them; there is even a chapter entitled “Dishes for Artists”, containing exactly what its name suggests. Elsewhere, the use of relatively scant provisions becomes a significant emblem of hospitality during the Occupation, as Toklas ensures that guests are each offered “two cups of tea without sugar, milk or lemon and one cigarette” (“With economy”, she writes, “the ten pounds [of tea] a friend had sent us from the United States in the summer of 1939 lasted until the liberation”).³¹⁸

³¹⁴ Toklas, *Cook Book*, p.235.

³¹⁵ Toklas, *Cook Book*, p.238.

³¹⁶ Toklas, *Cook Book*, p.178.

³¹⁷ See, for instance, the account given by Steven Watson in *Prepare for Saints: Gertrude Stein, Virgin Thomson, and the Mainstreaming of American Modernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 19.

³¹⁸ Toklas, *Cook Book*, p.206.

Deviations from good manners are also notable. In the *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Stein has her Toklas narrate how the friendship between herself and Picasso began over the dinner table:

He was sitting next to Gertrude Stein at dinner and she took up a piece of bread. This, said Picasso, snatching it back with violence, this piece of bread is mine. She laughed and he looked sheepish. That was the beginning of their intimacy.³¹⁹

Picasso's rude transgression earns not awkwardness or anger but Stein's laughter; her good humour in the face of his bad manners forges intimacy. This moment, in which the usual rules around food are played with, sets the tone for the trio's dynamic, and in Toklas' "Dishes for Artists" chapter, she reveals how she invoked her American culinary heritage to make an experimental dish for Picasso:

One day when Picasso was to lunch with us I decorated a fish in a way that I thought would amuse him. I chose a fine striped bass and cooked it according to a theory of my grandmother who had no experience in cooking and who rarely saw her kitchen but who had endless theories about cooking as well as about many other things. She contended that a fish having lived its life in water, once caught, should have no further contact with the element in which it had been born and raised A short time before serving it I covered the fish with an ordinary mayonnaise and, using a pastry tube, decorated it with a red mayonnaise, not coloured with catsup – horror of horrors – but with tomato paste. Then I made a design with sieved hard-boiled eggs, the whites and yolks apart, with truffles and finely chopped *finest herbes*. I was proud of my *chef d'oeuvre* when it was served and Picasso exclaimed its beauty. But, said he, should it not rather have been made in honour of Matisse than of me.³²⁰

Toklas' account of the recipe is telling not only in terms of what it reveals about her and Stein's eating habits. There is an oft-quoted passage from *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, immediately preceding an anecdote about Picasso's wife, in which "Toklas" says:

Before I decided to write this book about my twenty-five years with Gertrude Stein, I had often said that I would write, *The wives of geniuses I have sat with*. I have sat with so many. I have sat with wives who were not wives, of geniuses who were real geniuses. I have sat with real wives of geniuses who were not real geniuses. I have sat with wives of geniuses, of near geniuses, of would be geniuses, in short I have sat very often and very long with many wives and wives of many geniuses.³²¹

³¹⁹ Stein, *The Autobiography*, p. 52.

³²⁰ Toklas, *Cook Book*, p. 29-30.

³²¹ Stein, *The Autobiography*, p. 18.

This has been taken up by some feminist critics as indicative of the way the couple's relationship involved an uneven power dynamic akin to that found in contemporary heterosexual marriages (the fact that it is Stein, not Toklas, who pens this "autobiography" doubtless does not help). Summarising these debates in her introduction to *Baby precious always shines*, Kay Turner writes how Toklas is frequently read as "occupying the 'feminine', subordinate position of secretary, cook, and willing servant" in the partnership,³²² while Stein is occupied with the public-facing, masculine role of artist. Yet critics might be cautious of the risk of reading Toklas' position as subservient simply because her realm is the domestic one. Toklas' role in the kitchen is not that of a beleaguered housewife, but something more ambiguous and personal, which incorporates a complex mass of relations with Stein, her art, their shared life and Toklas' own creativity and expertise as cook and household manager. As Turner writes, the apparently "heterosexual convention" of their marriage is not fixed, but rather "fully chosen and manipulated for the purposes of pleasure and freedom".³²³ In the *Autobiography*, for instance, "Toklas" writes that "I do inevitably take my comparisons from the kitchen because I like food and cooking and know something about it", adding later that "I used to say that Gertrude Stein was the chauffeur and I was the cook" –³²⁴ a line which, perhaps surprisingly, places Stein in a similarly domestic role rather than as "the writer".

Yet if Toklas' cook is here the equivalent of Stein's chauffeur, it is not that alone – as the *Cookbook* makes clear. For Toklas, cooking is also an art, despite its impermanence when compared to other creative forms:

When treasures are recipes they are less clearly, less distinctly remembered than when they are tangible objects. They evoke however quite as vivid a feeling – that is, to some of us who, considering cooking an art, feel that a way of cooking can produce something that approaches an aesthetic emotion. What more can one say? If one had the choice of again hearing Pachmann play the two Chopin sonatas or riding once more at the Café Anglais, which would one choose?³²⁵

Understanding that for Toklas cooking is a form of artistry as much as it is necessary domestic labour allows us to recognise her recipe for Picasso as a tribute to a fellow creative. Notably, Toklas chooses to serve him not something from a cookbook, but a dish

³²² Kay Turner, *Baby precious always shines: selected love notes between Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), p. 2.

³²³ Turner, *Baby precious*, p.10

³²⁴ Stein, *The Autobiography*, p. 206.

³²⁵ Toklas, *Cook Book*, p.100.

of her own invention which combines her American heritage with techniques and ingredients favoured in classical French cuisine. The clumsiness of her grandmother's advice, more poetic than technical – as might be expected from a woman “who had no experience in cooking” – leads Toklas away from cooking the fish in water; instead, she uses a typically French bouquet of *fines herbes* to create a *court-bouillon*, defined in the 1977 edition of *Larousse Gastronomique* as “an aromatic liquor”.³²⁶ The recipe indicates a certain degree of culinary snobbery on Toklas' part: rather than, “horror of horrors”, use ketchup to colour the mayonnaise she uses tomato purée. This she combines in a rich mixture of eggs, truffles, chopped herbs and sauce to create a design on the fish, to which Picasso responds by playfully suggesting she might have instead made the dish for Matisse, whose paintings often included bowls of fish.³²⁷ Toklas names the dish her *chef d'oeuvre*, a pun which incorporates the usual meaning of the phrase – a masterpiece – but also the title “chef”, used in professional kitchens everywhere as a deferential form of address. Thus her cooking is not simply an act of service for someone to whom her wife is a friend and patron, but also a “tribute”, to use Picasso's word, from one artist to another. Biographies frequently mention Toklas waiting on artists' wives during Stein's salons; yet in this anecdote, we see her area of expertise imbricated with the work of the artists themselves, albeit with a degree of amused irony.

Her use of the cookbook form highlights this playful creativity. For, while Toklas' prose sometimes resembles Stein's in its use of parataxis, the book as a whole is marked by a loose associative quality quite different from the densely circuitous writing practised by its author's wife. Recipes, for instance, are not only placed within chapter groupings whose boundaries are dictated by Toklas' memories, but internally organised in accordance with the way one ingredient, place or person reminds her of another item. Two recipes for mushroom sandwiches, for instance, are followed by a chicken recipe, solely because the second ends:

This makes a delicious sandwich that tastes like chicken. A Frenchman can say no more. Which gave me the idea of introducing chicken sandwiches in which chopped

³²⁶ Prosper Montagné and Charlotte Snyder-Turgeon, *The New Larousse Gastronomique* (New York: Crown, 1977), p. 278.

³²⁷ See, for instance, *Goldfish and Sculpture* (1912), *Goldfish and Pallett* (1914) and, simply, *The Goldfish* (1910).

and pounded chicken was substituted for the mushrooms. Naturally they were well received.³²⁸

“So we are back”, Toklas writes, “to chicken”. This almost stream-of-consciousness association between recipes matches the book’s loquacious prose on the level of form.

So, too, are her recipe titles prompted by personal observations. Rarely do they refer to ingredients; quite frequently they refer to a dish’s geographical origins, but most enjoyable are the titles for recipes Toklas has invented (or gathered nameless) and christened herself. Thus an omelette recipe “without a name” becomes “Omelette sans nom”,³²⁹ while an involved recipe for a leg of lamb – collected from a surgeon and requiring a hypodermic syringe to inject the meat with an emulsion of red wine and olive oil, and perhaps the most “modernist” recipe in the book – is named “*Gigot de la Clinique*”.³³⁰ Other titles poke fun at circumstance or the person from whom they were acquired. After telling the final story of “Murder in the Kitchen”, in which her cook Kaspar leaves a woman behind broken-hearted after eloping with a “dark lady” – its inclusion in the chapter another quiet joke – Toklas says that “the last souvenir of Kaspar” is a recipe for “A tender tart”.³³¹ This irreverence extends to tense. Even within the instructional space of the recipe, normally written in the present tense imperative, amusing anecdotes often interrupt, such as in a recipe for haricot (“yes, that is its seventeenth-century name”), which slide between different tenses:

. . . . Then add 8 slices of toast on which 3 tablespoons vinegar have been sprinkled. There are some who like a few prunes or raisins added. Our haricot’s sauce had raisins in it. They had previously been swollen by soaking in hot water. They are an agreeable addition and cut the acid of the vinegar.³³²

5. Life during wartime

If Toklas’ negotiation of the various local cuisines she encounters is done with humour, however, translating the knowledge she has gained in France into the culinary idiom of her

³²⁸ Toklas, *Cook Book*, p.109.

³²⁹ Toklas, *Cook Book*, p.106.

³³⁰ Toklas, *Cook Book*, p.33.

³³¹ Toklas, *Cook Book*, p.46.

³³² Toklas, *Cook Book*, p. 73.

home country also prompts serious considerations. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, given that it is the Occupation – and the resulting loss of staff – which forces her to become a rounded and inventive household chef, the impact conflict has on food provision and preparation is a key theme of the *Cook Book*; although, as the fact the first mention of war is in “Murder in the Kitchen” hints, her treatment of even this topic does not shy away from the irony which characterises the text as a whole. This is not to say, however, that Toklas avoids communicating the difficulty her task. “Suddenly”, she writes in her chapter “Food in the Bugey during the Occupation”, “we realised we were hungry, but it was not mentioned”. She dreams “of a long silver dish floating in the air and on it were three large slices of succulent ham” – a dream which haunts Toklas “for six months . . . before the blessed black market was organised”.³³³

Yet it is the social aspect of food, always placed in historical context, which occupies the bulk of the chapter and indeed Toklas’ war-writing in general. Often her description of food acts as a means of making her allegiances clear. She describes, for example, the *kneppes* – calves’ liver formed into balls with egg, breaded, and boiled – which her cook serves for American liberating soldiers,³³⁴ and her experience meeting an ex-Prisoner of War, whom she initially mistakes for a German spy, at dinner in a Nîmes hotel.³³⁵ Equally, while the German officers billeted with the couple cook in a way which “has no place in a cook-book”, Toklas includes their diet as a sort of sociological case-study, writing:

Per man: 1 large slice of ham 1½ inches thick heated in deep fat, the gelatinous-glutinous contents of a pint tin (replacing bread and potatoes?), the muddy liquid contents of a large tin (replacing coffee?).³³⁶

Her disdain for their diet – she reports that even her cook’s hens will not eat the “substitute for bread and potatoes” – is compounded by the apparent incomprehension expressed in her bracketed suggestions, suggesting a gulf of understanding between herself and the German soldiers on a fundamental level. Food xenophobia of this type is a common trope in stories of immigration and conflict, from the disgust of settlers³³⁷ to racist responses to

³³³ Toklas, *Cook Book*, p.205.

³³⁴ Toklas, *Cook Book*, p.63.

³³⁵ Toklas, *Cook Book*, p. 64-5.

³³⁶ Toklas, *Cook Book*, p.212.

³³⁷ See *Food in Time and Place: The American Historical Association Companion to Food History*, ed. Paul Freedman, Joyce E. Chaplin, and Ken Albala (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), p. 152.

halal meat,³³⁸ and is a form of attack which leverages the primacy of food in everyday life – as Highmore’s account of the macho Anglo-Celtic culinary bravado around hot curries reminds us.³³⁹ Toklas’ bafflement at the Germans’ food, and her refusal to clarify the contents of their cuisine or explain how they cooked, makes her description of their diet an unusual inclusion for a cookbook: one aimed at expressing her sense of alienation from the occupying force more than giving her reader information about the food. She need not say that she considers the American soldiers her friends and the German soldiers her enemies. Her description of what they eat, and how they dine, is enough.

This is just one deviation from the “ordinary” conventions of the cookbook form with which Toklas gestures to the wider material politics of wartime. Where she uses humour to narrate the ingenuity with which she tackles the sudden paucity of food, the cookbook form becomes an additional agent in her narrative, in subtle but meaningful ways. She describes stocking the house before the grocery stores empty, buying “dried fruits, chicory to replace coffee, sardines, spices, corn meal and cleaning materials”. “The Autumn harvest in the vegetable garden”, she writes, “would largely see us through the winter with the string beans and the tomatoes I had put up”.³⁴⁰ Using the black market also poses specific problems for Stein and Toklas as immigrants, with parcels addressed to “the two American women” causing anxiety for the pair.³⁴¹ Constrained, Toklas invents a dish to utilise her vegetable garden which she humorously names “Tomatoes au natural”. This involves cooking 28 lbs – twelve kilos – of tomatoes in salicylic acid so that they might be canned for winter, and is what she describes as “a foolproof recipe”.³⁴² Other items in “Food in the Bugey” include a recipe for home-made mustard, using seeds which had been “a chance purchase one day when there was nothing else to be found”. The recipe calls for parsley, tarragon, chervil and mustard seed, pounded in a mortar and then combined slowly with oil and vinegar. In season, gooseberry or currant juice can be used if vinegar is not available. “These make a delicious mustard”, Toklas says, “but it will not keep long” – although the recipe does allow “all our friends to partake of a relish that had

³³⁸ See James Carr, *Experiences of Islamophobia: Living with Racism in the Neoliberal Era* (New York: Routledge, 2016), p.40.

³³⁹ Ben Highmore, *Bitter After Taste: Affect, Food, and Social Aesthetics*. In *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010). N.p.; electronic copy courtesy of the author.

³⁴⁰ Toklas, p. 205.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*

³⁴² *Ibid.*

disappeared long before”.³⁴³ Similarly, Toklas provides a recipe for black market truffles purchased in Belley, which uses a quarter pound of chocolate with a tablespoon and a half of powdered sugar to recreate the delights that the confectioner would hide from Occupation Forces. “This makes a very small quantity”, Toklas advises.³⁴⁴

The quantities are significant in these recipes. Rather than adapt them for use during peacetime – giving, for instance, a ratio of tomatoes to other ingredients, rather than suggesting the reader cook a whole 28 lbs, or scaling up the truffle – Toklas instead publishes her recipes using the quantities as she cooked each dish during the Occupation. Thus any reader who wishes to recreate Toklas’ cooking at a reasonable scale, given peacetime access to ingredients, is forced to convert her recipes. To use the terminology of narratology, her recipes are lodged in the world of the story rather than the world of the text (or, more accurately, the world in which one might expect the text to be read) – a subtle adaptation to the conventions of the cook book genre which, again, privileges the personal over the utilitarian. By forcing the reader to translate her culinary experiences for modern use, Toklas draws attention to, and requests the reader’s engagement with, the methods by which she eked out pleasure during the Occupation.

This is no accident. Indeed, pleasure might reasonably be identified as the guiding principle of *The Alice B. Toklas Cook Book*: both the core of its quietly revolutionary praxis and the focus of Toklas’ stylistic play. It is significant, for example, that despite all Toklas has to recount about scarcity, she does not view conflict as a solely limiting force, writing how it can open, as well as limit, food pathways:

I fell to considering how every nation . . . has its idiosyncrasies in food and drink conditioned by climate, soil and temperament. And I thought about wars and conquests and how invading or occupying troops carry their habits with them and so in time perhaps modify the kitchen or table.

If this comment seems to jar with Toklas’ account of the German soldiers in the Bugey, then this may be because the observation seems, in context, not to refer solely to occupying forces but also to the couple themselves. Immediately succeeding a sentence in which Toklas explains she has “lived so long in France that both countries [America and France] seem to be mine”, and therefore took to considering “the differences in eating habits and general attitude to food and the kitchen in the United States and here”, the line

³⁴³ Toklas, *Cook Book*, p.212.

³⁴⁴ Toklas, *Cook Book*, p.213.

on “carrying their habits with them” could be as much a descriptor of Toklas’ own transnational culinary melange – a sense compounded by the next sentence, in which Toklas admits “[s]uch speculations led me to root about among my huge collection of recipes and compile this cook-book”.³⁴⁵ Needless to say, this is not the most eloquent expression of how food and war interact – but even in this somewhat uneasy juxtaposition of ideas, Toklas makes it apparent she views the combination as enabling, as well as disabling. Rather than read the passage as merely a series of cobbled-together thoughts, then, I propose that it is evidence of the fact Toklas saw herself as an agent engaged in disseminating food ideas through transnational networks of commercial publishing – an “occupying” insurgent by dint of being an American during the Occupation. In this light, her insistence on finding pleasure, and providing hospitality – particularly to other Americans – becomes as subversive as it is indulgent.

Rebecca Solnit’s *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities* (2004) has enjoyed a resurgence as of late. This is no surprise: it is a cheering, galvanising read, and seems to have become once again much-discussed following the United Kingdom’s 2016 referendum on membership of the European Union and, later that same year, the election of Donald Trump. It is also a book which frequently draws comparisons between the early twentieth century and the early twenty-first, and I mention it here because its lesson about the importance of emotion as it relates to political change is illuminating. (A full study of emotion in the *Cook Book* is regrettably outside the scope of this thesis, although it might readily serve as an avenue for further investigation.) I wrote in the introduction to this thesis that modernism’s fascination with rupture and revolution should not lead us to sideline work which operates in tandem with, rather than in opposition to, mainstream cultural forms. Recent work which challenges claims of modernism’s impersonality and, without wishing to oversimplify, despair, might be taken in the same spirit. Toklas’ writing poses a challenge to the notion that experimental writing cannot be simultaneously banal, personal and, yes, joyful. “When you face a politics that aspires to make you fearful, alienated and

³⁴⁵ Toklas, *Cook Book*, p.xi.

isolated”, Solnit writes, “joy is a fine initial act of insurrection”.³⁴⁶ If the author of *The Alice B. Toklas Cook Book* speaks of herself as an American, rather than as a Jew, then subsequent interpretations of her and her wife’s autobiographical writing are enough to remind us of the full implications of this war memoir which assumes seeking physical indulgence to be a right, even when soldiers are billeted in your home.

6. The Empire bites back

If that sounds glib, there is a necessary coda, which ought to prevent our vision of Toklas and Stein’s life from slipping into a romantic register. For, as Maria DiBattista and Emily O. Wittman write in the introduction to their 2014 collection *Modernism and Autobiography*, autobiography does not always announce the things we most readily glean from it— even when performed self-consciously. “The self [the author reveals]”, they write, “may be hiding in plain sight, to be inferred from outward shows of feeling, taste, and opinion”.³⁴⁷ Aside from the privilege of owning servants, the modern reader may also recoil at the amateur ethnography Toklas indulges in, particularly when it comes to what Alissa G. Karl terms “colonial labour”. In her study *Modernism and the Marketplace*, Karl points out the extent to which Stein and Toklas’ lifestyle relies on this labour, reading the 2003 novel *The Book of Salt*, Monique Truong’s semi-fictional account of the couple’s life as told from the perspective of their cook Binh, as a text which “exposes how global hierarchies are produced from which so much modernist literature emerged”. Toklas and Stein, she writes, literally rely on colonial labour for “sustenance”.³⁴⁸ “In this instance, the modernist is imperialist not as a result of affiliation with imperialist nations, but through practises of appropriation and consumption, such that the imperial metropole serves modernist proliferation well.”³⁴⁹ For Karl, then, Toklas’ book might remind us of the way that “[c]onsumer capital and economics can help us to understand the histories from which they are derived because they also are themselves representative discourses that render social life and value systems in particular ways”. As she puts it,

³⁴⁶ Solnit, Rebecca. *Hope in the Dark* [eBook edition] (London: Canongate Books, 2010), n.p.

³⁴⁷ Maria DiBattista and Emily O. Wittman, *Modernism and Autobiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. xiv.

³⁴⁸ Alissa G. Karl, *Modernism and the Marketplace: Literary Culture and Consumer Capitalism in Rhys, Woolf, Stein and Nella Larsen* (London: Routledge, 2009), p.2.

³⁴⁹ Karl, *Modernism and the Marketplace*, p.3.

[It is] not possible to discuss adequately the ideologies and operations of consumerism without considering the ways that consumerism and modernism alike interfaced with procedures of capitalist economies more broadly, with the classed hierarchies that organise capitalist structures, with shifting but still active nation- and empire-building, and with racial and ethnic dynamics of societies in demographic flux.³⁵⁰

Juxtaposed with Toklas' comments on the "blessed" black market, and the fact that she and Stein had enough space to have soldiers billeted at their home, we can see how the political dimension of Toklas' pleasure brings us full circle to autobiography. For, if her somatic joy is a means of resistance, it is a resistance specifically accessible to a wealthy, articulate and well-connected woman – and although her account makes no claim to universality, it is nevertheless important to mark her account as specific, and, ultimately, personal.

To the extent that the distribution of labour in *The Alice B. Toklas Cook Book* can undermine any claim to Toklas' radicalism, the occlusion of labour in *The Futurist Cookbook* throws into doubt the text's relationship with reality (for want of a better word). The form of Marinetti's cookbook, as we shall see, differs from both *How To Cook A Wolf* and *The Alice B. Toklas Cook Book*; if the secondary genre of these texts is autobiography, *The Futurist Cookbook* is closer to a manifesto – and is, accordingly, more concerned with the future than the past. Oriented decisively away from the quotidian, the book advocates a radically redistributed culinary regime which forces self-conscious sensuality to the fore. Yet the extent to which labour is not accounted for is still, at first glance, surprising – particularly given the complexity of the recipes contained within the text.

F.T. Marinetti's *La Cucina Futurista*, or *The Futurist Cookbook*, is a text which enjoys a certain degree of infamy. Known popularly today for its amusingly incendiary attack on pasta – on which more shortly – the book represents an attempt to engineer a complete culinary idiom formulated for the Futurist lifestyle. Published almost fifteen years after Marinetti's 1909 Futurist manifesto, the book contains recipes, here called "formulas", which reflect the poetic and social values of the movement. Like other Futurist musings on

³⁵⁰ Karl, *Modernism and the Marketplace*, p.4.

art,³⁵¹ film,³⁵² national identity,³⁵³ and so on, the cookbook attempts to inject radical art into everyday life. As Will Noonan writes in his essay on the book's legacy, "A Taste of Refusal", the cookbook "brings the aesthetic ideals and political outlook of the Italian Futurist movement into the kitchen" by "[c]ombining recipes and banquet menus with a collage of quotations, manifestos and polemics on food".³⁵⁴ It is this unusual juxtaposition of forms that is the most striking feature of the text: aside from the forms mentioned above, *The Futurist Cookbook* also contains diagrams, journalistic accounts of dinner parties, and even a glossary.

Together, these items work to fabricate a gastronomic system which reflects Futurist strategies for living: fast, sensual and imbued with geopolitical significance. Intensely hostile to the banal or unconsidered, the cookbook profiles "deliberately unpalatable meals [which] violate the traditionally sacrosanct – but usually unspoken – conventions surrounding food, taste, and eating".³⁵⁵ In what follows, I will suggest that Marinetti's recipes mirror the book's *bricolage*, mixing incongruous combinations of ingredients to disrupt the sensory equilibrium of the eater. Like the subversive redeployment of the textual codes associated with the cookbook genre, his radical miscategorisation of food items allows the "everyday" material of the Italian people to be reconstituted as a series of surprises, impossible to experience passively. As the remainder of this chapter will demonstrate, Marinetti's experimental cuisine thus stages a collision between the literally quotidian act of consumption and Futurist praxis, formally rewriting the "everyday" as a series of exceptional events.

The political tones of this project are as clear as one would expect. As its introduction explains, the text purports to have nothing less than "the noble and universally expedient aim of changing radically the eating habits of our race . . . with brand-new food combinations in which experiment, intelligence and imagination will economically take the

³⁵¹ Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrá, Luigi Russolo et al, "Manifesto of the Futurist Painters (1910)", in *Futurism: an Anthology*, eds. Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, Laura Wittman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 62-3.

³⁵² F.T. Marinetti, Bruno Corra, Emilio Settimelli et al, "The Futurist Cinema (Italy, 1916)", *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Scott MacKenzie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), pp. 15-8.

³⁵³ F.T. Marinetti, "Futurist Speech to the English (1910)", *Futurism: an Anthology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 70-3.

³⁵⁴ Will Noonan, "A Taste of Refusal: Aesthetics, Politics and the Legacy of F.T. Marinetti's *Futurist Cookbook*", *The Politics and Aesthetics of Refusal*, ed. Caroline Hamilton, Michelle Kelly, Elaine Minor and Will Noonan (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), p. 165.

³⁵⁵ Noonan, "A Taste of Refusal", p. 166.

place of quantity, banality, repetition and expense” –³⁵⁶ a statement which anticipates Italian fascism’s interest in what Andrew Hewitt calls “the illicit humanism . . . which celebrates ‘the continuous development of man’”.³⁵⁷ The cookbook thus declares war on two fronts, proposing a diet which uses culinary collage and bizarre serving suggestions to disrupt not only complacency but also any snobbery around food. In doing so, *The Futurist Cookbook* addresses the predictability of most food rituals, particularly those rooted in domesticity. Marinetti looks forward, for instance, to the moment “when the kitchen is no longer the dominion of inept housewives” – a potentially surprising declaration given the way the figure of the housewife would come to be valorised during the Fascist regime,³⁵⁸ but one which fits with the nationalist machismo of Marinetti’s Futurism.

That Marinetti stated an intention to remove cooking from the hands of the figure who was, in most Italian households, the only person doing it is a clear sign of how totalising and radical his culinary regime was to be. As early as 1909, while writing his manifesto, Marinetti saw political and artistic evolution as being inseparable, envisioning, as Christine Poggi puts it “not just the creation of an avant-garde literary movement but also the cultural and political regeneration of Italy” in “an activist avant-garde”.³⁵⁹ (A formulation not so different, we might suppose, as that proposed by the Gramscian *Left Review*.) As Jonathan Dunnage writes in his history of twentieth-century Italy, the family unit was often “a vehicle of solidarity in the face of transformation”. Yet as emigration – international and internal – gathered pace around the turn of the century, the family’s association “with widespread practices of patronage and clientelism” fuelled suspicions that kinship ties represented “an obstacle to the development of civic consciousness and horizontal solidarity”.³⁶⁰ Italy’s entry into the First World War further disrupted the country’s predominant social forms. Futurism is widely understood to have been formulated partially to exploit and intervene in this moment of change. As Anne Bowler writes in “Politics as art: Italian Futurism and Fascism”, “[i]nternationally, Futurism gave voice to a number of

³⁵⁶ F.T. Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, trans Suzanne Brill (London: Penguin, 2014), p. 21.

³⁵⁷ Andrew Hewitt, *Fascist Modernism: Aesthetics, Politics and the Avant-Garde* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 110.

³⁵⁸ See, for instance, Lucia Re, “Futurism and Fascism, 1914-1945”, *A History of Women’s Writing in Italy*, ed Letizia Panizza and Sharon Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 202.

³⁵⁹ Christine Poggi, *Inventing Futurism: The Art and Politics of Artificial Optimism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 1; p. 9.

³⁶⁰ Jonathan Dunnage, *Twentieth Century Italy: A Social History* [eBook edition] (London: Routledge, 2014), n.p.

concerns and ideas central to the first decades of the century”.³⁶¹ Art, the Futurists suggested, could be an antidote for the “postwar syndrome” – characterised by “pessimism, indecision, neurosis [and] lack of will”, as Cinzia Sartini Blum puts it.³⁶²

This interventionist approach to aesthetics informs *The Futurist Cookbook*. Twentieth-century cookbooks, particularly general domestic cookbooks – as opposed to, say, books themed around certain ingredients – were often marketed as containing time-saving solutions for the housewife. For Marinetti, however, concerns about the economy of time are unacceptably banal – even traitorous. (In fact, the recipes in his cookbook are time-consuming to such an extent that we might reasonably question whether anyone could possibly be expected to make them, a fact I will discuss in more detail shortly.) Writing on Marinetti’s aesthetics in her study of Benito Mussolini’s Italy, Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi explains how the poet “encouraged the emancipation of all individuals from the tyranny of homogenous life”.³⁶³ In the kitchen, this meant translating the “constant development of man” into a process of constant culinary renewal. Cooks must be active in the pursuit of their craft: rather than eat like “rats, cats or oxen”, as the cookbook has it, the Futurist “art of self-nourishment” requires creative originality. Diminished attentiveness in this regard, the book implies, is tantamount to socio-political negligence. Marinetti explicitly calls on his cooks to renew their practice continually, warning that “we do not want Italian cooking to remain a museum” in a paragraph with the subheading “down with the museum-kitchen”.³⁶⁴ “Like all arts”, Marinetti writes, “[Futurist cooking must] eschew plagiarism and demands creative originality”.³⁶⁵ Furthermore, Marinetti proposes that all people ought to award cooking this degree of attention: the pasta controversy, for instance, is winkingly said to have been discussed by “all social categories”, “from society ladies to cooks, literary men, astronomers, doctors, street urchins, nursemaids, soldiers, peasants, dockers”. *The Futurist Cookbook*’s impulses simultaneously homogenise, demanding all citizens participate in its revolutionary gastronomic regime, and oppose repetition. This radically amplified sensory experience allows the act of cooking, so closely

³⁶¹ Anne Bowler, “Politics as art: Italian Futurism and Fascism”, *Theory and Society* (20:6), Dec 1991, pp. 763-94.

³⁶² Cinzia Sartini Blum, *The Other Modernism: F. T. Marinetti’s Futurist Fiction of Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 133.

³⁶³ Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini’s Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 119.

³⁶⁴ Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, p. 150.

³⁶⁵ Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, p.21.

allied with the rhythms of everyday life, to be ruptured from mundanity and elevated to the level of art; a process which, Marinetti suggests, is an essential part of achieving full participation as a productive citizen in the Futurist polis. At one point in the text, Marinetti recounts a conversation with the aeropoet Filia, in which he asks his companion: “What will be left of the old regime?” Nothing, Filia responds – “not even the saucepans”.

7. Theory versus practice

At this point, it is worth addressing the most obvious question about *The Futurist Cookbook*: is it serious? Does Marinetti really expect these recipes to be cooked and eaten; does he really think readers will sit and stroke each other’s pyjamas?³⁶⁶ There is certainly an argument to be made that *The Futurist Cookbook*’s “formulas” are so complicated as to be deliberately off-putting. The supposedly “improvised dinner”, for instance, asks that the cooks install “moving carpets that run along in front of the diners, carrying every kind of different dish”.³⁶⁷ Even shorter recipes, presented in a section entitled “Futurist formulas for restaurants and quisibive”, require fiddly presentation, such as wrapping a trout “in very thin slices of calves’ liver” to make “aeropoet” Filia’s “Immortal Trout”³⁶⁸ or floating, in a cocktail made of grappa, gin, kummel and anise liquor – a strong and bitter formula – “a square of anchovy paste wrapped pharmaceutically in a wafer”.³⁶⁹ If the text fundamentally lacks clarity as to its purpose, however, then this lack is not so much an oversight as a deliberate feature. In their book *Futurism* (2009), Lawrence Rainey, Laura Wittman and Poggi describe the recipes as being “charged with elements of the grotesque, the macabre, the lurid – trappings of literary decadence, yet so strained, so overworked that they deliberately cross over into the comic, producing an uncanny effect”.³⁷⁰ (This is a feature of Marinetti’s work that Poggi has identified elsewhere; her *Inventing Futurism*, for instance, describes his account of his car crash as being “deliberately provocative, simultaneously extreme in its claims, and tinged with self-

³⁶⁶ See “a tactile dinner party”, Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, p. 125.

³⁶⁷ Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, p.181.

³⁶⁸ Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, p.195.

³⁶⁹ Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, p.197.

³⁷⁰ Lawrence Rainey, “Introduction: F.T. Marinetti and the Development of Futurism”, *Futurism* ed. Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, Laura Wittman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 3.

parody”.)³⁷¹ Yet Marinetti’s tone, and the genres he chooses to borrow from, suggest that the directions here ought at least to be entertained as instructive, even if not followed to the letter: manifestos and glossaries are, after all, designed to share directions just as cookbooks are, and this accrual of instructive genres cumulatively suggests that *something* is to be learned from *The Futurist Cookbook* – even if that something is not, precisely, how to make “Immortal Trout”. Similarly, asides intended to reassure and inspire the cook might reasonably be taken as a sign that Marinetti wishes for the recipes here to be followed in essence, if not in specifics: he tells readers, for instance, that the quantities given in the book – which are often unhelpfully vague – should not put one off. “[F]ar from constituting a matter of concern”, Marinetti reassures, this ambiguity “should on the contrary stimulate the imagination of Futurist cooks, for fortuitous mistakes often lead to new dishes”.³⁷² If the text has a degree of camp, then, it does not necessarily imply that it is not to be taken seriously in its general vision, whether or not one then goes home to mix up a bowl of vegetables in which to bury one’s face.

Academic writers have also generally perceived an ideological and aesthetic earnestness in Marinetti’s book. According to Sam Rohdie, for instance, *La Cucina Futurista* is a radical text which stages “[a] double break with convention; one which privileges the cuisine and gives it a radical aesthetic function”. It is, in fact, “an intervention of aesthetics into cuisine”.³⁷³ Rohdie reads the cookbook in terms of what he believes are structuralist tendencies: “The dishes”, he writes, “are ‘texts’”.³⁷⁴ Enrico Cesaretti’s reading, while formalist in focus, similarly centres on the book’s artistry, arguing that Marinetti intends to re-centre food aesthetics in an artistic avant-garde.³⁷⁵ Other critics, however, focus on the book’s ambiguous relationship with material reality, Delville’s reading of it as enacting “Marinetti’s ambivalent relationship to the lyric and his obsession with *matter* [Delville’s italics]” being just one example.³⁷⁶

³⁷¹ Poggi, *Inventing Futurism*, p.10.

³⁷² Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, p. 188.

³⁷³ Sam Rohdie, “An Introduction to Marinetti’s Futurist Cooking”, *Salmagundi*, 28(Winter 1973), p. 127.

³⁷⁴ Rohdie, “An Introduction”, p. 133.

³⁷⁵ Enrico Cesaretti, “Recipes for the Future: Traces of Past Utopias in the Futurist Cookbook”. In *The European Legacy: Towards New Paradigms 14:7: Future Imperfect-Italian Futurism Between Tradition and Modernity* (2009): 841-56.

³⁷⁶ Michel Delville, “Contro la Pastasciutta: Marinetti’s Futurist Lunch”, in *Interval(le)s* 1:2 (Spring, 2007), p.23.

Yet this critical divide, far from muddying our understanding of the book, in fact exemplifies a tension within the text itself – one present within Marinetti’s aesthetics generally and, relatedly and subsequently, in the aesthetics of the Italian fascist regime. We might summarise this dyad, in its most basic terms, as being that of symbolism and affect. Scholarship has long acknowledged the centrality of symbols and tropes in fascist culture. In fact, Barbara Spackman suggests, Italian fascism makes up for its failure, or refusal, to “define itself philosophically” by “overdefining itself rhetorically and semiotically”.³⁷⁷ Yet if symbolism provides an alternative to a fully worked-through philosophy, it also serves an affective function. Fascism, Spackman writes, attempts to “appeal to the emotions”.³⁷⁸ Affect, and particularly sensory affect, formed an important part of this project: Ruth Ben-Ghiat, for instance, notes “support in the early 1930s for an aesthetic that, as one [commentator] put it, ‘would be more direct and immediate in its effects’”.³⁷⁹ Falasca-Zamponi suggests, following Walter Benjamin’s observations on Marinetti, that this manipulation of feeling was specifically designed to exploit “the alienation of the senses” which was “a condition of modernity”. Fascism, she writes, took advantage of this alienation by “filling the absence of meaning left by the loss of experience” –³⁸⁰ going on to note a rise in symbolism specifically designed to influence people’s emotions.³⁸¹

It is, of course, a misleading simplification to suggest that the aesthetics of Futurism are in essence contiguous with those of Italian Fascism, however much their shared interest in “patriotic idealism” –³⁸² and, indeed, patriarchal idealism – tempts us to draw an equivalence. As Willard Bohn notes, their relationship was more “stylistic and thematic” than politically entrenched.³⁸³ Yet if we accept that, as Spackman suggests, Italian fascism lacked a thorough philosophical self-definition – papering over its absence with investment in symbols – then we can see how the shared stylistics of, at least, Marinetti’s futurism and Mussolini’s fascism constitute a political as well as artistic affinity. In this light, the empty

³⁷⁷ Barbara Spackman, *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology and Social Fantasy in Italy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p.5-6.

³⁷⁸ Spackman, p. 118.

³⁷⁹ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), p. 31.

³⁸⁰ Falasca-Zamponi, *The Aesthetics of Power*, p.12.

³⁸¹ Falasca-Zamponi, *The Aesthetics of Power*, p.6.

³⁸² Willard Bohn, *The Other Futurism: Futurist Activity in Venice, Padua and Verona* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), p. 4.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*

core of Marinetti's text is not a feature which distinguishes it from the later formulations of the fascist state, but instead brings the two into closer relation. Turning away from producing philosophically coherent, comprehensive directions to focus instead on, on the one hand, icons, symbols and gestures, and on the other, an interest in speed, bodily disruption and a frantic sensory affect, *The Futurist Cookbook* enacts what we can recognise as a version of aesthetics akin to those practiced in Mussolini's fascism.

This unstable slippage – between symbol and “feeling”, whether emotional or sensory – is a key aspect of *The Futurist Cookbook*. If we are to understand its rhetorical gestures, formal innovation and, indeed, the core conceit which Marinetti seeks to express through these stylistic features, it is essential that we acknowledge it as a text which understands artistic formulations and bodily life as intrinsically intertwined. In fact, the cookbook traverses Highmore's modalities in both directions, representing not only an excursion of Futurism's politico-artistic ideology into the gastronomic sphere, but also, as Delville puts it, confirming “the centrality of food and eating to Futurist aesthetics and philosophy”.³⁸⁴ In this sense, we might productively think of it not as a book which simply advocates for the application of Futurism's aesthetic principles to food, but instead extends the movement's already dialogic relationship between art and politics – a relationship addressed in Futurist writing, almost without exception, via highly charged invocations of the physical – into the kitchen. The inseparability of the apparently contradictory priorities of the body and “aesthetics” is the text's central motivating feature.

Each of the spectacular recipes in *The Futurist Cookbook* prompts the reader to actively embody the encounter between food and the avant-garde. Following the dual meaning of the word “cucina”, which refers both to a kitchen and, metaphorically, to cuisine, the cookbook fuses the sensory world of cooking with the creation of ideas, treating the two processes as not only linked but structurally similar. Cooks are advised to be attentive to the body when configuring their recipes: the famous warning against pasta, for instance, is given partially as the heavy foodstuff is said to make men's bodies feminine, and therefore less capable of achieving the virile stature Marinetti's biopolitically-attuned vision of masculinity demands. Considerable space is given to rebutting Paolo Monelli's defence of pasta which “declares it the ideal food for the fighting man”.³⁸⁵ This

³⁸⁴ Delville, *Food, Poetry*, p. 110.

³⁸⁵ Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, p. 60.

may be true for “the Alpinists”, the cookbook declares, but not for “the bombardiers of the Vertoibizza like Marinetti”, who operate in a different physical environment.³⁸⁶ It should not surprise us that this constitutes not only the *Cookbook*’s only extended engagement with a single foodstuff, but also one of the book’s most thorough and intensive theoretical discussions. As Martin Puchner notes, war was a “favourite theme” of Marinetti’s – and, he adds, “never a metaphor”.³⁸⁷ Outfitting men’s bodies for war, then, is an almost inevitable cornerstone of Marinetti’s gastronomic regime.

Other examples, however, invoke a more complex sense of aesthetics. The “improvised dinner”, to give one example, demands “every cook . . . acquire an attitude that”:

- Understands that form and colour are just as important as taste
- Can conceive of an original architecture for every dish, possibly different for each individual, in such a way that EVERY PERSON HAS THE SENSATION OF EATING not just good food but also WORKS OF ART.
- Will, before preparing a dinner, study the character and sensibility of everyone, and take account of *age, sex, physical make-up and even psychological factors* in the distribution of the dishes.³⁸⁸

This “formula” brings together several of the principles mentioned above, including the demand that food become art – a goal cooks can achieve by taking a multi-sensory, individualised approach to each dish. Only by studying the mind and body of the diners can the meal be properly “improvised”, and thus achieve its aesthetic goals.

While this approach may not sound so radical to anyone who has, say, tried to tempt a picky child to eat, for Marinetti this attentiveness is part of a project which is anything but banal. Frequently, the cookbook borrows from specialist discourses to frame the diner, or, more specifically, his or her body – it is usually his – as a mechanised instrument. Like other Futurist texts, the cookbook makes ongoing comparisons between the human body and machinery: another component of the anti-pasta diatribe, for instance, suggests Italians stop eating the stodgy foodstuff the better to outfit their bodies for the new, lightweight trains.³⁸⁹ Elsewhere, the body is not only receptive but also an

³⁸⁶ Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, p. 61.

³⁸⁷ Martin Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-gardes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 70.

³⁸⁸ *The Futurist Cookbook*, p. 181.

³⁸⁹ *The Futurist Cookbook*, p. 80.

investigatory tool, much like the self becomes for Warner; a permeable object subjected to the effects of foodstuffs but also a means of assessing them:

While recognising that badly or crudely nourished men have achieved great things in the past, we affirm this truth: men think, dream and act according to what they eat and drink.

[. . .]

Let us consult on this matter our lips, tongue, palate, taste buds, glandular secretions, and probe with genius into gastric chemistry.

The language here is typical of both *The Futurist Cookbook* and Marinetti's writing as a whole, employing re-iterative lists and making reference to specialist parlance, such as the scientific discourses from which "glandular secretions" and "gastric chemistry" are lifted. Expert testimony is also included to support Marinetti's views on pasta, with various physiologists and clinicians quoted in their opinion that pasta "dilates the stomach", and that "the great consumers of pasta have slow and pacific characters, while meat eaters are quick and aggressive".³⁹⁰

Of course, Marinetti's is not the only cookbook which cites scientific opinion friendly to its instructions. What is exceptional is the quantity and variety of other discourses and genres that Marinetti includes. Yet while studies of the book clearly recognise the difficulty of defining exactly what it is, flitting between naming it a "manifesto", a "cookbook" and even a "design",³⁹¹ none has so far explicitly considered the question of genre. This may be partly due, one can speculate, to the English title used in Suzanne Brill's 1989 translation (which is also the translation cited in this chapter). With no English word able to convey the multiple associations of "cucina", Brill opted for the title *The Futurist Cookbook* – necessarily imposing a relatively fixed, genre-oriented moniker. The Italian title is more ambiguous, invoking both the cookbook as a genre and the idea of a metaphorical "kitchen" in which Futurist ideas might be cooked up. This mirrors Marinetti's equivocation of invention and cooking; in fact, at one point he writes that a meal will be "extremely quickly digested like everything that comes from the Futurist forge (I mean kitchen)".³⁹² The act of translation, however, is not only diminishing; in fact, it is productive in that it

³⁹⁰ Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, p. 42.

³⁹¹ Delville, *Food, Poetry*, p. 14.

³⁹² Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, p. 150.

invites us to consider how closely *La Cucina Futurista* actually fits with our understanding of what a cookbook is – and the way it differs from this understanding.

This frame is particularly instructive when it comes to situating the text in Marinetti's broader *oeuvre*, in that the ways in which this cookbook deviates from the usual conventions of the genre make apparent how closely to the rest of the Futurist project its instructions are intended to be read. The fact that the book includes reprints from newspaper articles on Futurist cuisine, including a "Manifesto of futurist cooking" first published in the Turin *Gazette del Popolo*³⁹³ which demands its readers "probe with genius into gastric chemistry", shows the extent to which the boundaries between the book and other, more public venues for Futurist writing are permeable. (Despite its eccentricities, this is not a text closed off from associations with the mainstream.) Likewise, the advertisements which appear in the back of the original 1932 edition of *La Cucina Futurista* also suggest that the publication was not intended to be placed in a canon of commercial cookbooks. Of course, it is not unusual for cookbooks to include advertisements; but these tend to be for household items. Here, however, the advertisements showcase other works by Marinetti and even related items of foreign literature, as well as a *Grande Enciclopedia* (definitions and language being, as we shall see, a significant part of the cookbook's ideology). Suggesting that the book be placed alongside both fictional and non-fictional – but not culinary – works, *La Cucina Futurista* is thus offered not as one approach to food marketed among possible others, but one item in a self-consciously intellectual bibliography selected to further the Futurist subject's understanding of various areas of life.

This contextual framing is emphasised further by testimonials for Marinetti's culinary project, omitted from Brill's translation but present at the back of the Italian original. Given Futurism's popular reputation, it may be cheap to cite Mussolini's comment first; yet the decision to include his remarks – which begin by expressing regret for missing a banquet before going on to praise Marinetti as "the poet innovator who gave me the feel of the ocean and the machine", naming him a metaphorical "soldier" for the country – serves as a firm indicator of the book's priorities (and reminds us, incidentally, that Futurism's infamy is at least partially deserved).³⁹⁴ Mussolini's sentiments are followed by a comment from

³⁹³ F.T. Marinetti, "Manifesto of futurist cooking", *La Gazzetta del Popolo* [The People's Gazette] (Turin, Italy), December 23, 1930.

³⁹⁴ F.T. Marinetti, *La Cucina Futurista* (Milano: Sonzogno, 1932), p. 271 (translated from the Italian).

Ezra Pound, who similarly credits Marinetti's innovation in his discussion of modernism: "The writer who interests me today and to whom I confess many debts of gratitude is Marinetti." The nationalist and literary contexts signalled to by these two quotations, like those indicated by the advertisements, gesture to a broader cultural vision than we might normally expect in a cookbook.

8. Eating for Italy

For Marinetti, however, the art one enjoys is just as important as what one eats. Just as *The Futurist Cookbook* makes reference to specific ingredients that a proud Italian would do well to eat more of – such as rice –³⁹⁵ it treats music, visual art and even social forms as commodities. Any patriot, he suggests, ought to seek local varieties of both ingredients and arts. Those who do not may find themselves guilty of "xenomania", an inappropriate, even traitorous preference for the culture of other nations. A manifesto included in the cookbook names those groups of people who are "xenomanes and therefore guilty of anti-Italianism",³⁹⁶ including orchestras who play abroad "using little or no Italian music", those "critics and cultivated gentlemen" who fête foreign avant-gardes "derived from our own"³⁹⁷ and the "young Italians who fall into cretinous ecstasy before all foreigners".³⁹⁸ The rituals around food and drink may also betray one's xenomania. Marinetti condemns those "infatuated with foreign customs and snobbisms", such as those who hold America-style cocktail parties, which are

perhaps suitable for the North American race but certainly poisonous to our race. Therefore we consider vulgar and foolish the Italian woman who proudly participates in *cocktail parties* and that sort of alcoholic competitiveness. Vulgar and foolish the Italian woman who thinks it is more elegant to say 'I've drunk four cocktails' than 'I've eaten a bowl of minestrone'. She is only submitting herself to the foreigner's envied financial superiority. . .

The manifesto is not only revealing in that it equates artistic and cultural customs with produce – other xenomanes include those who buy foreign goods, "casting a sceptical and

³⁹⁵ Part of Marinetti's decision to ban pasta stems from the fact it would help "the Italian rice industry".

³⁹⁶ Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, p. 68.

³⁹⁷ Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, p. 72.

³⁹⁸ Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, p. 69.

pessimistic glance at Italian produce³⁹⁹ – but also that it is, despite being a list which does not mention cooking at all, included in the material which prefaces *The Futurist Cookbook's* recipes. It is also worth noting that, even where other books might be said to be imbued with nationalist sentiment, few wear their nationalism so fervently or ostentatiously – certainly not with the emotive language (“vulgar”, “foolish”, “poisonous”) that Marinetti employs. Nevertheless, its materialist approach to culture underpins what follows, placing the recipes in the context of a philosophy which sees cultural trade as being just as politically charged as the movement of material goods.

If this does not in itself seem controversial, its ramifications within the cookbook may nevertheless be surprising. One of the tools Barbara Kruger teaches students during her “Reading Historic Cookbooks” seminar at Harvard University’s Schlesinger Library is to conduct a stock-check of each cookbook’s ingredients,⁴⁰⁰ the better to understand its financial and geographical remit. The results for *The Futurist Cookbook* are unexpected. A number of ingredients, as one would anticipate, are Italian in origin or association, often linked to a specific region; but a significant minority are international, including “African fruits”,⁴⁰¹ “Japanese nuts”⁴⁰² and *gruyère* cheese.⁴⁰³ Of course, Marinetti nowhere claims that imported ingredients must be eschewed altogether. But the intermingling of these exotic goods with items that are specifically encoded as Italian is nevertheless significant – a hint that the geography of Marinetti’s cuisine is not as simplistic as the layperson may assume. Unlike *terroir*, the gastronomy of Futurism allows sacrifices to be made in terms of nationalist economic purity if inventiveness is at stake: for instance, both nuts and fruits can be procured in Italy, but the symbolic value of foreign goods, it seems, is more significant. Counter to the battle between the futuristic urban and nostalgic rural that Harris takes as the focus of her work, then, Marinetti practises a form of cosmopolitan nationalism, which permits cooks to deviate from the instructions the “xenomania” manifesto lays out if it is in the service of avant-garde symbolism. In his book *Aesthetic Modernism and Masculinity in Fascist Italy*, John Champagne identifies this tension – between national identity and global trade – as being the “fatal contradiction” of not only

³⁹⁹ Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, p. 71.

⁴⁰⁰ I attended Kruger’s seminar in the summer of 2014.

⁴⁰¹ Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, p.91.

⁴⁰² Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, p. 144

⁴⁰³ Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, p. 122.

fascism but all capitalist societies in the age of the nation state. The state, he points out, “attempts to mediate the interests of all parties within its borders while also making possible the flow of capital, labour, and goods across state boundaries”.⁴⁰⁴

If this problem is familiar, however, it reads particularly awkwardly alongside the nationalist rhetoric of *The Futurist Cookbook*. Yet this detail may also be instructive in understanding Marinetti’s politics, which are, as I noted above, primarily interested in symbolism and affect. Rancière famously suggested, following Michel Foucault, that “politics” consists not merely of what mainstream commentators suggest – governmentality; elections; law-making – but rather how humans understand the world, and specifically which actions are registered as meaningful and which are discounted as “noise”. Politics, he theorised, is thus organised not just by those employed in political professions, but by what he refers to as “the police”; a body which may consist of any person or regulation who influences the distribution of the sensible world:

The police is thus first an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying, and sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task; it is an order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise.⁴⁰⁵

Rancière terms this “the distribution of the sensible”, and it is a useful framework with which to read the politics of *The Futurist Cookbook*. For while Marinetti’s gastronomic instructions are informed by his nationalist ambitions, his struggle to mediate the material, physical aspect of cuisine with the raucous aesthetic of Futurism is addressed just as explicitly. In fact, Marinetti proposes nothing less than a redistribution of the sensible, demanding of his subjects a constantly exceptional engagement with the sensory world, which is never banal.

9. Disordered eating/reforging the sensible

For Marinetti, repetition spoils cuisine. “Boring” food is not just, as I discussed above, an artistic and moral failing, but one which ruins otherwise pleasurable events. “Nowadays habit has killed the joy in big dinners on New Year’s Eve”, he writes. “[F]or many years the

⁴⁰⁴ John Champagne, *Aesthetic Modernism and Masculinity in Fascist Italy* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 19.

⁴⁰⁵ Jacques Rancière, *Dis-agreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 29.

same elements have conspired to produce a happiness which has been enjoyed too often." "Family memories", Marinetti warns, "roll out like newspapers from presses. Old habits must be cast off to escape this monotony". Similarly, in a formula for an official Futurist dinner, Marinetti bemoans the "low, wan, funereal and banal tone of the dishes" which is one of the "grave defects that pollute all official banquets",⁴⁰⁶ promising instead to serve a dinner which is stimulating in all aspects: served at high speed, and accompanied by obscene jokes, his menu includes a "soppy soup of tapioca and milk . . . in a monastery tureen to ridicule and put to flight all diplomacy and reserve", as well as a "various raw meats" from which the guests must help themselves. These are followed by a "castle of nougat", in a dish called "The Solid Treaty", which plays with the idea of diplomacy by containing within it "very tiny nitroglycerine bombs which explode now and then, perfuming the room with the typical smell of battle".⁴⁰⁷ The book has little time for "ordinary" recipes; in fact, as we have seen, it is actively hostile to the idea of easy, quotidian cooking, as one formula for an "aeropoetic futurist dinner" reminds us, promising: "Movement. Lightness. Chewing the infinite. Vertical takeoff. Tilting away from everyday life."⁴⁰⁸ "The modern world", Highmore writes, "seems characterised by routines, by systems and regulatory techniques".⁴⁰⁹ In defiance of this, Marinetti demands a constant exception.

In *The Problem with Pleasure: Modernism and its Discontents*, Laura Frost defines the "fundamental goal of modernism" as "the redefinition of pleasure: specifically, exposing easily achieved and primarily somatic pleasures as facile, hollow, and false, and cultivating those that require more ambitious analytical work".⁴¹⁰ This, she explains, is the key driving force behind the "[e]ssential paradigms" of modernism, such as its "high/low" and "elite/popular culture" divides. As I argued in the introduction to this thesis, such divides are an overly-simplistic way of accounting for modernism's relationship to popular, mass culture – and yet Frost's thesis regarding simple, somatic pleasures, which she develops through readings of James Joyce, Stein and Jean Rhys, among others, is an apt descriptor of Marinetti's approach to pleasure (even as Toklas' weaponised contentment complicates it). For Marinetti, pleasure is not so much shifted from a haptic register to an

⁴⁰⁶ Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, p. 145.

⁴⁰⁷ Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, p. 146.

⁴⁰⁸ Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, p. 168.

⁴⁰⁹ Highmore, *Everyday Life*, p. 2.

⁴¹⁰ Michelle Delville, *Food, Poetry*, p. 3.

intellectual one as it is found in a complex, self-aware (at least on the part of the cook) engagement with the sensory. Blum's *The Other Modernism: F.T. Marinetti's Futurist Fiction of Power* notes Marinetti's "pre-occupation with chewing, digestion and assimilation".⁴¹¹ In fact, the obsession goes beyond that: food is not just registered in the body, but in the mind, in a multi-sensory experience which forces a degree of attention not normally demanded of – for instance – the family being fed daily by a *Mrs. Beeton's* housewife. In the example of "dismusica", for instance, it is the synthesis of art and music that evokes new sensations; as Marinetti's list of strategies for Futurist cooking tells us, poetry and music can be used as "surprise ingredients" to accentuate the flavours of a dish with their "sensual intensity".

For Marinetti, food's affective potential is more important than its nutritional value, or whether it is pleasurable to consume. One can eat a song as much as a prune, as long as it has a sufficient sensory impact. Indeed, Marinetti's book can be theorised as practising what we might today recognise as a sort of symbolic orthorexia, restricting the diet only to extreme foods, which must be constantly exceptional in aesthetics, if never in volume. Those creating art, in particular, are expected not to gorge themselves, in order to condition the body for the political task which awaits them. (In one "extremist banquet", no-one eats food at all, with Marinetti describing how scent will sate alone: "The two perfumes of life, flesh, luxury, death synthesize and thus gratify all eleven starving palates").⁴¹² If Toklas' book uses indulgence to formulate a resistance through the lived experience of pleasure – in contrast to the enforced parsimony of wartime – Marinetti makes self-denial political. And where Toklas' goal is to continue the food rituals which organise her and her wife's social life in wartime, adapting their form only as necessary, Marinetti seeks to disrupt, radically, the repetitive conventions which constitute the majority of most of our gustatory lives – even the "convention" which says the thing we consume will be food. It is surprising, then, that the ingredients *The Futurist Cookbook* utilises are mostly ordinary. True, Marinetti includes "snow" and "gasoline" alongside the nuts, tuna, apple peel, cherries, ice-cream, trout and gin, but these unusual items are firmly in the minority, reminding us again that a culinary avant-garde is always subject to material restrictions. Again, it is not the food itself which is the point of focus: everyday ingredients are

⁴¹¹ Blum, *The Other Modernism*, p. 93.

⁴¹² Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, p. 158.

permitted as long as they are used in unusual ways, either by cooking using symbolically-charged methods, such as meat “cooked electrically”, or by juxtaposing ingredients that would not ordinarily go together: for instance, salami in custard,⁴¹³ or endives cooked in wine “strewn with boiled and sugared beans”.⁴¹⁴ In this sense, Marinetti’s approach to cuisine mirrors the formal tactics he uses to construct *The Futurist Cookbook*. Just as the book fuses genres and tones, the recipes mix different courses in one dish – such as in the above examples, where meats and bitter foods are placed with sweet items. Similarly, the recipes frequently perform rhetorical gestures which rely on their symbolic or visual status. A recipe for bachelors, for example, includes luscious meat and vegetables as “earrings”;⁴¹⁵ the “architectural dinner for sant’elia [sic]” is made up of pastry, spinach, nougat and risotto, sculpted into (respectively) cubes (3cm high), parallelepipeds (10cm high), cylinders (30cm high) and balls (15cm diameter).⁴¹⁶

Nowhere is this sense of culinary rhetoric as charged as in the formulas which are geographically-themed. Thus, while the “tourist dinner” is relatively straightforward – each course features a dish from a city, with roast beef for London, pré-salé for Paris and eel stuffed with Milanese minestrone for Milan –⁴¹⁷ other recipes are both more complicated, and more abstracted from real-world geography. The “synthesis of Italy dinner”, for example, does not profile regional foods, but uses a synesthetic range of smells, images and sounds to evoke different aspects of Italy thematically. “It is impossible”, Marinetti writes, “to order on a single occasion all the various regional foods”; instead, he divides Italy into four environments: “Alpine Dream”, “Civilized Rusticity”, “Suggestion of the South” and “Colonial Instinct”, with a multi-sensory show for each.⁴¹⁸ The “geographic dinner”, meanwhile, shows Marinetti literally mapping out colonial geography onto a woman’s body:

The *listavivande*-waitress. . . is a shapely young woman dressed in a long white tunic on which a complete geographical map of Africa has been drawn; it enfolds her entire body.

⁴¹³ Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, p. 146.

⁴¹⁴ Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, p. 152.

⁴¹⁵ Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, p. 153.

⁴¹⁶ Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, p. 164.

⁴¹⁷ Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, p. 144.

⁴¹⁸ Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, p. 172-3.

Guests are then invited to point at parts of the woman and thus order dishes, such as a pyramid of dates for Cairo.⁴¹⁹ In this way, Marinetti writes, “a gastronomic orientation inspired by continents, regions and cities will prevail”.⁴²⁰ The divergence between these formulae and the geographically-inflected recipes of other cookbooks is notable. Nowhere, for instance, does Marinetti express a concern for authenticity when it comes to foreign foodstuffs. Rather, places are represented through a range of shifting signifiers, just as likely to be visual or cultural as they are to relate to the origin of a specific recipe or ingredient. His geography is as much textual as actual – as much concerned with semantics as substance.

This approach to geography similarly influences Marinetti’s most striking use of the cookbook form. As with the advertisements, the inclusion of a glossary in a cookbook is not in itself unusual, and yet the specifics of *The Futurist Cookbook*’s version both further the text’s expansive rhetoric and provide an amusing linguistic underline to its proposed national gastronomy. Alongside renaming “recipes” as “formulas”, a choice which transforms cooking into an act of mechanical invention and extends the “kitchen”/“forge” analogy, the cookbook’s glossary also translates – literally and figuratively – common culinary terms. Wryly named the “little dictionary of Futurist cooking”, the cookbook’s glossary contains Italian terminology created to “replace” common loan words from other languages. We are told, for instance, that “traidue” should replace “sandwich”, “peralzarsi” “dessert” and “poltiglia” “purée”.⁴²¹ A range of common terms is appropriated into this specifically Italian idiom; foreign terms thus retain their meaning, while being symbolically coded as national. This geographically-tempered vocabulary is supplemented by specifically Futurist terms invented to refer to concepts described elsewhere in the cookbook. *Dismusica*, for instance, is defined as “a term which indicates the complementary nature of a given music with the flavour of a given food” (such as that allegedly found between anchovies and Beethoven’s Ninth).⁴²² Thus the glossary which other cookbooks use to teach housewives culinary terms is here employed to create a gastronomic language for a new era. With the cook’s verbal arsenal fashioned into a Futurist mould, the matter of whose culinary idiom is the valid one – in broader terms, who

⁴¹⁹ Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, p. 174.

⁴²⁰ Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, p. 175.

⁴²¹ Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, p. 175.

⁴²² Marinetti, *The Futurist Cookbook*, p. 175-6.

can give the authoritative account of a food culture – is clear. There is an aura of aggressive reification underpinning this slightly arch linguistic colonising of domestic space. As Solnit puts it, “to name something is to presume to know it or make it into something knowable”.⁴²³ To re-name is equally about claiming knowledge.

It is hard to evade the sense, however, that there is something silly – even slightly camp – about this glossary. The overwrought prose with which Marinetti defines his new terms, like that used throughout the book, suggests that it is more interested in its status as textual performance than on whether it will be taken up in the real world. Of course, it is impossible to know precisely how seriously the “little dictionary” is intended to be taken; yet if Marinetti’s translation is a symbolic gesture, rather than a practical one, it would not be out of step with the cookbook’s broader relationship to ‘the real world’. For, while the photographs of a Futurist restaurant and accounts of dinners suggest that the Futurist *formulae* cannot be solely considered, as Rohdie claims, as “texts”, it is nevertheless important to remember that *The Futurist Cookbook* is a work with no necessary obligation to practicality. Unlike cookbook readers who actually have to run a household, Marinetti is at licence to be impractical and bombastic. This biographical detail shapes his book, which is not interested in domestic cooking, makes no reference, as I mentioned previously, to feeding children, and theorises a way of eating which engages only selectively with the material world of lived experience (it does not, for instance, discuss how ingredients might be sourced – a central theme for Toklas). Recipes are expensive and labour intensive, with very little attention awarded to exactly who will do the work, or pay for it; the cooking of *Elle*, not *L’Express*. In extending modernism’s aesthetic of difficulty towards a radical intervention in everyday life – in attempting to force a radical quotidian, in which life is a series of constant exceptions – *The Futurist Cookbook*’s culinary vision becomes a work of abstraction. After all, if it is the case, as Highmore writes, that the everyday “witnesses the absorption of the most revolutionary impulses into the landscape of the mundane”, then it seems impossible for the cookbook’s intervention to be genuine, or successful.

It is this strange, ambivalent relationship to real life which lies at the heart of the book. To return again to our series of tensions, we can see how *The Futurist Cookbook* is caught between the textual and haptic; between the sensory and stylistic; between

⁴²³ Rebecca Solnit, *Storming the Gates of Paradise: Landscapes for Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), p. 153.

symbolic bodies and real ones, engaged with chewing, biting and digestion; between real-world economics and the abstracted geography of Marinetti's outward-looking nationalism. It is a text which dances between the two strands of "aesthetics", an ambivalence it furthers by playfully manipulating the cookbook form to complicate the instructiveness implied by the genre (and indeed the other genres, such as newspaper columns, and manifestos, nested within). The utopic society it imagines is clipped, collage-like, into vignettes; each *formula* a window into a fantastic vision of the near future. Thus while the organising potential of the twentieth-century's "everyday" which Highmore analyses is also a formal one – as we shall see in the next chapter, on Flann O'Brien's newspaper columns – it is the very boundedness of the cookbook form which permits it to become incendiary in Marinetti's hands, used not to gather fragments but to fragment.

What does this tell us, then, not only about the intersection of politics, art and bodies in Marinetti's cookbook, but about culture and, indeed, the cookbook genre generally? More so than Toklas' text, *The Futurist Cookbook* invites us to reflect on food writing potentially open to, as Poggi calls it, an "activist avant-garde". More broadly, it invites us to consider domestic space as an arena in which art can intervene as well as one it can describe – a situation we are used to accepting as part of contemporary culture, but which has hitherto remained under-examined in studies of literary modernism.

Both Marinetti and Toklas write at a point of crossover between several material and artistic conditions which we might reasonably identify as jointly constructing "modernity" – including the networks of empire, travel technology and mass marketed cookbooks, as well as poetic innovations – and it is in this sense that their texts request an active reading of the link between the individual's domestic living and broader geopolitical constructions. Their attempt to intervene in this cultural milieu and respond creatively to the intellectual demands generated by the modern condition – which is, in a sense, the impetus for every text examined in this thesis – forces us to reconsider the relationship between the banal and the avant-garde, especially as it appears in non-fiction. As such, they turn our attention again to the blurred edges of modernism and open up new ways of considering modernism's "everyday", particularly as it acts as an arena in which wider political forces meet the domestic, and ideas meet material reality. Attentiveness to this dynamic provides us with a framework via which we can revisit instances of food and

eating in modernist fiction: from the boeuf en daube of *To The Lighthouse*⁴²⁴ to the picnic prepared by the servant Kate in *Finnegans Wake*.⁴²⁵

Similarly, in that both texts allow us to “probe” – to borrow a term from Marinetti – the cookbook genre, they also encourage us to turn anew to form. Like Hugh MacDiarmid, Lewis Grassie Gibbon and particularly Sylvia Townsend Warner’s travel guides, Marinetti and Toklas embody a series of tensions by leveraging the textual codes of the cookbook form. *The Alice B. Toklas Cook Book* and *The Futurist Cookbook* were chosen for this chapter partly to contrast their respective forms, which can be loosely located at the “fringe” of modernism proper. Marinetti’s use of deliberately complicated – even obstructive – difficulty, both on a textual level and in his “formulas”, is recognisably similar to the disavowal of “simple”, “somatic” pleasures which Frost identifies as a key feature of literary modernism. Likewise, Toklas’ writing draws on modernism’s irreverent use of narrative modalities to construct a self-conscious, self-ironising piece of food writing which uses the cookbook genre as a frame for highly personalised testimony.

With this in mind, we might turn to other artists’ cookbooks which sum up similar entangled relationships to the more conspicuously avant-garde stylistics of high modernism, including those written by Andy Warhol, Liberace, Lewis Carroll, and Norman Douglas’ *Venus in the Kitchen* (1952) – whose clever, tell-all style, regrettably outside the limits of this chapter, might provide an amusing counter-point to Toklas’ wry prose. There is also scope for further close-reading of the two texts considered here: this chapter has necessarily considered both books in less depth in pursuit of a comparative reading, and the complex aesthetics of each could bear deeper, more thoroughly-historicised investigation. Similarly, my analysis has only skimmed the surface of Toklas’ biographical writing, including her letters, which, aside from being a rich source of information in their own right, might in future serve as a useful counterpoint with which to undertake a sustained analysis of her prose style. Equally, *The Futurist Cookbook*, self-consciously situated among the wider Futurist project, offers rich possibilities for the study of Futurism’s manifestos, speeches and other writings.

Finally, it is worth returning to the question of popularity which I raised in the opening to this thesis. It is, I hope, not controversial to say that Toklas has so far not

⁴²⁴ Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (New York: Harcourt, 1981), pp. 100-1.

⁴²⁵ James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (London: Penguin, 2000), pp.141.30-142.7.

received her deserved degree of scholarly attention. I am hopeful that this thesis, which seeks to explore texts which have been under-explored in critical terms (despite being highly visible as cultural artefacts for mass audiences), might contribute in some small way to rectifying this state of affairs. It is important, then, to close by reminding the reader that her cookbook was a best-seller, and its impact on food writing significant. In the second half of this thesis, I will move to considering works that take the principle of complexity for mass audiences further – specifically, works which appear in highly public media spaces, yet integrate a recognisably modernist complication into their formal structure. Through readings of Flann O’Brien’s newspaper columns for the *Irish Times*, and broadcasts by Virginia Woolf, Elizabeth Bowen and the GPO Film Unit collaboration of Benjamin Britten and W.H. Auden, I will demonstrate the importance of understanding modernism’s mainstream, non-fictional forms as arising through generic manipulation in a specific time and place.

“That grey tablet of lies”: *Cruiskeen Lawn* and the newspaper as cultural object

“I put down”, Myles na gCopaleen’s “Cruiskeen Lawn” column of December 23rd, 1943 begins, “one of my various newspapers the other day and sighed. ‘Poor old Ireland’, I mused, ‘Will she ever get a chance?’”. There are many words that might be used to describe *Cruiskeen Lawn*, written by novelist and civil servant Brian O’Nolan, but “understated” is not one of them. Published under a pseudonym taken from a Dion Boucicault play, the column’s deft satire on the Irish government and Dublin’s literati is often noted in studies of Irish political and cultural consciousness. Being, as the “Publisher’s Note” in the compendium *The Best of Myles* stresses, “a committed newspaperman”,⁴²⁶ with an awareness of – and stake in – the conventions of the press, O’Nolan was attentive to what he saw as a failure on the industry’s part to give “poor old Ireland” the treatment she deserved. Published in the Protestant-leaning broadsheet *The Irish Times*, na gCopaleen’s – or O’Nolan’s, or, another, better-known pseudonym, Flann O’Brien’s – absurd dramatics contrasted sharply with the articles they appeared alongside. Writing in a space normally reserved for factual analysis and sincere polemic, the pseudonymous Myles⁴²⁷ played with his column’s pseudo-factual status, with its placement among “regular” features of the newspaper, such as society writing and advertisements, lending its cultural commentary an ambiguous mix of legitimacy and parody. Thus its placement in the newspaper allows *Cruiskeen Lawn* to pass comment on the sociopolitical impetus thinly veiled in various forms of popular discourse, not least news media. This exaggerated, subversive re-appropriate of the newspaper column’s (at least ostensibly) instructive role implicated the press and its discourses in the social, political and artistic upheavals with which *Cruiskeen Lawn* is concerned – aware that even as it comments on it, the press is part of culture.

⁴²⁶ “Publisher’s Note”, *The Best of Myles: A Selection from “Cruiskeen Lawn”*, ed. Kevin O’Nolan (London: Grafton Books, 1990), p.11.

⁴²⁷ Throughout this chapter, I have referred to “Myles na gCopaleen” as “Myles”. Quite aside from the fact this is the name I most often hear among Irish acquaintances who remember the column, like Jan Morris and Virginia Woolf, na gCopaleen seems overly, inappropriately, formal. I have elected to therefore use the first name, if only in tribute to the character.

1. Hot on the press?

Despite the role of newspapers in public life, the medium remains relatively under-examined in modernist studies – a fact which seems unusual given the field’s broad interest in the changing face of society and representations of the everyday. All of the totalising narratives of the twentieth century towards which modernism felt equally enamoured and suspicious – nationalism, travel, civic health, ways of narration – were concentrated in the daily news. Yet while it cannot be said that modernist criticism has ever entirely neglected the study of newspapers, so far little research has considered the newspaper as a cultural form. Instead, studies are pre-occupied, albeit understandably, with literary modernism’s relationship to the popular, addressing how modernist fictional works both cite from the mainstream press and define themselves against it. In this respect, it is likely that the study of newspapers has suffered from an intersection of recent critical gestures which have turned renewed attention to topics such as periodicals and the long-running interest in modernism and new media. Research into the press stands adjacent to these topics, but does not fall specifically under the rubric of either; as such, critical scholarship on newspapers has become somewhat sclerotic. Drawn upon most often as a point of differing comparison, various scholars have noted how the creators of modernism’s “little magazines” set out to distance their work from the popular press: Faith Binckes’ monograph on the magazine *Rhythm*, for instance, notes how its editor John Middleton Murry worried that if the publication “ceased to take its function as a little magazine seriously, and retreated into . . . the more popular realm of the newspaper” it risked failure.⁴²⁸ Enjoying none of the glamour which the radical typography, aesthetics and poetics of modernist periodicals engender, scholarship still too frequently keeps the mass newspaper industry at arm’s length in much the same vein.

In this regard, “newspapers” as an area of dedicated enquiry is the victim of a wider trend, reflecting the firmly debunked yet still pervasive belief that modernism is best defined by the way its progenitors defined themselves: against the mainstream. Unsurprisingly, however, the little magazine’s relationship with its popular cousin was more ambivalent than Middleton Murry suggests, and while Binckes names the disposability of

⁴²⁸ Faith Binckes, *Modernism, Magazines, and the British avant-garde: Reading Rhythm, 1910-1914* [eBook edition] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

the daily newspaper as a source of terror for the artist-editor of the modernist periodical, with its slower, small-market publishing cycle, more nuanced studies note how the “dynamic approach” of the daily press influenced the aesthetics of various esoteric journals.⁴²⁹ Doubtless, scholarship on little magazines should be praised for advancing our understanding of this relationship, as well as the relationship of modernism to mass culture more generally. Yet it should also be acknowledged that, by taking this correspondence as its focus, such scholarship has neglected other lines of enquiry less easily reconciled with the field’s existing priorities. In this respect there remains much to be gained from extending the examination of little magazines towards a reading of mainstream publications; indeed, in what follows I will propose that such a move is a natural progression, bringing together several key areas of scholarly inquiry which have recently enjoyed renewed attention in modernist studies.

Patrick Collier’s *Modernism on Fleet Street* (2006) is so far the only book-length study of modernism’s relationship with the popular press. Examining how authors such as James Joyce, T.S. Eliot and Rose Macauley drew on debates about the psychosocial effects of newspaper reporting, Collier’s book constitutes a significant challenge to the totalising narrative which names modernism as anti-popular (or, at least, anti-populist) and newspapers as decidedly mainstream. Yet even Collier’s thorough analysis could not hope to cover all aspects of such a dynamic, and, as Mark Wollaeger noted in his review of the book for the *James Joyce Quarterly*, *Modernism on Fleet Street* neglects certain lines of investigation in pursuit of its argument. “Insofar as Collier is less interested in thinking about the newspaper as a particular kind of cultural object”, Wollaeger writes, “than he is in exploring a wide range of modernist responses to the growing cultural dominance of mass newspapers, his book participates less in recent developments in periodical studies”.⁴³⁰ While *Modernism on Fleet Street* intervenes deftly in some areas of modernist criticism, such as “modernism and the public sphere, modernism and democracy” and so on, it has less to offer for those wishing to understand how modernist authors drew on, and contributed to, the formal and culturally attenuated attributes of newspaper publishing.

⁴²⁹ *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, Vol III: Europe 1880-1940, part 1, Ed. Peter Brooker, Sascha Bru, Andrew Thacker, and Christian Weikop (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) p.41

⁴³⁰ Mark Wollaeger, “Modernism on Fleet Street (Review)”, *James Joyce Quarterly* 45 no. 3-4, 2008, p. 611.

In this respect, the book fits comfortably into a broader critical topography. Existing scholarship on newspapers broadly falls into one of two categories: either undertaking (often limited) readings of newspapers' formal features as they are referenced in, for instance, the "Aeolus" chapter of *Ulysses*, or focussing on the language of journalism as authors such as Eliot and Woolf addressed it. Otherwise, newspapers appear most frequently in modernist scholarship as an illustrative side note in author-specific discussions – so that one can review scholarship only by assembling cuttings from books and articles on different subjects, almost all of which similarly focus on the discourses contained within newspapers, rather than newspapers as objects in their own right. Little research considers the space of the newspaper itself: despite critics frequently noting the significant role newspaper articles played as a source of income, for instance, few have specifically considered the writing modernist authors did for the popular press, and so far no piece of sustained modernist criticism has addressed newspaper reports, interviews, reviews and articles as unique genres of writing. Indeed, critical studies have done little to examine the two features of newspapers which might reasonably be thought of as most prominent in contemporary modernist scholarship: their dailiness, and the specificity of their literary form.

Such an oversight is particularly surprising given how this sense of the press as simultaneously quotidian and yet generically distinct pervades in artistic representations of the newspaper from the period. Experimental visual arts in the early twentieth century incorporated reams of newsprint as signifier of the bourgeois everyday ripe for subversion. Picasso's guitars are perhaps the best-known example. Chiefly completed between 1912 and 1914, this series uses newsprint in collages of what art scholar T.J. Clark calls "the little bourgeois's belongings",⁴³¹ pasting it onto the canvas alongside simple charcoal drawings of instruments, cups and other household objects. The same technique was adopted by a series of other avant-garde artists, including Carlo Carras, who used newsprint in his 1915 racing-themed work "Pursuit", Max Weber, who drew pastel flowers directly on to an inverted page of the *Sunday Tribune*, and Man Ray, whose "Transmutation" (1916) deconstructed the newspaper's form both textually and

⁴³¹ T.J. Clark, *Picasso and Truth: From Cubism to Guernica* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), p.82.

thematically. The trend culminated in Edward Burra's 1929 "Composition Collage", in which a woman is literally made out of newspaper.

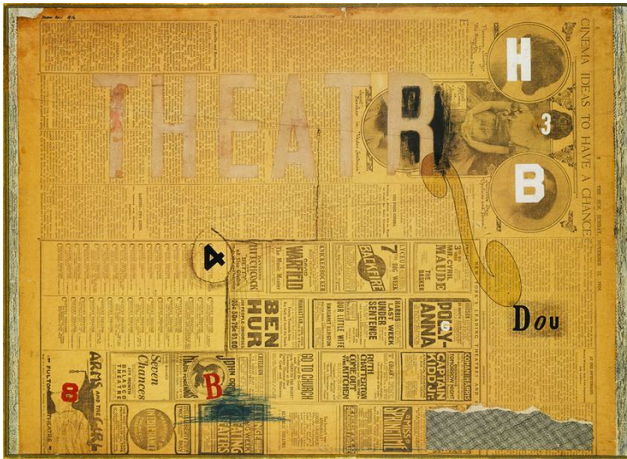


Figure 3: Man Ray's "Transmutation" (1916)⁴³² and Edward Burra's "Composition Collage" (1929).⁴³³

Placed together, the last of these two works are particularly suited to illustrating the two stages of newspapers' life cycle: their design and production, and their consumption by the public. The woman in "Composition Collage" is especially striking: both made of newspaper and appearing behind a table on which a newspaper lies open, she is an invocation of the modern reading public, formed of opinions gleaned from newsprint and faced with even more of the stuff. It is an image which evokes the relentless renewal of the daily press, which passes comment on public affairs in something close to real time while simultaneously shaping how such affairs are understood, discussed and managed by private individuals.

⁴³² Man Ray, *Transmutation*, 1916. Watercolor, ink, crayon, charcoal, graphite, and collage on newspaper, Moderna Museet, Stockholm.

⁴³³ Edward Burra, "Composition Collage", 1929. Collage and ink on paper. Private collection.

We might suspect that few consumers of news media think much about the production of the newspaper – and, if they do, tend to restrict their analysis to journalistic or editorial biases. Even in Collier’s study, little is said about the components that “Transmutation” forces to the fore: the fonts, the layouts, headlines and page layouts. The invisibility of such items is, of course, partially intentional – a good newspaper spread can merely be one in which the reader doesn’t notice bad design – but they are worthy of close attention: after all, page architecture forms a key part of the reading process, and consequently how content is interpreted, prioritised and digested by the readership.

Turning to *Cruiskeen Lawn* as an instance of modernist writing as it appeared in the press, rather than newspapers in fiction, this chapter proves the newspaper a potent instructive space with distinct generic conventions. Myles’ columns, which appropriate these newspaper codes in subversive, humorous ways, both force the readers’ attention towards them while simultaneously disavowing their usual instructive purpose. As such, the daily *Cruiskeen Lawn* feature invites its audience, us included, to dwell on the newspaper as a cultural object, resituating its contents in its own production and making evident formal mediation normally unnoticed. Drawing on the critical tools of periodical studies to undertake a close reading of *Cruiskeen Lawn* as it emerges at a particular geopolitical moment, in a specifically Irish-modernist tradition, I will show how Myles employs literary experiment to satirise the institutions and officials who organise the post-independence Irish state. The thread of modernism which Myles and consequently this chapter takes up is one which permeates into and indeed intervenes in the mainstream, with a specificity which forces our attention to the embodied form of the newspaper as it comes to enforce, or undermine, certain types of spatially-situated identity. Beginning with a general study of newspapers and their development during the early years of the twentieth century, I then turn to what might be called the pedagogical function of *Cruiskeen Lawn*, showing how the formal play Myles practises in his column encourages specific reading strategies. These, I will go on to demonstrate, allow space to critique Ireland’s bureaucracy, insularity and fraught culture industry, opening up recent debates both in Irish studies and modernism more generally.

Of course, O’Brien is neither the first nor last to implicate the form of the newspaper in its ideology. For Benedict Anderson, the newspaper is part of the cultural apparatus which constructs the imagined national community, helping to introduce and maintain a set

of shared beliefs which he terms “quotidian universals”. In his essay “Nationalism, Identity, and the World-in-Motion”, which builds on the studies of media in *Imagined Communities* (1983) to specifically address seriality, Anderson separates serial forms into two categories: bound and unbound. It is the origins of the latter which Anderson locates in “print culture, especially newspapers”, whose “calendrical simultaneity of apparently random occurrences”, combined with their coverage of domestic and foreign affairs, construct certain approaches to political and civic structures. The transposition of these structures across national boundaries while retaining their community-specific origins as a referent is, for Anderson, a type of “new serial thinking” which is a pre-condition of imagining the nation. Indeed, the “very format of the newspaper precluded anything else from being imagined, by the very randomness of its ceaselessly changing contents”.⁴³⁴ The rapidity and apparently ineffability of the newspaper (what Anderson calls the “effervescent boundlessness of the newspapers’ serial imaginings”) helps the press inform certain patterns of serialistic thinking, encouraging the modern subject to consider him or herself under various categories (“‘a’ revolutionary, ‘a’ prisoner, ‘a’ youth, ‘a’ spy”).⁴³⁵ In this way, the very everyday-ness of the newspaper makes it a particularly potent tool in constructing, and repeatedly re-enforcing, a national.

Unusually for Anderson, his essay pays little attention to the producers of the newspaper – or, in other words, who is organising the various serialities by which twentieth-century thought attempts to understand the world. Other critics, however, diagnose an intentionality in the newspaper which is at best suspicious, if not conspiratorial. Cultural critic Ben Highmore, for instance, uses the newspaper as a point of contrast against which to emphasise the democratic form of Mass Observation’s art event *May 12th*. Like Mass Observation, newspapers “practice a form of montage, but to very different ends. The radicalism of Mass-Observation’s montage technique . . . should be seen as a critical response to the techniques of newspapers”.⁴³⁶ The egalitarian exchange between reader and text to which *May 12th* aims is, for Highmore, in opposition to the unilateral movement of information from text to reader in the newspaper. This same

⁴³⁴ Benedict Anderson “Nationalism, Identity, and the World-in-Motion”, in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, ed. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p.121.

⁴³⁵ Anderson, “Nationalism, Identity”, p.128.

⁴³⁶ Ben Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: an Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.85.

suspicion colours what little scholarship comments on the newspapers' relationship to modernism's everyday. Just as studies of newspapers have tended to neglect the everyday, key studies of the modernist quotidian, such as Bryony Randal's *Modernism, Daily Time and Everyday Life* (2007) and Liesl Olson's *Modernism and the Ordinary* (2009) have largely ignored the place of the newspaper, with the former setting it aside entirely and the latter turning to it only briefly, when Olson identifies a passage in "Aeolous" which

mocks the work of a newspaper when journalists concoct an 'event' out of insignificant phenomena. Reporting an event in a newspaper necessarily adds significance to the event itself, a development amplified by modern news media. Blanchot notes that the transcription from real life to newspaper event 'modifies everything'.⁴³⁷

If such descriptions of the newspaper might reasonably be thought to over-determine the agency of the press – after all, newspaper editors and journalists are, as Myles and this chapter both make evident, only people, who are themselves embroiled in the milieu of everyday life and often as fallible as their readers – they nevertheless speak to its power as a mechanism for shaping public opinion. In his essay on *Cruiskeen Lawn*, Steven Young notes precisely this role of the newspaper, describing it as "a mirror of the flux and chaos of daily life, and an arena in which words create the conventional wisdom of the society it serves".⁴³⁸ Thus the newspaper enjoys a symbiotic relationship with its public, one which undertakes analysis of everyday affairs while also coming to form part of the sediment of the same: a reciprocal cycle to which, as I shall demonstrate, *Cruiskeen Lawn* was keenly attentive.

This complex relationship opens up a discursive space to consider wider questions about public discourse and the role of the individual citizen. In the early twentieth century, the newspaper not only brought a textual materiality to the visual arts but also provided an allegorical field for philosophers as they tackled urgent questions of self, state and cultural life. The young Karl Marx engaged in a public debate in the pages of the *Rheinische Zeitung* in 1842, in which he not only weighed in on the anti-intellectual Berlin press gang who attempted to throw away "like soap bubbles years of study of genius", but also used the concept of the newspaper to approach more general questions about the "truth" of

⁴³⁷ Liesl Olson, *Modernism and the Ordinary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.54

⁴³⁸ Steven Young, "Fact/Fiction: Cruiskeen Lawn, 1945-66", in *Conjuring Complexities: Essays on Flann O'Brien*, eds. Anne Clune and Tess Hurson (Belfast: The Institute of Irish Studies, 1997), p. 112-9.

philosophy. Drawing a distinction between the philosopher and what he calls the “newspaper public”, Marx claimed that philosophy had “become a newspaper correspondent” – to unfulfilling ends.⁴³⁹ Other thinkers used newspapers as a way of allegorically explaining ideas otherwise resistant to description. In her *Tribute to Freud*, the poet and philosopher H.D. talks of the “newspaper class” of dreams, which are “trivial and tiresome” and yet, like newspaper columns, can be panned for nuggets of wisdom:

. . .but even there is, in an old newspaper, sometimes a hint of eternal truth, or a quotation from a great man’s speech or some tale of heroism, among the trashy and often sordid and trivial record of the day’s events. The printed page varies, cheap-news-print, good print, bad print, smudged and uneven print – there are the great letter words of an advertisement or the almost invisible pin-print; there are the huge capitals of a child’s alphabet chart or building blocks; letters or ideas may run askew on the page, as it were; they may be purposeless; they may be stereotyped and not meant for ‘reading’ but as a test.⁴⁴⁰

In H.D.’s analogy, the content of dreams shares the quality of newspapers in varying from the profound to the cheaply trivial, and her list of print architecture conjures up an image of reams of text, all ripe for interpretation. In *The Tenth Muse* (2007), Laura Marcus productively interprets this passage by drawing an additional point of comparison between newspapers, dreams and everyday life.⁴⁴¹ H.D., she writes, “implicitly [suggests] the ways in which the diurnal newspaper itself provides the materials for the ‘day’s residues’”. Akin to Burra’s newspaper woman and the “conventional wisdom” of society Young describes, Marcus’ reads H.D.’s newspapers as effecting the very content of her dreams. This triple correspondence of newspaper-dreams-dailiness invites attention to shared qualities of volume and repetition – serialisation – which H.D.’s repetitive, textured litany represents in prose, suggesting an unwieldy “residue” of the quotidian; an object whose mass and variation makes it resistant to interpretation. Most intriguingly, H.D. suggests that the letters on the page may in fact be “stereotyped” (a term that originates in the printing press) and not meant for “‘reading’ but as a test” – a phrase which gestures both to the way meaning seems to gradually submerge under the weight of reams of print, and emphasises the fact the onus is on the reader to address the difficulty the daily news

⁴³⁹ Karl Marx, “From Rheinische Zeitung”, *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, ed. Loyd David Easton and Kurt H. Guddat (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997), p.124.

⁴⁴⁰ Hilda Doolittle, *Tribute to Freud*, 2nd edition (New York: New Directions, 2012), p. 92.

⁴⁴¹ Laura Marcus, *The Tenth Muse: Writing About Cinema in the Modernist Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.365.

presents in terms of discerning meaning. Unlike Highmore's, H.D.'s reader is not only subject to the opinions of the newspaper, but an active, if anxious, participant in the news process.

2. The press gang

Yet even in her meandering prose, H.D. retains a degree of circumspection akin to Olson and Highmore's: if journalists might occasionally cough up a pearl, their output remains chiefly problematic. To understand the roots of this suspicion, it is worth returning to debates about print culture which originated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It may seem unnecessary to point out that the social and political changes of the period were narrated in the 'papers, but it is nevertheless significant that not only were the topics we now recognise as the prominent concerns of the era's artistic avant-garde extensively documented in print, but that this state of affairs – in which newspapers offered contemporaneous analysis of social, political and cultural events – was unprecedented. With many newspapers appearing daily, the mainstream press was linked intimately with everyday life, both in the sense that the newspaper would be read each day and in terms of its contents, designed to appeal to and inform a non-specialist audience. Changes in media culture, the availability of cheap paper, and the necessity of current affairs reporting were accompanied “by breakthroughs in print, transportation, and communications technology”,⁴⁴² contributing to the rise of the newspaper in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Howard Cox and Simon Mowatt's *Revolutions from Grub Street: A History of Magazine Publishing in Britain* (2014) details the rise of the industry during the period, noting how, as a combination of paper imports and the introduction of the American rotary press allowed the news to be printed cheaply and efficiently, publishing businesses similarly reformed their business models, shifting from family-owned, often conservative companies to vertically-integrated enterprises with an eye to sales figures.⁴⁴³ *Modernism on Fleet Street* opens with a detailed account of these changes, beginning with the story of Alfred Harmsworth, the press baron who “engineered the most important change in British culture of the past 50 years: the introduction and explosive growth of

⁴⁴² Patrick Collier, *Modernism on Fleet Street* (London: Ashgate, 2006), p.13.

⁴⁴³ Howard Cox and Simon Mowatt, *Revolutions from Grub Street: a History of Magazine Publishing in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 26.

‘papers for the millions’”. These diurnal products featured “brightly written articles, blaring headlines and advertising placards, and perpetually mutating variety of content” with which they “sought and won readers respectable papers of 50 years ago had ignored”. The instant success of *Tit-bits*, launched in October 1881 and now most famously associated with Leopold Bloom’s outhouse,⁴⁴⁴ is indicative of this turn towards populist, eclectic reportage.

Thus it was not only the bourgeois of Picasso’s artwork who benefitted from the expansion of the press. “Gains [in readership figures]”, Collier explains, were the result of new technology but also “enabled by the spread of education”.⁴⁴⁵ Like travel guides, newspapers at the turn of the century broadened their scope to appeal to a working-class purchasing public; yet, unlike guidebooks, there was no consensus that their contents were educative or even appropriate for such an audience (they might even, heaven forbid, entertain them). As Collier explains, popular publications like Harmsworth’s were quickly at the centre of a debate on press standards.⁴⁴⁶ Commentaries from the time narrate a growing, paternalistic anxiety over the possible ill-effects of newspaper reporting: one fortnightly review, quoted by Collier, describes a “fear that the gigantic newspaper organisations of to-day are prospering on the weaknesses of the public mind and are deepening them by subtly obscuring the boundaries between fact and fiction”. The concern was not only that newspapers would print the wrong sort of material, but that it would be found by the wrong sort of reader, as commentators drew a distinction between serious readers and distracted ones, with the press implicated in the degradation of the latter. Newspapers, Collier writes, were feared to be capable of exercising “a mysterious, extra-rational, mass influence, transforming readers into a dehumanized conglomerate, liable in the direst projections to become agents of anarchy or an easily manipulated mob”.⁴⁴⁷ By the twentieth century newsprint was, he summarises, “the most controversial medium of the age of modernism”.⁴⁴⁸

Yet “the wide audience, cultural centrality, and apparent power of mass journalism were not easily renounced” – and the form of the newspaper quickly changed accordingly.

⁴⁴⁵ Collier, *Modernism*, p.1.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁷ Collier, *Modernism*, p. 19.

⁴⁴⁸ Collier, *Modernism*, p.1.

Stead's pioneering new journalism debuted editorial codes including "bold headlines" and "themed leading articles" designed to demarcate individual items and encourage readers to interpret them in a certain way.⁴⁴⁹ Quantitative analysis shows how headlines, "not yet an established feature" in the eighteenth century, "steadily climbed [in use] in the nineteenth century and peaked in the early twentieth".⁴⁵⁰ What the authors call the "macro-structures" of stories also changed to privilege quick comprehensibility. Paragraphs shortened, and the shape of articles shifted "from chronological to inverted pyramid", an re-orienting of the column's form towards its communicative function which front-loaded information.⁴⁵¹ In Ireland publications like the *Irish Independent*, founded in 1905 and serving a similar market to the most popular English titles, incorporated "such novel populist features as a woman's page, extensive sports coverage, and leaders of half a column rather than the two or three found in the [established rival] *Freeman's Journal*".⁴⁵² Like travel guides, newspapers were divided into sections such as "society", "foreign news" and "letters", inviting readers to understand news items through their taxonomy. In short, newspapers became less difficult to read; a process which may have suspect implications in terms of how readers approach their contents, but was primarily designed to boost sales.

The process was effective. Cox and Mowatt cite the examples of newspapers such as the leading Sunday title *Lloyd's Weekly*, which increased its circulation from 350,000 in 1863 to 750,000 in 1886, as evidence of this fact.⁴⁵³ During the golden age of Irish newspapers, large titles enjoyed comparable conditions to their British and American counterparts, drawing on innovations and even – controversially – news from overseas to enhance their product. Over *Cruiskeen Lawn's* run, Irish newspapers continued to grow in circulation, with the three major Dublin morning newspapers (the *Irish Independent*, *Irish*

⁴⁴⁹ Collier, *Modernism*, p. 19.

⁴⁵⁰ Robert Facchinetti, Nicholas Brownlees, Birte Boes et al., *News as Changing Texts: Corpora, Methodologies and Analysis* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), p.118.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵² Fearghal McGarry, "Irish Newspapers and the Spanish Civil War", *Irish Historical Studies* 33, no. 192 (2002), p.69.

⁴⁵³ Collier, *Modernism*, p. 20.

Press and *Irish Times*) reaching a combined circulation of 351,235 by 1956,⁴⁵⁴ almost half the county's estimated population of 693,000.⁴⁵⁵

Yet there are also specificities to the Irish national press in the twentieth century that are worth remarking on, particularly in relation to the *Irish Times*. For if press standards remained a thorny topic in England, London's reading public was nevertheless not involved in the fraught series of nationalist and sectarian divisions which Irish newspapers were forced to take a stance on. Ireland's changing geopolitics added a specific weight to these debates: before 1922 the specific complications of reporting news in a colonised country had to be contended with; after, the necessity of establishing a suitable register for the new Irish press became a matter of urgency.

These complications effected Ireland's relationship with newspapers overseas. Writing on James Joyce and the "New Journalism", Margot Gayle Backus describes how "a complex, interactive circuitry" emerged in Ireland's media involving "metropolitan and regional newspapers across the British archipelago and beyond".⁴⁵⁶ Yet if these different journalistic spheres interacted, reporting on Irish affairs was imbalanced not only in English newspapers but in Irish ones. One key flashpoint was the reporting of the 1882 Phoenix Park murders when, according to Backus' account, both nationalist and loyalist organs seemed to "accept British political violence in Ireland as an unremarkable fact of life, while viewing Irish violence as shameful and stigmatising".⁴⁵⁷ The scandal became symbolic, "locking all 'decent' newspaper readers into an obligatory defensive identification with English rule in Ireland".⁴⁵⁸ Other examples of Irish newspapers being colonised abound: as John Hergan reminds us, for instance, "Ireland had no indigenous broadcasting" in the early twentieth century and thus the BBC schedule was listed "as a matter of course in all the daily newspapers".⁴⁵⁹ Reporting of foreign news most often focussed on English political affairs, and perhaps not unreasonably; after all, until 1922 Irish MPs returned to Westminster. Naturally, there was backlash, and just as the Victorian intelligentsia

⁴⁵⁴ Gavin Ellis, *Trust Ownership and the Future of News: Media Moguls and White Knights* [eBook edition] (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014).

⁴⁵⁵ "Census, 1951 reports", *An Phríomh-Oifig Staidrimh/Central Statistics Office*, <http://www.cso.ie/en/census/censusvolumes1926to1991/historicalreports/census1951reports/>

⁴⁵⁶ Margot Gayle Backus, *Scandal Work: James Joyce, the New Journalism, and the Home Rule Newspaper Wars* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), p.27.

⁴⁵⁷ Backus, p. 35-6.

⁴⁵⁸ Backus, p.39.

⁴⁵⁹ John Hergan, *Irish Media: A Critical History since 1992* (London: Routledge, 2001), p.7.

expressed anxiety over how the working class might be effected by base, salacious copy, so Irish patricians began to denounce the tone of reporting from England. Douglas Hyde's famous speech on "The Necessity for De-Anglizing Ireland" in 1892 expressed concern over how English pulp sensationalist periodicals might effect Irish morality, lambasting "the garbage of vulgar English weeklies like *Bow Bells* and *Police Intelligence*", while Sinn Féin urged readers to turn their backs on sensationalist news from abroad, from where many of the juiciest stories originated.⁴⁶⁰

The *Irish Times*, however, managed to sustain a broad church. While it tended to eschew obviously salacious reporting, it did carry society stories; equally, it refused to be bound by the prevailing dogmas of Irish politics. Founded in 1859 by proprietor Lawrence E. Knox, the paper was opposed to Home Rule and the expansion of the Irish language both, with a tendency to privilege the "gossip of the old Protestant ascendancy over cultural items".⁴⁶¹ The publication was thus conservative in the literal sense: as Mark O'Brien's *The Irish Times: A History* explains, the *Times* was initially aimed at Church of Ireland communities committed to "maintaining the status quo vis-a-vis politics and religion" –⁴⁶² or, as Hergan characterises it, a Protestant journal with a large dose of British exports for its readers.⁴⁶³ After the newspaper's circulation increased in the nineteenth century, a growth O'Brien attributes to changes to taxation,⁴⁶⁴ its editorial line became more solidly aspirational, with features such as "Fashion Intelligence" "which listed the doing, comings and goings of members of the royal family, the aristocracy and high ranking officials of the armed forces".⁴⁶⁵ The paper took a liberal line on both the Parnell affair⁴⁶⁶ and J.M. Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*, citing freedom of expression in the latter case,⁴⁶⁷ and although it took a hard line on the Easter Rising – to the extent that the *Freeman's Journal* accused it of "blood-thirsty incitement to the government" – it was critical of both Sinn Féin and British tactics during the War of Independence,⁴⁶⁸ and later caused controversy by calling anti-Unionists "Republicans" rather than "irregulars", as the

⁴⁶⁰ Collier, *Modernism* p.108.

⁴⁶¹ Collier, *Modernism* p.114.

⁴⁶² Mark O'Brien, *The Irish Times: A History* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008), p.16.

⁴⁶³ Hergan, *Irish Media*, p.6.

⁴⁶⁴ O'Brien, *The Irish Times*, p.16.

⁴⁶⁵ O'Brien, *The Irish Times*, p.16-7.

⁴⁶⁶ O'Brien, *The Irish Times*, p.28-9.

⁴⁶⁷ O'Brien, *The Irish Times*, p.34.

⁴⁶⁸ O'Brien, *The Irish Times*, p.54.

British government desired.⁴⁶⁹ While conservative, therefore, the *Times* remained sceptical and plural in its coverage of both domestic news and foreign affairs; a stance which permitted the hire of, in 1944, a certain Myles na gCopaleen.

3. A portrait of the hack

"I declare to god, if I hear that name Joyce one more time I will surely froth at the gob."

– Brian O’Nolan, in a letter to Timothy O’Keeffe⁴⁷⁰

"Work harder? For what? To import . . . more newsprint wherewith to disseminate more chauvin rubbish?"

– "Cruiskeen Lawn", 30th July 1930⁴⁷¹

O’Brien’s history of the *Irish Times* narrates how, true to stereotype on both their parts, Robert Marie ("Bertie") Smyllie hired Flann O’Brien in a bar. The offer came following a protracted exchange of pseudonymous joke correspondence in the letters pages of his newspaper, set off by a Patrick Kavanagh poem and eventually broadening to include several fake correspondents.⁴⁷² Myles was in several respects ideally suited for the role. The *Times* had recently faced criticism over its allegedly flippant coverage of Irish,⁴⁷³ and O’Brien suggests that Smyllie "eventually consented to a column in Irish written by O’Nolan simply because their philosophy on the language was the same – that it stood a better chance of survival if it were not rammed down people’s throats".⁴⁷⁴ An Irish speaker from birth, Brian O’Nolan was home educated until the age of twelve; his brother Ciarán Ó’Nualláin recounts that the children spoke Irish among themselves, often spending time in the Donegal *Gaeltacht*,⁴⁷⁵ and that the family were all voracious readers, with his father frequently buying books.⁴⁷⁶ At University College Dublin, O’Nolan helped found *Blather*, a "chaotic collage"⁴⁷⁷ of in-jokes and cultural commentary whose language play is perhaps

⁴⁶⁹ O’Brien, *The Irish Times*, p.60.

⁴⁷⁰ Letter to Timothy O’Keeffe, 25 November 1961, in Gordon Henderson and Robert Hogan, "A Sheaf of Letters", *The Journal of Irish Literature*, IH, 1 (January 1974), p.79.

⁴⁷¹ "Cruiskeen Lawn", *The Irish Times*, Monday, 30 July 1951, p.4.

⁴⁷² A satisfying start to the column given that the newspaper column as a form initially developed from particularly eloquent readers’ letters which editors began to publish in full during the 19th century.

⁴⁷³ O’Brien, *The Irish Times*, p.129.

⁴⁷⁴ O’Brien, *The Irish Times*, p.125.

⁴⁷⁵ Ciarán Ó’Nualláin, *The Early Years of Brian O’Nolan/Flann O’Brien/Myles na gCoplaeen*, trans Róisín Ní Nualláin (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1998), p.32.

⁴⁷⁶ Ó’Nualláin, *The Early Years*, p. 42.

⁴⁷⁷ Maebh Long, *Assembling Flann O’Brien* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p.31.

the closest predecessor to *Cruiskeen Lawn*, and wrote an Irish-language master's thesis on "Irish nature poetry" before taking a job on the civil service.⁴⁷⁸ This rare combination of comic skill, linguistic deftness, knowledge of government and what might be called "literariness" made him an appealing prospect as an *Irish Times* columnist. According to Smyllie, however, he hired Myles because he was "the only person, to my knowledge, who was ever funny in Gaelic [sic] . . . he has actually made people brush up on their Irish who have forgotten it since they left school".⁴⁷⁹

In hindsight, we can see that O'Nolan sat at a cultural crossroads; one which disturbs the reactionary dichotomy too often attributed to the Irish literary scene of the early twentieth century. For although O'Nolan spoke Irish as a child and wrote in the language, most famously in his 1941 novel *An Béal Bocht* ("The Poor Mouth"), also published under the name Myles na gCopaleen, there is another strand to his cultural identity which is of equal significance: the influence of experimental modernist writers. O'Nolan began writing *Cruiskeen Lawn* at a time when the synthesis of modernism and Irish literature was itself edging further into the mainstream, and if it is his Irish patter which initially attracted Smyllie, it is an absurdist play gleaned from high modernism which fuelled his most inventive columns. Often introduced via his relationship with James Joyce – on which more in a moment – O'Brien's rising prominence in modernist studies attests to the ease with which his work fits in the pantheons of literary modernism, as well as Irish writing. For although his writing "[bristles] against generic designation",⁴⁸⁰ as Rónán McDonald and Julian Murphet put it in their introduction to *Flann O'Brien & Modernism* (2014), there are several compelling parallels, or more accurately strands of influence, to be noted between the aesthetic values of modernism and the guiding principles of O'Brien's wide output. His use of pseudonyms is one such trait, with McDonald and Murphet comparing Myles' rejection of objectivity with Picasso's rejection of mimesis or Schönberg's atonality. "[A]rtists [were] as reluctant to stand steadfast by the ethics of a proper name", they write, "as they were to abide by standard definitions of the work of art".⁴⁸¹ This radical refusal to *be* anything that might be pinned down evidences a distinctly

⁴⁷⁸ Ó'Nualláin, *The Early Years*, p.101.

⁴⁷⁹ O'Brien, *The Irish Times*, p.125.

⁴⁸⁰ Juliet Murphet and Rónán McDonald, "Introduction", *Flann O'Brien & Modernism*, ed Julian Murphet, Rónán McDonald, Sascha Morrell (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p.2.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*

“modernist notion of subjectivity which thwarts singular or positivistic ideas of a coherent, self-contained individual, which also has precursors in an Irish tradition of self-concealment or self-invention”.⁴⁸² Indeed, the repudiation of consistency is something of an O’Nolan hallmark, and something which occurs not just on the level of his bibliography but often – and this we shall see with *Cruiskeen Lawn* – within the work itself. As with Warner’s “constitutional incapability” of being a guide, there is a wry edge to O’Brien’s multifaceted self-fashioning, which takes up modernist debates about selfhood half-sincerely, half-ironically.

With this in mind, we can understand O’Brien’s output as markedly different to that of several of his most famous Irish contemporaries. While “[m]any writers of O’Brien’s generation – Kavanagh, O’Faolain, O’Conner – retreated from the pyrotechnics of the Modernists to a self-effacing chronicle of the jagged realities of the breaking world”, as Anne Clune and Tess Hurson put it, the vestiges of modernist play allowed O’Brien to avoid being “trapped by the quotidian” (although, as we shall see, the everyday remained a favoured topic).⁴⁸³ Yet if O’Brien’s modernism distanced him from his peers, it should not be read as a rejection of the Irish literary tradition; indeed, personas and other evasions are just as much a part of this tradition as they are of modernism. So, too, are O’Brien’s literary aesthetics drawn from the shared stylistics of modernism and Irish writing. Plays on words, particularly, are both a key marker of literary modernism and, as Danielle Jacquin writes, “an unquestionable feature of the Irish comic tradition”.⁴⁸⁴ In this regard, it is not so much that O’Brien forges a link between the Irish literary tradition and high modernism so much as that he operates in the common ground shared by the two, navigating a hybridised tradition which draws on the shared characteristics of both spheres while remaining attentive to their distinct etymologies and expressions.

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that Myles’ relationship to Joyce has attracted a good degree of recent critical attention (indeed, many who are today working on Flann O’Brien were initially Joyce scholars).⁴⁸⁵ Nevertheless, it is worth briefly commenting on it

⁴⁸² Murphet and McDonald, “Introduction”, p.1.

⁴⁸³ “Introduction”, *Conjoining Complexities: Essays on Flann O’Brien*, ed. Anne Clune and Tess Hurson (Belfast: Queen’s University Belfast, Institute of Irish Studies, 1997), p.ix.

⁴⁸⁴ Danielle Jacquin, “Flann O’Brien’s Savage Mirth”, *Conjoining Complexities: Essays on Flann O’Brien*. Ed Anne Clune and Tess Hurson (Belfast: Queen’s University Belfast, Institute of Irish Studies, 1997), p.2.

⁴⁸⁵ For instance, illustrious International Flann O’Brien Society members Ronan Crowley, Joseph Brooker and Paul Fagan.

here, if only for the frequency with which *Cruiskeen Lawn* makes direct or indirect reference to Joyce's novels. For while, as with Joyce's relationship with Yeats, early commentary too often oversimplified Myles' rivalry with his predecessor – with scholars who in other circumstances would be hesitant to take O'Brien's dramatics at face value all too happy to uncritically repeat the most scathing of his indictments – more recent studies have noted a complex, ambivalent relationship. Thus while authors like Thomas B O'Grady conclude that "[o]nly grudgingly would O'Brien acknowledge Joyce's talents as a writer",⁴⁸⁶ subsequent commentary by scholars including Stephen Abblitt⁴⁸⁷ and David Kelly⁴⁸⁸ affirms that while O'Brien certainly felt a certain amount of disdain for Ireland's Joycean hagiography – "if I hear that word 'Joyce' again I will surely froth at the gob"⁴⁸⁹ – his resentment was commingled with respect, and an awareness of the comic potential offered by Joyce's influence. The *Cruiskeen Lawn* columns, as will become clear in what follows, reveal a deep reverence for Joyce's literary craft. Aside from a sustained campaign to mock any journalist who inserted an apostrophe in *Finnegans Wake*, Myles' columns borrow from Joycean poetics – most obviously those of *Ulysses*' "Cyclops" – in order to hold up a mirror to Irish society. The gesture is as much a political one as it is stylistic: if Joyce is a figure whose stature all subsequent Irish writers must "reckon" with, he also helped to configure a space in which authors could address Ireland in a cosmopolitan context without relinquishing their specific literary tradition, and, by the same token, without recourse to lazy provincialism. It is this ambiguous literary terrain which O'Brien was eager to occupy.

Of all the things that Myles inherited from Joyce, it is this complicated relationship to Ireland which is of most relevance to this chapter. When *Cruiskeen Lawn* began, in 1940, Joyce was still alive and the Republic was not yet twenty years old; by the time it concluded with O'Brien's death in 1966, the *James Joyce Quarterly* had been founded to document the growing field of Joyce studies⁴⁹⁰ and Éamon de Valera was president of

⁴⁸⁶ Thomas B. O'Grady, "High Anxiety: Flann O'Brien's Portrait of the Artist", *Studies in the Novel* 21, no.2 (Summer 1989), p.200.

⁴⁸⁷ Stephen Abblitt, "The Ghost of 'Poor Jimmy Joyce': A Portrait of the Artist as a Reluctant Modernist", *Flann O'Brien and Modernism*, ed. Julian Murphet, Rónán McDonald, and Sascha Morrell (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 55-66.

⁴⁸⁸ David Kelly, "'Do You Know What I'm Going to Tell You?': Flann O'Brien, Risibility and the Anxiety of Influence", *Flann O'Brien and Modernism*, ed. Julian Murphet, Rónán McDonald and Sascha Morrell (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 67-76.

⁴⁸⁹ Letter to Timothy O'Keefe, 25 November 1961, in Hogan and Henderson, "A Sheaf of Letters", p.79.

⁴⁹⁰ "About", *James Joyce Quarterly*, University of Tulsa (<https://jjq.utulsa.edu/about/>).

Ireland. Criticism of the column attests to its broad potential for interpretation, in terms of both its social and literary value. Stephen Young's "Fact/Fiction: Cruiskeen Lawn, 1945-66", for instance, explains how O'Brien "[f]ound a perch in the heaven of international modernism – Yeats, Joyce, Beckett"⁴⁹¹ with the column, despite its "[remaining] rooted in its time and place, filled with the particulars of, and topical allusions to, daily life in Dublin", and thus seeming like "unlikely material on which to base an international reputation" – presumably *Ulysses*' example aside. Yet there remains, Young notes, a sense that journalism was a potential "waste of talent" – a suggestion which echoes the nineteenth-century concern that the populist language of journalism was degrading to more serious forms of rhetoric, or equally the pervasive belief that modernism as a retrospective designation is best understood as describing an aesthetic radically divorced from more popular literary discourses.

Cruiskeen Lawn complicates these hierarchies. The modernist backlash against popular discourses is, for John Attridge, one whose origins can be traced to the fallout of World War I: as "hostility to public cant peaked in Britain" with conflict "widely felt to have bankrupted the linguistic economy", renovations to the form of the novel took on a specific urgency – with "the very nature of truth at stake".⁴⁹² Citing Jacques Ranciere's assertion that "literary modernity . . . was positioned as the setting to work of an intransitive use of language opposed to its communicative use",⁴⁹³ Attridge describes how "literary language defines itself against the exhausted vocabulary of 'communicative' or instrumental language, and especially against the various debased or fraudulent discourses that dominate the public sphere".⁴⁹⁴ If this is true, then the modernist newspaper column is a curious thing indeed; for, as anyone who has worked as a jobbing hack knows, journalistic prose is oriented first and foremost towards its "communicative use". "The name of Flann O'Brien", which, as Attridge writes, "is almost mythically associated with lying and fabulations",⁴⁹⁵ would seem a particularly unusual one to peg to a newspaper article. Yet there is a political side to O'Brien's "bullshit" which makes the newspaper an apt outlet, if

⁴⁹¹ Steven Young, "Fact/Fiction: Cruiskeen Lawn, 1945-66", p.111.

⁴⁹² John Attridge, "Mythomaniac Modernism: Lying and Bullshit in Flann O'Brien", *Conjoining Complexities: Essays on Flann O'Brien*. Ed Anne Clune and Tess Hurson (Belfast: Queen's University Belfast, Institute of Irish Studies, 1997), p.28.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁵ Attridge, "Mythomaniac Modernism", p.31.

not the expected one. I have said above that personae and feints are part of the Irish literary tradition; what must also be mentioned is how the same tradition often positions deception as a political act. In his chapter on Irish literature for the *Oxford History of Ireland* (2001), Declan Kiberd notes this political dimension to Irish bullshit, writing that “[n]o matter how far back one looks in Irish experience . . . one comes upon regimes or rebels devoted to the sanctification of the lie”. For Kiberd, “irony, ambiguity, and downright lying” are “modes of self-protection as well as being graces of literary style”; the natural response of a culture whose tenor had been quashed by English political and artistic colonising.⁴⁹⁶ Like Ranciere’s literary modernism which opposes the communicative use of language, this deception opposes the instrumentalising of Irish identity and artistry.

In O’Brien’s hands, however, bullshit becomes a tool for resisting other oppressors – including domestic ones. His columns give particularly short shrift to the writers of the Celtic Revival and the Gaelic League. Although it is worth pointing out that O’Nolan shared several broad concerns with the minds behind such movements; most obviously the preservation of the Irish language, but also anxieties around emigration and bureaucratic governance, he had little time for the particulars of their approach which he saw as peddling an inauthentic, atavistic national literature, shot through with phobic tribalism. The style and politics of the Celtic Revivalists lacked the self-awareness of MacDiarmid’s synthetic Scots, and “authenticity” was often their stated goal.⁴⁹⁷ For O’Nolan, Maebh Long writes, this “mode of ‘Irishness’ created by the Abbey Theatre, the Gaelic League and the works of Yeats, Synge and Gregory” came “from a past either created or anachronistically understood” – and, more importantly, “adhered to in theory and while convenient”,⁴⁹⁸ although often “with all the blind determination of adherents of eugenics”.⁴⁹⁹ According to Long, his “early work in particular was a reaction to the Gaelic Revivalists’ belief in the ‘dignifying power of poverty’”.⁵⁰⁰ *An Béal Bocht* (1941) places “the Gaelic League, the government, the English-speaking public and the Gaeltachts themselves” equally before the law as it pantomimes the tragedy of Irish poverty;⁵⁰¹ likewise, *At Swim-Two-Birds*

⁴⁹⁶ Declan Kiberd, “Irish Literature and Irish History”, *The Oxford History of Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp.231-2.

⁴⁹⁷ See Philip O’Leary, *The Prose Literature of the Gaelic revival 1881-1921: Ideology and Innovation* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 1994), p.78-9 for a taste.

⁴⁹⁸ Long, *Assembling*, p.28.

⁴⁹⁹ Long, *Assembling*, p.141.

⁵⁰⁰ Long, *Assembling*, p.3.

⁵⁰¹ Long, *Assembling*, p.127.

(1939) tackles “the obsessive pre-occupations of the Gaelic League”, reminding its reader that “far worse than a state of acknowledged fragmentation is a nation priding itself on a false and created purity”.⁵⁰² Significantly, writing in the *Gaeltacht* failed to adhere to this “mode”. Contrary to the aesthetics of the Revival, which moved relatively away from engagement with other discourses to centre on its own internal logic, plenty of Irish literature contains a pastiche of different registers, from the graveyard chatter of Máirtín Ó Cadhain’s *Cré na Cille* (1949) to the shrewd reportage of Tomás Ó Criomhthain’s *An t-Oileánach* (1929) – works which also capture oral cadences as opposed to the Revival’s primarily written *fíor Ghaed*, or “true Irish”. So, too, do such writers exemplify the dark humour of Irish literature; for, as Maria Tymoczko writes in *The Irish Ulysses* (1994), “[r]arely is a tale purely comic or purely tragic” in the Irish tradition.⁵⁰³ O’Nolan’s various literary creations follow in this vein. Defying “authenticity”, they “[write] against homogeneity and static sameness”,⁵⁰⁴ using a carefully-modulated mix of fictional and nonfictional which, as Attridge puts it, “blurs the line between . . . serious assertive discourses and non-assertive pseudo-statements”.⁵⁰⁵ With layers of truth and fabulation concealed within each other, his works might be best understood with reference to what Attridge calls “sociable lies”: a term he uses to describe “discourses whose audience voluntarily regulate their credulity so as not to be deceived”. This he compares with “bullshit”, another form of discourse which operates on the premise that both speaker and listener know the content of the message to be false, or at least exaggerated. “[A]ny reader of O’Brien’s fiction”, Attridge writes, “would do well to keep the related concepts of bullshit and sociable lying in mind”: “Examples abound in O’Brien’s fictional world of utterances that are not supposed to be taken seriously, and which are, nonetheless, not stigmatised as lies”.⁵⁰⁶

4. Precision vagueness

Nowhere is this principle of “sociable lying” as evident as in *Cruiskeen Lawn*. Ostensibly categorised as non-fiction, and placed among other writing which at least claims to be

⁵⁰² Long, *Assembling*, p.27.

⁵⁰³ Maria Tymoczko, *The Irish Ulysses* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p.89.

⁵⁰⁴ Long, *Assembling*, p.141.

⁵⁰⁵ Attridge, “Mythomaniac Modernism”, p.31.

⁵⁰⁶ Attridge, “Mythomaniac Modernism”, p.35-6.

verifiable, the column rejects not only the prevailing conventions of storytelling but also the specific conventions of the newspaper form. In many ways, it is a column characterised by its difficulty – whether expressed by its strange turns of phrase, twisting line of argument (so different to the “inverse pyramid” style) or simply the fact it sometimes used Irish, a language spoken by only a minority of Dubliners.⁵⁰⁷ O’Nolan’s self-fashioned persona passes comment on the day’s events in a way which deliberately wrong-foots readers, and subsequently encourages a sceptical approach to news media. As will become clear in that follows, very few things in *Cruiskeen Lawn* are represented simply, and we might well think back to Ford Madox Ford’s two newspaper writers⁵⁰⁸ in characterising it: for Myles, while not exactly an Impressionist, represents his various subjects more frequently through coded details – whether it be local signifiers or a certain texture of prose – than he does through “the facts”. Yet the column is also playful in its complexity: where other columnists establish their authority by valorising comprehensibility and usefulness, Myles elects to privilege a complicated form of satire, drawing both from modernism and an Irish literary tradition of concealment. The name “Myles na gCopaleen” is itself a nod to this, being the name of the moonshine-brewing “lovable Irish scoundrel” in *The Colleen Bawn* by Dion Boucicault (1860),⁵⁰⁹ a playwright whose works Joyce had previously mined for the names “Garryowen” and “Shaun-the-Post”.⁵¹⁰ In this way even the most basic requirement of a newspaper column – a columnist – was complicated, with readers given little indication of who was really writing. The columns appropriate other newspaper features in similar ways, replacing instructive details with irrelevant ones in a form of burlesque which both pantomimes the relationship between the newspaper and its readers and demands that that relationship be re-negotiated. Everything from the narrative of each column to Myles’ subversive appropriation of page architecture aims away from the comprehensible, communicative mode which normally typifies newspaper content.

⁵⁰⁷ Dublin has never been part of the official Gaeltacht, established in 1926 with a quota of 25%+ Irish-speaking citizens for a district to be included. Cf. Diarmait Mac Giolla Chríost, “Micro-level Language Planning in Ireland”, *Language Planning and Policy: Language Planning in Local Contexts*, ed. Anthony Liddicoat and Richard B. Baldauf (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Limited, 2008) p.79.

⁵⁰⁸ See Chapter 1, page 44.

⁵⁰⁹ Dion Boucicault and Peter Thomson, *Plays by Dion Boucicault* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p.2.

⁵¹⁰ The former, the name of the Citizen’s dog in “Cyclops” (*U* 12.120); the latter, one of the iterations of Shaun in *Finnegans Wake* (*FW* 403.28).

In what follows, I will suggest that it is this very refusal to be comprehensible which most precisely defines *Cruiskeen Lawn* as a whole. Leaning on the negative, the column is reminiscent of the bureaucrat in O'Brien's novel *The Third Policeman* (1966) who, having noticed almost every demand made of him was better refused than honoured, "decided to say No henceforth to every suggestion, request or inquiry whether inward or outward. It was the only simple formula which was sure and safe."⁵¹¹ The moment is a send-up of the lunacy of bureaucracy, but when applied to *Cruiskeen Lawn* it might also be a cipher for Myles' methods (especially when contrasted with the conventions adhered to by his colleagues). Where other modernists may seek to carve out a neutral space in novels or poetry, far from the irritatingly "heterogeneous creature" of the general public,⁵¹² Myles inserts himself in the media arena, thus occupying the ambivalent position of being cynical towards journalistic discourse even as, indeed often because, he was implicated in it. As will become clear in what follows, *Cruiskeen Lawn* often makes a point of refusing the ostensible duty to file copy which is readily comprehensible to all (in a format that can be easily digested, in a five-minute stint, with breakfast). Although Stephen Young notes a changing tenor to the columns over their long run – "the writer's playfulness became rare in the last ten years"⁵¹³ – their unifying strategy is irony and varying levels of obliqueness. Writing on Mahler in *The Ancients and the Postmoderns* (2015), Fredric Jameson describes how "experientially we are (not unpleasantly) at sea" during parts of the composer's ninth symphony – "[y]et it is a delicious confusion, which I have wanted to reinscribe within the work under the heading of 'indecision' as a formal category". There is something of this sense in Myles also: like his novels, his columns are filled with imaginative flights, irreverent (though not often irrelevant) asides and deliberate misunderstandings which could not, in any strict sense, be called "true" – but are nevertheless not expected to be read as falsehoods. As such, while its complex strategies and deliberately ambiguous interleaving of truth and meaning force its reader to work, it would be a mistake to view *Cruiskeen Lawn* as indiscriminate or chaotic. Attention to detail is particularly rewarded, and long-running in-jokes, from the famous "catechism of cliché"

⁵¹¹ Flann O'Brien, *The Third Policeman* (London: Harper Perennial, 2007), p.31

⁵¹² "General Introduction", Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines Vol 1: Britain and Ireland 1880-1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.20.

⁵¹³ Young, "Fact/Fiction", p.115.

to “ACCISS” (on which more below) offer additional pleasure to loyal readers whose interests lasts beyond the daily news cycle.

In this way, Myles encourages his audience to read *Cruiskeen Lawn* in the same manner he studies the media, current affairs and Dublin’s cultural milieu. His humorous underwriting of other journalism is exemplary in this regard. Attempting to discern a method in *Cruiskeen Lawn*’s apparent madness, Young writes:

I think there is a pattern in the wild variety of these extracts, in Myles’ trick of paying close attention to writing that no one else ever reads carefully, of turning his fierce eye and his scholarly mind to the quintessentially ephemeral, and snatching little pieces of flotsam from the flood of contemporary media writing.⁵¹⁴

Young’s “quintessentially ephemeral” harks back to the swirling mass of H.D.’s “newspaper class” of dreams: Just as H.D.’s dreaming indiscriminately regurgitates items from everyday life in a ceaseless rubble which incorporates both the banal and the eventful, the incisive to the surplus, Myles’ gaze pans the whole of Dublin life. Like her, his hermeneutics are those of high modernism, based on the forms of attention that allow one to find the particular among the general. Yet where H.D. encourages her dreamers to pan for gold, the author of *Cruiskeen Lawn* pans for error; with an eye attuned to the ridiculous, to cliché, and to double-meanings, Myles is more interested in criticising those who need criticism than praising those who pass muster. His columns frequently lambast the new nation state’s civic institutions for what he sees as acts of inefficient, overly-bureaucratic paternalism, often employing thinly-veiled descriptions of parliamentary figures; a frequent talking point for Dubliners in the know which eventually lost him his job as civil servant. Similarly, although Myles often quotes other newspaper writers, it is hard to find an example of him doing so approvingly. He has, to borrow a phrase used by John Lanchester to characterise the late Karl Miller, a “visceral horror of cant”⁵¹⁵ and is quick to re-appropriate others’ lazy thinking for his own column. “No one”, as Martin Green puts it, “could pick his way round the hazards of journalistic clichés with such deftness as Myles, nor turn them to such good use when it suited his need”.⁵¹⁶ In one column, Myles winking tells his readers that he is “not a journalist, of course (I am a philosopher) and perhaps it is presumptuous of me to expect to comprehend newspapers”.⁵¹⁷ On many occasions,

⁵¹⁴ Young, “Fact/Fiction”, p.113.

⁵¹⁵ John Lanchester, “Karl Miller Remembered”, *London Review of Books* 36, no.23, October 2014: pp.10.

⁵¹⁶ Martin Green, *Myles Away from Dublin* (London: Granada, 1958), p.vi.

⁵¹⁷ “Cruiskeen Lawn”, Wednesday, October 4, 1944, *Irish Times*, p.3.

however, *Cruiskeen Lawn* was composed in its entirety of a close-reading of another writer's output, with each flaw given a theatrical dressing down. These media columns read newspapers in an almost Leavesite sense, close-reading slips and mistakes resulting from others' inattention – particularly when they inadvertently divulge the prevailing assumptions of Dublin society.

Yet if Myles demanded precise attention in certain matters – his pantomime rage at the errant apostrophe which found its way into so many print appearances of “*Finnegans Wake*” is, again, exemplary – his column seems, unusually, to have no specific brief. Thus while the columns reject cliché and laziness, so they equally defy the sort of “serial thinking” of the period which Anderson identifies as problematic. The newspaper logic which divides articles under specific headings – such as the *Irish Times*' court reporting, society coverage and foreign affairs – and helps the twentieth-century citizen formulate themselves in accordance to certain categories – Irish; middle-class – are not only sent up through parody but are undermined on a formal level. Media discourses designed to police the distinction between, for instance, Irishness and non-Irishness are often, as we shall see, the subject of *Cruiskeen Lawn*'s imaginative flights. The columns, however, often refuse to speak clearly to a single subject, flitting through several topics in a day's offering. These frequently abrupt changes of direction are not always marked by subheads; when they are, those subheads are not always helpful. His kaleidoscope of civic institutions, public behaviours, prevailing trends in cultural and literary criticism and even of trends in clothing – or of where it's popular to go in the city – are just as much a part of Myles' experimentalism as his modernist aesthetics of pastiche, irony, linguistic play and intertextuality which allude to other, more obviously experimental components of the canon. In this way, the disjointed formalism of *Cruiskeen Lawn* mirrors its irreverent reading of social forms: the columns blur boundaries, make unlikely connections in terms of nationality and civic thinking, imagine strange municipal “schemes” incorporating otherwise discrete aspects of everyday life and generally disregard the taxonomy encouraged by the twentieth century media class. Placing this gently surreal melange into one of the ultimate cultural objects of seriality, the newspaper, is a potent corrective to the bureaucracy he so abhorred.

5. “That grey tablet of lies”

“Is there any point in writing unless the writer is certain that many people will read the words, submit to their alchemy?”
 – *Cruiskeen Lawn*, 4 October, 1954⁵¹⁸

Given its complex mediation of the role of columnist, it is perhaps unsurprising that another playful character appears in *Cruiskeen Lawn*: the figure of its reader. Although the imagined voice of the reader appears in a variety of different ways, dramatised through a complex mix of different registers and specialist discourses reminiscent of Joyce’s “Circe”, the most fully-fleshed depictions tend to characterise Myles’ reader as a specifically urban figure, equivalent to “The Brother” or the stock chorus of the “Plain People of Ireland”. At the mercy of his own obligations, this reader is slave to the daily cycle of industrial time in which the newspaper plays a key rôle. Take, for instance, the frantic lust for “unspoken words” which plagues the man in this column, urgently headed “Don’t read this!”:

Consider the average day of the average man who is averagely educated. The moment he opens his eyes he reads that extremely distasteful story that is to be found morning after morning on the face of his watch. Late again. He is barely downstairs when he has thrown open (with what is surely the pathetic abandon of a person who knows he is lost) that grey tablet of lies, his newspaper. He assimilates his literary narcotic, giving 5 per cent of his attention to the business of eating. His wife has ruined her sight from trying for years to read the same paper from the other side of the table and he must therefore leave it behind as he departs for his work. Our subject is nervous on his way, his movements are undecided; he is momentarily parted from his drug. Notice how advertisements he has been looking at for twenty years are frenziedly scrutinized. . . ⁵¹⁹

Following the man throughout his day, Myles gradually constructs a set of contrasts between the banal and the extreme. Our newspaper reader, we are told, is “an average man who is averagely educated” and living an “average day”; an everyman who could represent any number of such men in Dublin. Yet the overwrought repetition of “average” – which makes up a full quarter of the sentence – immediately introduces a note of franticness to the depiction. The “story” on the face of the man’s watch both gestures to this conceit of the column, to build a dramatic narrative out of what in other contexts would

⁵¹⁸ “Cruiskeen Lawn”, *The Irish Times*, Monday, October 4, 1954, p.4.

⁵¹⁹ “Cruiskeen Lawn”, *The Irish Times*, Friday, May 7, 1954, p.6.

be mundane images, and simultaneously introduces the theme of the column: constant reading (“for years”). The newspaper itself is a “grey tablet of lies”, a phrase which introduces another contrast, this time between the newspaper’s pretence to infallibility (the Biblically-resonant “grey tablet” conjuring a visual allegory of its words as literally “set in stone”) and its actual, lying content.

Yet the man at the breakfast table devours the newspaper at the expense of placing his attention in the task of eating. A further, subtler, association is drawn between eating and reading by what is *not* present: for the column gives no details either as to what the man is eating or what his newspaper says – an omission which both serves to highlight the routine nature of his activities and shifts the focus on to the activity as significant *for its own sake*. This type of attention, or inattention, is stressed through Myles’ prose. The man’s sense of helplessness – “the pathetic abandon of a person who knows he is lost” – is coupled with terminology which nods to specialist medical and scientific discourses, such as “narcotic”, “assimilated” “5 per cent” and “his drug”, culminating in the dyad of “frenziedly scrutinized”: a phrase which gestures to both the reader’s distress and his need to decode and assimilate information. He is both entirely at the mercy of print culture and yet compelled to engage with it actively. Its unusual headline – “Don’t read this!” – nods with mock-urgency to this typical readers’ complaint.

In this way, the column performs the inner antagonism of modernity as it is expressed in the citizen’s relationship to print: the newspaper is an object that is part of one’s average, everyday life, and yet it is also one filled with items that have been demarcated from a mass of possible stories on the basis that they are specific and eventful. (Like F.T. Marinetti’s meals, as we shall saw in the previous chapter, the newspaper demands that exception be constantly repeated.) The man’s stressed “averageness” universalises the portrait, emphasising the pervasiveness of the daily newspaper amongst his class, and the timescale which structures his addiction is explicitly made general – at least on a national level – in other *Cruiskeen Lawn* columns, such as one which shows a couple becoming confused and descending into argument “after the same picture . . . appeared in this column two days running”. “I distinctly remember, says one of the pair, “that picture in yesterday’s paper, every single day that passes I have to

turn the house upside-down to get to my own newspaper". This mistake, Myles reports, thus "provoked domestic rows all over Ireland".⁵²⁰

Like other demands ordinarily placed on the newspaper writer, however, Myles rejects the obligations of this cycle. While his column appeared daily for much of its run,⁵²¹ it is often best understood with reference to other *Cruiskeen Lawn* columns published previously, with long-running series which require a reader to engage over an extended period of time in order to get the joke. Thus while its appearance in the newspaper is dictated by the cycle of newspaper publishing, its internal ontology is not; what might be called the chronology of its comprehensibility is longer than its own production cycle. In this sense, certain runs of *Cruiskeen Lawn* are closer to a serialised novel than a newspaper column. Where such items as leaders and subject editorials refer to information which has appeared solely in the same newspaper, attempts are ordinarily made to explain its provenance, or at least to provide enough details so that a reader might look up the relevant item. In contrast, Myles is studiously off-hand with his gestures to earlier columns, rarely providing the earlier references on which a specific iteration of a joke builds.

Such is the case in one of Myles' best-known series, a string of columns on "WAAMA" made famous by dint of its inclusion in the 1968 *Best of Myles* compilation. "I have received by post", the first column in the series begins, "a number of papers inviting me to become a member of the Irish Writers, Actors, Artists, Musicians Association, and to pay part of my money to the people who run this company". The organisation, a real one established in 1941 to act as an arts lobbying agency "which could apply pressure in matters that effected the quality of public life as a whole",⁵²² provokes Myles' ire in a fictional account of "one of the preliminary meetings of this organisation":

I bought a few minor novelists at five bob a skull and persuaded them to propose me for the presidency. Then I rose myself and said that if it was the unanimous wish of the company, etc., quite unworthy, etc., signal honour, etc., serve to the best of my ability, etc., prior claims of other persons, etc., if humble talents of any service, etc., delighted to place knowledge of literary world at disposal of, etc., undoubted need for organisation, etc.

⁵²⁰ "Cruiskeen Lawn", *Irish Times*, 7 January 1942, p.3.

⁵²¹ Carol Taaffe, *Ireland Through the Looking Glass: Flann O'Brien, Myles na gCopaleen and Irish Cultural Debate* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2008), p. 128.

⁵²² *A New History of Ireland, Volume VII: Ireland, 1921-84* [eBook edition], ed. J R Hill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

To my astonishment, instead of accepting my offer with loud and sustained applause, the wretched intellectuals broke up into frightened groups and started whispering together in great agitation.⁵²³

Several elements of this passage are exemplary in terms of Myles' dealing with institutions. The litany of stock phrases, for instance, shows his usual disdain for cliché, while the repeated "etc." refrain signifies how little of the actual content of such speeches is important, emphasising the inattentiveness with which such phrases are regurgitated in formal settings. For our purposes, however, the episode is most significant in that it introduces the organisation and its rejection of Myles na gCopaleen (in reality, it had installed Gaelic Leaguer Seán O'Faoláin as president, which may explain wherefore the column.)⁵²⁴ Myles goes on to question the aims and motives of the apparently duplicitous, and indiscriminating, WAAMA: "[e]ven my wife could claim to be a 'commentator' . . . and everybody knows that all these organisations are really formed in order to give people a pretext for getting away from their families. So what's the use?" He then berates them for putting solicitors, "a fiery Celtic breed that I admire", out of business.

The theme of literary appearances versus actualities eventually and primarily becomes the basis for one of *Cruiskeen Lawn's* schemes: the "professional book handler". This service, which promises to dog-ear and annotate the libraries of the wealthy to give the impression of studious attention, is described in a long-running series of columns, few of which make themselves comprehensible to a reader who has not followed the previous instalments. Thus, although the first column "explaining" the book-handler's services concludes "[w]hat does he do? How does he work? What would he charge? How many types of handling would there be? These questions and many more I will answer the day after tomorrow",⁵²⁵ the next item on the subject simply begins "yes, this question of book handling".⁵²⁶ Likewise, while the column following recaps a little, the one after that begins simply "I promised to say a little more about the fourth, or Superb, grade of handling" (at which level the book-handler will insert "'forged messaged of affection and gratitude'", for instance, "'from your devoted follower and friend, K.Marx.'" , or "'[y]our invaluable suggestions and assistance, not to mention your kindness, in entirely re-writing chapter 3,

⁵²³ "Cruiskeen Lawn", *The Irish Times*, September 5, 1941, p.2.

⁵²⁴ See "Sean O'Faolain", *The Oxford Companion to Irish Literature*, ed. Robert Welch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 428-50.

⁵²⁵ "Cruiskeen Lawn", *The Irish Times*, November 5, 1941, p. 2.

⁵²⁶ "Cruiskeen Lawn", *The Irish Times*, November 7, 1941, p.2.

entitles you, surely, to this first copy of “Tess””).⁵²⁷ One must read daily and follow the narrative beyond the bounds of the 24-hour news cycle to enjoy the full meaning of these columns; the reader who has not read the previous days’ entries is, presumably, left in the dark. In this way, *Cruiskeen Lawn* toys with the boundaries of the newspaper’s conventionally bounded form: a state of affairs Myles pokes fun at by opening that final column above, which appears on a Monday, with “[i]t will be remembered (how, in Heaven’s name, could it be forgotten) that I was discoursing on Friday last on the subject of book-handling”.

Subtler provocations to the requirements of the daily column come in the form of refusals to produce a meaningful column each day. Columns frequently skirt as close to meaningless as possible, often referring obliquely to their daily task in doing so. One October 1953 column, for instance, opens with the announcement that it is the “shortest ‘Cruiskeen Lawn’ ever written”: “I write only because I couldn’t let the date pass. To-day is my birthday”. (Headlined simply “OCT. 5”, the column was, indeed, printed on O’Brien’s birthday.) Three paragraphs long, the article teases at the notion that a newspaper columnist must produce content on a daily basis by making the date itself its entire, solipsistic focus.

As such, it joins a class of *Cruiskeen Lawn* pieces which begin by explicitly making reference to the newspaper form, and O’Brien’s self-conscious formulations for playing with it. Columns poke fun at the requirement for newspapers by beginning with lines such as “Yes. (This is the first time in the history of mankind that a newspaper article began with yes.”)⁵²⁸ and “(This is the first time a newspaper article was started in brackets. Innovation, you see”.⁵²⁹ These two openings are not entirely serious in their claims of journalistic play, as the phrases “history of mankind” and “innovation, you see” reveal through their overstated gesture towards novelty. Yet both nevertheless point to a real practice which Myles’ was undertaking – as a later joke in the latter column makes clear, with Myles asking his reader to “[p]lease remind me to close the brackets at the end of the article. We must be neat, have some system”.

⁵²⁷ “Cruiskeen Lawn”, *The Irish Times*, November 10, 1941, p.6.

⁵²⁸ “Cruiskeen Lawn”, *The Irish Times*, Saturday, June 5, 1943, p.3. Where practical, I will follow usual convention in removing capital letters and punctuation from quotations; however, as so many of the *Cruiskeen Lawn* columns rely on specific typography, I have left them exact where I felt that it would be a loss to dilute Myles’ prose in order to make my own sentences run smoothly.

⁵²⁹ “Cruiskeen Lawn”, *The Irish Times*, September 7, 1942.

6. His reader's voice

This is just one of the moments at which *Cruiskeen Lawn* calls upon its reader to participate actively in the column, and it brings us back neatly to the figure of the daily newspaper reader whose plight I explored above. Where Man Ray's newspaper woman becomes composed of typescript and H.D.'s dreamer must sift through information, likewise Myles demands an active reader. (For this reason, recent proposals, most notably from Jon Day,⁵³⁰ to produce a hypertextual version of *Cruiskeen Lawn* seem to me to miss the spirit of the column as a whole). Myles' calls for participation vary in scale and seriousness: at the milder end of the spectrum are requests for letters which parody the usual "letters to the editor" (and hark back to the origins of the column, for those paying close attention), accompanied by the complaint that his "notes of last week have brought me some very boring letters about art and the like". Sometimes, Myles alleges that readers have sent him helpful comments, such as a "Dublin reader" who writes in in response to a taxonomy of bores "to inform me of a bore (petrol lighter species) who infects a local public house". One 1942 column includes a section headed "Steam Corner", which encourages members of the public to write in with their concerns regarding steam chests (although, Myles warns, "only broad questions of general interest can be dealt with here").⁵³¹ Unsurprisingly, the "answers" featured respond to ludicrously specific questions: including several technical instructions for pressure gauges. The list ends with one addressed to "S. O'C" with the simple line "[t]he Irish for cut-off is *gearradh*",⁵³² a joke which both gestures to the problem of integrating Irish into modern life – on which more soon – and the sort of stock figures, such as the man who must have everything as *Gaeilge*, who make up Myles' imagined readership. Thus these columns pantomime the usual interactions between a newspaper and its readers, just as O'Brien's original letters to the *Irish Times* did, disrupting the validity of existing channels for reader recourse by depicting them as useless and predictable.

Instead, Myles promotes a different, active and sceptical form of engagement. Take this example, from a column in 1942:

⁵³⁰ See Jon Day, "Cuttings from the Cruiskeen Lawn: Bibliographical Issues in the Republication of Myles na Gopaleen's Journalism", in *Is It About a Bicycle? Flann O'Brien in the twenty-first century*, ed. Jennika Baines (Dublin : Four Courts Press, 2011).

⁵³¹ "Cruiskeen Lawn", *The Irish Times*, Wednesday, August 5, 1942, p3.

⁵³² One of the meanings of *gearradh* is "cutting" – close enough.

Now, you (yes, YOU) before you tear this paper into little bits, kindly tell me whether that last paragraph was written by me as part of my satanic campaign against decency and reason or whether it is taken from a book written in all seriousness by some other person. On your answer to that query will depend more than I care to say in public.⁵³³

Leaving aside for a moment the mock-villainy of “my satanic campaign against decency” – a phrase which, we can safely presume, is intended to poke fun at real-life accusations of indecency, as well as the literary “indecency” of the source from which the quotation is taken – this passage contains within its humour a genuine request. True, Myles may not literally wish to receive responses to his query; nevertheless, in asking for his reader to identify the provenance of an item in his column, and question its authorship, the column asks of its audience a certain method of reading – one which seeks to distinguish between fact and fiction, stylistic achievement and “indecent” prose.⁵³⁴ Similarly, while the line “[o]n your answer . . . will depend more than I care to say in public” is written in the style of a spy novel or other dramatic fiction, in the context of *Cruiskeen Lawn*’s overall logic it might be read entirely seriously. Myles’ habit of quoting from other items in the news, for instance, is called into doubt in a column which ostensibly begins by quoting an advertisement “that appeared recently in an evening paper”:

‘Wanted, wife, copper-faced, any length, capable of being bent.’

. . . It is, of course, that ‘wife’ is a misprint of wire.

To be honest for a change, I invented this advertisement out of my head. It did not appear in any paper. But, if any reader thinks that any special merit attaches to notices of this kind because they have actually appeared in print, what is to stop me having them inserted and then quoting them? Nothing, except the prohibitive cost.⁵³⁵

The joke works on two levels. On the first, Myles calls into question the notion that people have more confidence in items which “actually [appear] in print” – a comment which fits comfortably into his more general ongoing critique of news media. Yet further consideration reveals another meaning to the column, signalled by the word “actually”: for the item has, of course, “actually”, literally, appeared in print by dint of appearing in *Cruiskeen Lawn*. Thus the “prohibitive cost” is a feint, with Myles at liberty to “quote” any item he deems fit and make it appear in the medium to which readers attach such authority. This double play of honesty and dishonesty therefore incites a broader

⁵³³ “Cruiskeen Lawn”, *The Irish Times*, Monday, May 11, 1942, p.2.

⁵³⁴ Naturally, Myles being Myles, it may be more appropriate to write “fact” and “fiction”.

⁵³⁵ “Cruiskeen Lawn”, *The Irish Times*, Wednesday, October 1, 1941, p.2.

scepticism, nodded to by the easily-missed “[t]o be honest *for a change*” [my emphasis] which begins Myles’ “confession”. This admission draws attention to not just this particular lie, but Myles’ habit for lying; and if Myles might lie, and ratify his lies in print, what is to stop any other columnist doing so?

It is not the only time *Cruiskeen Lawn* calls upon the reader to question its own truth value. An early column, for instance, includes what alleges to be a transcript of Dublin intellectuals’ chatter – or, as Myles has it, the “extraordinary guff that passes for enlightened conversation when a couple of beards and corduroys get together”.⁵³⁶ This, he explains, is part of a new project to record the speech of such types, gathered “by me and my stool pigeons”, a “feature unique in the annals of Irish journalism”. Further specimens are solicited from readers, who are told, if they have a better example, to “write to me and tell me”. They are warned, however, not to make things up: “It is no use . . . inventing speeches that were never said, because a child could tell the genuine article from any concocted substitute. This is the sort of thing that just can’t be faked. The real thing rings like a silver bell and shines like gold”. This deliberately exaggerated phrasing is, we might suspect, designed to tempt the reader into doubting the column’s own example (and, one presumes, subsequently admiring Myles’ skill in fakery if the extract does, in their opinion, “shine like gold”). Other allusions to deception in *Cruiskeen Lawn* are more overt, such as a tale which recounts how Myles “noticed a film writer in the Irish Press” – note the capitals

–

saying that Disney fans were now known as ‘Fantasians’. When I read this I flew into a temper. Immediately, I demanded to know from all the hacks who write this stuff for me why we had not thought of this first.⁵³⁷

Like the faked advertisement, the joke here is a double bluff: Myles is lying about his lies, and does in fact write *Cruiskeen Lawn* “himself”; yet as “Myles na gCopaleen” is an obvious pseudonym, the single “he” who writes every day is not the “he” named in the byline.

Each of these conceits is geared towards the same end: Myles’ deconstruction of the newspaper column. Like the column’s formal experimentation, which I will turn to shortly, raising the spectre of *Cruiskeen Lawn*’s lying authorship allows O’Brien to disrupt

⁵³⁶ “Cruiskeen Lawn”, *The Irish Times*, Monday, Sept 22 1941, p. 2.

⁵³⁷ “Cruiskeen Lawn”, *The Irish Times*, Friday, 8 May, 1942, p. 3.

the normal expectations of the form, not only by raising the possibility of deceit but also by drawing readers' attention to the process by which newspaper writing is produced. The column which mentions Disney's *Fantasia*, as if to emphasise this, culminates in a staged conversation between Myles and his editor:

The Editor: Have you seen this picture?

Myself: No.

The Editor: Why?

Myself: Because the free list is suspended.

The Editor: But why condemn something you have not seen?

Myself: Why suspend the free list?

The Editor: Then this is all an exhibition of spite because you are not admitted free.

Myself: Not necessarily. It is something taut, elegant, alert.

Again, the item works by drawing attention to the production of the column – specifically, the process by which editorial comments and queries are worked out. O'Nolan's letters reveal ongoing⁵³⁸ disputes with his *Irish Times* editors;⁵³⁹ in fact, several attempts were

⁵³⁸ In April 1964, he wrote to the features editor of the *Guardian*, saying: "I have had a very long connection with the *Irish Times*, which paper has however gone altogether to hell in recent years owing to the advent of very ignorant slobbs who have no experience of editorial work or any aspect of productive writing. This country is in danger of having no decent native paper at all." O'Nolan, Brian. *Brian O'Nolan to John Rosselli*, 6th April, 1964. Letter. From Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Brian O'Nolan papers, 1914-1966, Box 51/4/2.

⁵³⁹ Among O'Nolan's most scathing correspondence concerning the *Irish Times* is the following, from a letter to Niall Montgomery in 1960: "Have written several good CL articles recently but none have appeared. Cannot make out if it is intended to squeeze me out but present editorial situation is unbelievable. Editor is poor buff named Mongtgomery (son of Lynn Doyle, late senior northern reprobate), former chief reporter, afraid of his shadow and life. Lit. Editor is unbelievable but polite ignoramus, reputed background O/C shelving in warehouse of O'Mara's, bacon factors. Other item is de V. White, the Savonarola of Tibbradden. Expulsion of self wd. Be complete disaster, as no other paper on real offer, though heard talk of E. HERALD, owing to present war with E. PRESS. Have decided to ask Sav. To meet me outside for chat, subject not disclosed in advance. Cannot think of any other possible source of income beyond small, sundry and unpredictable pickings. Nobody trusts My Godliness but many of my contacts have been exclusively with morons. (As for former Editor of I.T, see cutting enclosed.) Have made tentative start on THE DALKEY ARCHIVE but this job will take a year." O'Nolan, Brian, *Brian O'Nolan to Niall Montgomery*, 21st of August, 1962. Letter. From Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Brian O'Nolan papers, 1914-1966, Box 51/3/4.

made to sell his columns elsewhere,⁵⁴⁰ including to the Manchester *Guardian*.⁵⁴¹ Yet using an imagined editor so brazenly to ventriloquise a concern regarding bias in journalism within the column itself brings a humorous slant to the discussion, with Myles using a “script”, subtly echoing the art form under discussion, to “perform” an ironic take on the production process. The use of this form, rather than a narrative discussion, gives the impression of the conversation taking place unmediated in real time. Interrupting a column hitherto fore in steady, first-person prose, the figure of the editor thus destabilises the form of the column itself as he expresses doubt over the writing process – and the honesty of his writer.

7. “In this (very) paper the other day I read the following”

“In this newspaper recently”, one 1943 *Cruiskeen Lawn* begins, “I noticed a big headline (footlines are prohibited by special orders of the Editor) ESCAPEE GETS JAIL FOR LIFE. One sighs, of course – I mean, surely this man was (if anything) an escaper. . .”⁵⁴² This reference to “footlines” – which would, of course, make no sense, coming after the article whose content they might frame – is a small one, yet a significance piece of evidence for those wishing to decode Myles’ irreverent page architecture. For just as *Cruiskeen Lawn*’s content invites its reader to question the status of the newspaper, so its form aims to disrupt the methods of reading encouraged by the structure of each edition. The taxonomy of the *Irish Times*, like its contemporaries, was – and remains – designed to filter news items in to various sections depending on their subject matter with clear headlines indicating the content of each individual article. Thus the headline is both a shortcut and a demarcation, exemplifying nineteenth-century concerns over the commercial debasement of the newspaper while also being a crucial part of the information practices which trouble

⁵⁴⁰ Columns were rejected to the *Tipperary Star* (*Tipperary Star to Brian O’Nolan, 23rd December, 1954*), the *Belfast Telegraph* (*John Ee Sayers to Brian O’Nolan, 3rd December, 1954*) and the *Clare Champion of Ennis* (*Clare Champion to Brian O’Nolan, 22nd December, 1954*). Among the papers to accept O’Nolan’s offer of a weekly column was the *Daily Express* of Manchester, who asked “how long it would take you to become disengaged from the Irish Times”, suggesting O’Nolan had proposed moving *Cruiskeen Lawn*, rather than writing a separate column. (*Tom E Hewat to Brian O’Nolan, 5th September, 1956*). All letters. From Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Brian O’Nolan papers, 1914-1966, Boxes 52/1/1-2.

⁵⁴¹ See *Brian O’Nolan to W.L. Webb [literary editor, Guardian], 24th March, 1964*. Letter. From Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Brian O’Nolan papers, 1914-1966, Box 51/4/2.

⁵⁴² “Escapee Gets Jail For Life”, “Cruiskeen Lawn”, *The Irish Times*, Saturday, 5 June 1943, p.5.

critics like Highmore. It is not surprising, therefore, that *Cruiskeen Lawn* displays a similar contempt for this convention as it does other aspects of modern journalism. Indeed, Myles' formal experimentation is used repeatedly to challenge the newspapers' internal order: whether it be through writing deliberately "useless" headlines, or gesturing across the page in such a way as to visually cut through the usual spatial limitations of the column. These irreverent touches draw attention to the newspapers' form in order to undermine it. In the above example, for instance, the notion that footlines are outlawed by editorial dictate makes headlines appear equally arbitrary, imposed on a whim (rather than being part of a complex, agreed set of conventions for newspaper print). By raising the possibility of footlines, Myles calls headlines into question.

Over the course of its run, *Cruiskeen Lawn* appeared variously without a headline, with "normal" headlines indicating its subject matter – Myles' research bureau series, for instance, which suggests plans for bizarre satirical "innovations", gained the heading "Research Bureau" as it solidified into a running feature – and with bizarre headlines, written by Myles himself.⁵⁴³ Although the headlines in this last category often refer to the content of the article, they do so in oblique ways more amusing than useful. A 1954 column on spitting, for instance, opens with the warning that

I must, as I already threatened, present a small selection of how DON'T SPIT should be said in a public notice, basing the challenge on the wording of a notice on the defunct Dublin teams concerning the dangers of crossing the street and the peril carried by the 'car approaching in the opposite direction'.

The line chosen to head this denunciation of poorly-worded signs is simply "DON'T": a word which, strictly speaking, relates to what follows, but gives the reader little indication of what they might expect in terms of argument or topic. With Myles' column appearing early in the book, mostly among news items, the headline looks particularly unusual, flanked as it is by "RUSSIAN REPLY TO AUSTRALIA NOT PLEASING TO WEST" and "BROADCASTING PROCEDURES"; longer headlines which take care to indicate not only the topic under discussion but, in the case of the former, something of the shape of the story.⁵⁴⁴ Yet, as is so frequently the case in Myles' columns, the refusal to follow

⁵⁴³ See typescripts returned by sub-editors, which reveal that headlines and formatting submitted with copy – such as box outs used to delineate sections of the column – were sent by O'Nolan and honoured by sub-editors. Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Brian O'Nolan papers, 1914-1966, Box 51/4/6.

⁵⁴⁴ "Cruiskeen Lawn", *The Irish Times*, Saturday, August 14, 1954, p.4.

convention allows him to get closer to the quintessence of his topic. For “DON’T” both signifies his disapproval and illustrates by example the theme of his column: poorly-phrased signs. Similarly, at other points headlines are overwrought to the point of parody, such as domestic affairs columns from 1953 headed “Titostalatarianism” and “Titostalatarianism – 2”,⁵⁴⁵ “Titostalatarianism – IV”⁵⁴⁶ and so on (to say nothing of “VENTROHOLOCAUSTICHYPERLOGOMACHY”, which appears later in the year).⁵⁴⁷ Such headlines capture the convoluted nature of foreign affairs and again prioritise tone over content, using textual play to mimetically rather than descriptively represent the contents of the column. The daily news cycle discussed above also earns playful headlines: Myles’ June 1953 announcement that “from Monday next, I intend to write in this newspaper every day!” is headed simply “NEXT WEEK”.⁵⁴⁸ Bylines, too, are used as a space for satirical commentary, such as in a 1945 column critiquing an item from the *Irish Times*’ “London Letter” which appends “(Citizen of the Republic)” under the name Myles na gCopaleen.⁵⁴⁹

At other times, headlines and crossheads are designed to implicate the reader in the column, with lines like “Do Not Nash Your Teeth At This”⁵⁵⁰ and “Yes, more of it”. (Grammar and stylisation are also deliberately inconsistent: where Stephen Donovan is able to make a study of whether the section titles in “Aeolus” are headlines or crossheads based on their formatting,⁵⁵¹ Myles’ headings vary in terms of both their capitalisation and whether they are followed by a full stop.) Where the majority of newspaper headlines refer only to their own content, and thus function in one direction, Myles’ frequently address the reader with his page architecture. Normally designed to mediate the reading process without drawing attention to themselves, headlines here do the reverse. In this way, Myles privileges the newspaper’s role as a cultural object equally with its status as a textual space: like his jokes about authorship, his experimental headlines encourage readers to consider the production and formal codes of the newspaper as much as its content.

⁵⁴⁵ “Cruiskeen Lawn”, *The Irish Times*, Friday, January 30, 1953, p.4.

⁵⁴⁶ “Cruiskeen Lawn”, *The Irish Times*, Thursday, February 5, 1953, p.4.

⁵⁴⁷ “Cruiskeen Lawn”, *The Irish Times*, Tuesday, November 19, 1953, p.4.

⁵⁴⁸ “Cruiskeen Lawn”, *The Irish Times*, Thursday, June 23, 1953, p.4.

⁵⁴⁹ “Cruiskeen Lawn”, *The Irish Times*, Thursday, July 12, 1945, p.3.

⁵⁵⁰ “Cruiskeen Lawn”, *The Irish Times*, Friday, January 27, 1950, p.4.

⁵⁵¹ Stephen Donovan, “Short but to the Point’: Newspaper Typography in ‘Aeolus’”, *James Joyce Quarterly*, Vol 40:3 (Spring 2003), pp.519-541.

Regular readers of *Cruiskeen Lawn* find this process intensified by other features which also invite them to consider the format of the page. O'Brien's columns display a keen awareness of the possibilities which the space provides, as well as its limitations. In one entry, he imagines a column which didn't exist:

When this column failed to appear one day recently, several readers became alarmed . . . Really, the explanation is simple. Some weeks ago I suggested that the stuff should be printed without warning under different headings – Births, Marriage and Deaths, Today's Radio Programmes, and so on. I began to brood on this and soon came to the conclusion that the supreme if somewhat esoteric expression of comicality was *not to appear at all*. Just abstraction, blankness, nullity, for one day. Can you not try to realise the superbness of that gesture, the . . . um . . . incomprehensible felicity of the nothingness of it all.⁵⁵²

In this passage, Myles conceives of the possibility of dispersing *Cruiskeen Lawn* throughout the different items in the newspaper: a step further than his experimental headlines, this scheme would also radically disrupt the serial thinking of the newspaper, deliberately miscategorising his output in such a way as to break, or at least test, the newspaper's taxonomy (as well as forcing the reader to go on a treasure hunt through the pages of the *Irish Times* to locate it, engaging them in another active reading process). This being impossible, however, Myles instead feigns that his recent absence from the pages is the result of a more radical idea still, suggesting that the missing column was in fact conspicuously absent as a show of experimentalism, reminiscent of the famous black page in *Tristram Shandy*.

Of course, the schemes are only jokes – yet even entertaining the possibility of these innovations throws into focus the actuality of the newspaper columns as a bounded, embedded form. Unlike the novelist, the journalist must share space with his fellow writers, as well as with advertisements, mastheads and other items demanded by the newspaper's editorial strategy. The pages of the *Irish Times* where Myles' column usually appeared changed format over the twenty-odd years for which *Cruiskeen Lawn* ran, particularly in regards to advertising, but certain conventions remained relatively consistent: most notable for our purposes, the division of the page into "boxed" items. This layout separates columns from each other while they remain in the same visual field, thus graphically representing the relationship between the individual piece, authored by its own writer, and the newspaper as a complete editorial body.

⁵⁵² "Cruiskeen Lawn", *The Irish Times*, Wednesday, 5 August 1942, p.3.

It is this relationship which fuels another of O'Brien's disruptive gestures: the inclusion of references to adjoining columns. Unlike his columns on the media, these are not analytical nor do they use in-text citation, instead making spatial references to other *Irish Times* features. "The other day", Myles writes in one such column, "I was reading that man down there on the right – £nunc – and I caught him saying this", a reference to the *An Irishman's Diary* feature which ran under the pseudonym "Quidnunc". These lateral gestures are particularly striking when they refer to other items which appear in the same day's newspaper, such as when Myles informs the reader that "Mister Quidnunc is even more stimulating today than usual. To his little corner and have the time of your life". Not only do such lines pass ironic comment on other pieces in the *Irish Times*, they also toy with the temporal restraints of the column; unlike the moments where Myles comments on things he's read, they have an immediacy which slips the bonds of the usual news cycle. Where *Cruiskeen Lawn's* long-running series extend the period of time over which a reader is expected to engage with the newspaper, these items, like the scripted editorial interruption in the *Fantasia* column, force the reader's attention on the moment of his or her reading. This gives the additional quality of the newspaper as a physical object, rather than textual, serial form; an effect only heightened on occasions where *Cruiskeen Lawn* includes an arrow or manicule, rather than a written instruction, to point the reader in the right direction. Myles seems to be not a corporeal author writing his copy for the next day's publication, but an entity actually embedded in the page, with the layout of the newspaper itself determining what is visible to him. (Perhaps a suitable notion given that the "Myles" character does, indeed, only exist on the page) If this ontological fancy contradicts his account of writing as it is told in other columns, it only further complicates the notion of authorship.

Yet the formal play of *Cruiskeen Lawn* is not simply for its own sake. As will become clear in what follows, these disruptive practices are geared towards establishing a space in which local politics, global affairs and the matter of Irish identity can be discussed at a sceptical distance. Just as headings and layouts normally employ page architecture to re-enforce their ideology, Myles' emphasise the playful strategies which maintain *Cruiskeen Lawn* as a space in which matters significant to the new republic can be given a half-comic, half-serious airing. In rejecting the formal obligations of the newspaper, so Myles

also rejects its ideological and tonal conventions, speaking on such topics in ways that would not ordinarily be considered appropriate journalistic discourse.



Figure 4: Page 8 of the Irish Times edition from Tuesday, November 19, 1963. Note Myles "HI FELLAS!" headline

8. King of Ireland

*"I regret to inform the sovereign Irish People (1922) Ltd that I am suffering from a severe cold".*⁵⁵³

– "Cruiskeen Lawn", 15 January 1945

Like MacDiarmid and Grassic Gibbon's Scotland, the Ireland of *Cruiskeen Lawn* has equal difficulty accessing its past and imagining its future; formulating a national character and establishing itself on the world stage. Whereas *Scottish Scene* develops a productive tension between these competing demands, however, Myles' account leans on the negative, with a particular focus on the structures and organisations which imagined themselves to be the administrators of the new state. From his position in a Civil Servants' office, which O'Nolan took up in 1935 to support his family,⁵⁵⁴ Myles' inventor developed an increasing disillusion with the promises of the Republic. The job, as O'Nolan's biography Anthony Cronin notes, would have seemed like a safe bet:

The position the Civil Service occupied in the public mind and consciousness in Ireland in those days is now somewhat difficult to grasp. In a country where jobs had always been scarce, it offered not only jobs but absolute security as well.⁵⁵⁵

Yet on entering the service, Joseph Lee explains, O'Nolan "was immediately posted, for reasons best known to civil service personnel planners, to Local Government, a field for which he may already have imbibed some of his father's disdain".⁵⁵⁶ His time there only heightened a growing sense that the now twenty-year-old state had graduated from colony only to become its own inept manager; a process which, Seamus Deane suggests, transmuted the dream for an independent Ireland into a parochial body which encouraged functional, yet ultimately impotent service. "The globalism of the Revival", he writes, "had succeeded to the localism of the Free State". The institutes that promised to parent the new country through its infancy came up inadequate: "the entity called Ireland", Deane

⁵⁵³ "Cruiskeen Lawn", *The Irish Times*, 15 January 1945, p.4.

⁵⁵⁴ Ciarán Ó Nualláin, *The Early Years*, p.102.

⁵⁵⁵ Anthony Cronin, *No Laughing Matter: The Life and Times of Flann O'Brien* (London: New Island, 1989), pp. 198-204.

⁵⁵⁶ Joseph Lee, *Ireland, 1912-1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.279.

concludes, “somehow failed to appear.”⁵⁵⁷ The new nation was left with a flawed civic infrastructure, in which “the vocation of ‘non serviam’ of Stephen Dedalus had been replaced by the obedient functionary’s job in the Civil Service. The fake nation, with its inflated rhetoric of origin and authenticity, had given way to the fake state.”⁵⁵⁸ If O’Nolan may not necessarily agree with the “globalism” of the Revival, he would almost certainly recognise Deane’s description of the new state: “Of the Irish Civil service”, writes John Wyse Jackson in his introduction to the 2003 Myles compilation *At War*,

and of the Government that was civilly served by it . . . Myles repeatedly asserted that both were staffed by farmers’ sons (‘turnip-snaggers’) with a thin veneer of education over their innate, ignorant rurality, and Corkmen.⁵⁵⁹

Having dispensed with the duties of a regular newspaper columnist, Myles was free to fight back against this new, civil-minded paralysis. His furious satire left few institutions unscathed: government bodies, artists’ groups and the press were all identified as sources of Ireland’s continued bureaucratic malaise, and each dragged over *Cruiskeen Lawn*’s “rostrum”⁵⁶⁰ for their due roasting. As with his send-ups of the newspaper industry, this roasting normally entailed painting civic institutions as pantomime versions of themselves, or else hatching various schemes designed to reveal their ineptitude. Frequently, politicians and organisations are described using the “wrong” register: one October 1944 column, for instance, uses a formulation popular in *Tit-bits* and other cheap periodicals to lampoon the illogic of state bureaucracy:

Try this on somebody. Ask that the figure 1,020 be imagined. Then ask that he should double it.

2,040, he will say.

Add 50, you retort.

2,090, he will reply.

Add 10, you say loudly.

3,000, he will reply.

⁵⁵⁷ Seamus Deane, *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing Since 1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.162-3

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁹ John Wyse Jackson, “Introduction”, *Flann O’Brien At War* (London: Duckworth, 1999), p.15.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

This works *ten times out of ten*. The little trick is valuable because it enables you to detect the base creature who does not read the *Irish Times* – the person who is uninformed on planning, post-war planning, town-planning, regional and country-planning, economic planning, the planning of the new Ireland, which is ours to build. (My own view is that we must first liquidate those who want to re-build the old Ireland).⁵⁶¹

That the first half of this column resembles an amusement item describing a party trick and the latter a government document is no accident. The transition between these styles, the former resembling the sort of light popular writing frequently enjoyed by the public and the other a thumping, repetitive list, affects a sharp turn for Myles' reveal. For, like the man tricked in the column, the reader is subject to a ruse: although the format of this joke signals that a common misconception is about to be debunked, it turns out that the "error" is that the maths is correct, and thus, according to the incoherent logic of the department in which *Cruiskeen Lawn's* writer was employed, unsuitable for use. The divergence between the grammar and syntax of this reveal, in which the active verb "planning" is offset by dense repetition, makes clear that this logic works against any attempt to build "the new Ireland" – as the regular *Irish Times* reader, Myles puckishly suggests, is sure to know.

Other columns turn to these "plans" in more detail, satirically proposing services which would be more efficient than those provided by state bodies. The Coñas Iopmair Éireann, a transport company founded in 1945 and nationalised in the 1950 Transport Act, is a repeat target. The company even earns itself a headline, "Secret SoCIeTy", and a comparison with "the Irish language revival which, movement though it be, is not much good for getting citizens home on a wet night":⁵⁶²

The resemblance resides in the endless issue of proclamations, speeches, denials, threats and rumours but mostly the pervasive fatuity of both bodies.

...

Dr. Tod Andrews, as he is called,⁵⁶³ is a transportation neurasthen. His economic reasoning in regard to C.I.E seems rooted in a sort of syllogism gone bawways. . .⁵⁶⁴

⁵⁶¹ "Cruiskeen Lawn", *The Irish Times*, Tuesday, Oct 17, 1944, p.3.

⁵⁶² "Cruiskeen Lawn", *The Irish Times*, Friday, January 15, 1960, p.9.

⁵⁶³ Actually "Todd Andrews": his papers are held at University College Dublin, cf "Identity Statement" IE UCD P91, "Papers of Todd Andrew".

http://www.ucd.ie/archives/collections/depositedcollections/items/collectionname_234422.en.html

⁵⁶⁴ The word "bawways", Anglo-Irish slang meaning "crookedly", is now best known for its appearance in *Ulysses* (U 12.382, among others).

Myles goes on to mock the various timetables of the services with a ludicrously long and contrived column laying out every possible route between two towns and the time it would take to get there. Like the planning list from October 1944, the account soon becomes tiresomely overwrought, and like his “Oct 5” birthday column, the length of this imaginative detour is significant. Orientated strictly towards being an information source, articles in the *Irish Times* rarely included exploratory, complex writing except within specific bounds, such as when serialising novels. That Myles should devote so much space to the recounting of various train routes runs counter to the normal demands of the newspaper genre, emphasising the unusual amount of time that must be dedicated to perusing the timetables if one wishes to travel. Eventually, Myles reported a possible scheme to deal with them. “The idea”, the column explains, “was to buy a bus of the same make and colour as that used by C.I.E”. People wearing uniforms would be placed on busses, but no people let on. This, we are led to believe, is preferable to the actual services of the C.I.E – at least if *Cruiskeen Lawn’s* own reports are anything to go by.

These over-long lists of planning departments and train timetables represent what Myles’ saw as the country’s inertia. At other points, *Cruiskeen Lawn* drops such playful representation and states its frustration outright, particularly later in its run when the columns darken in tone. By the 1950s, Long writes, Myles “saw himself more in the role of a latter-day Swift”,⁵⁶⁵ and the *Cruiskeen Lawn* columns become increasingly serious. The 1957 demolition of two Georgian Houses in Kildare Place, for instance, whose initial reporting in the *Irish Times* caused a scandal and heralded a national interest in preservation, became the subject of an acid column which defied its humorous title – “Kildaire Plaice Cod – 1” – to undertake a serious indictment of the country’s government. Here, Myles draws comparisons between the affair and the turgid paralysis of Joyce’s *Dubliners* (1914). “[W]hile Dublin is still the centre of paralysis”, he writes “it has since also had to endure many monstrous sequalee, including a creeping political leprocy”.⁵⁶⁶

Nowhere was this sense of paralysis and leprosy as concentrated as in “ACCISS”, a long-running series about a stopped clock adorning a shop owned by Andy Clarkin, Fianna Fáil politician and, from June 1951, Lord Mayor of Dublin.⁵⁶⁷ Its first *Cruiskeen Lawn* mention, in the October following Clarkin’s ascension, was the start of a long series

⁵⁶⁵ Long, *Assembling*, p.73.

⁵⁶⁶ “Cruiskeen Lawn”, *The Irish Times*, Saturday, 13 July, 1957, p.8.

⁵⁶⁷ Timothy O’Keeffe, *Myles: portraits of Brian O’Nolan* (London: Martin Brian and O’Keeffe, 1973), p. 59.

of jokes in which the acronym “Andy Clarkin’s Clock is Still Stopped” became a frequently-employed shorthand. This code pointed not only to the broken clock but also to the Lord Mayor’s habit of saying he would “ask Cis”, his wife, about crucial matters; a secondary meaning accessible only to those Dubliners “in the know”.⁵⁶⁸ The ACCISS columns grew in ludicrousness, with Myles at one point requesting that his readers greet each other with their hands in the position of the stopped clock, and even undertaking what seems to be his sole foray into concrete poetry to create an “ACCISS” banner out of the words “Andy Clarkin’s clock is still stopped” at the top of a column in January 1952.⁵⁶⁹

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AKKIP...KISSSTILLSTOPPEDANDY
CLAF      OCKISSSTILLSTOPPEDAN
DYC      : LOCKISSSTILLSTOPPED
AN       : SCLOCKISSSTILLSTOPP
ED       : ESCLOCKISSSTILLSTO
PI       DYC KINSCLOCKISSSTILLS
T       DAF  ESCLOCKISSSTIL
LSTOPPED      KINSCLOCKISSST
ILLSTOPP      WDYCLARKINSCLOCKIS
STILLSTO      DANDYCLARKINSCLOCK
ISSSTILLS      WDYCLARKINSCLO
CKISSSTILL      WDYCLARKINSC
LOCKISSST      WDYCLARKIN
SCLOCKISSSTII  WPPEDANDYCLARK
ISSCLOCKISSY  STOPPEDANDYCLA
RKINSCLOCKES  LLSTOPPEDANDYC
LARKINSCLOCK  STOPPEDAND
YCLARKINSCLO  STOPPEDA
NDYCLARKINSCLOCKE: LLSTOPPE
DANDYCLARKINSCLOCI  STOPP
PEDANDYCLARKINSCLO  T
COPPEDANDYCLARKINS: STILL
STOPPEDANDYCLARKII  I
LLSTOPPEDANDYCLARKINSCLOCK  S
TILLSTOPPEDANDYCLARKI  K
ISSSTILLSTOPPEDANDYCLA  O
CKISSSTILLSTOPPEDANDYCLARKINSC

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Figure 5: Andy Clarkin's Clock Is Still Stopped

It was not the last time that Myles would make a sustained effort to mock politicians in *Cruiskeen Lawn*. In 1956, Fine Gael’s Ard-Fheis⁵⁷⁰ took place in Dublin’s custom house. To mark the occasion, the *Irish Times* ran an economics column by one General MacEoin of Fine Gael, who helpfully explained that “[t]he statement made by the Taoiseach at the recent Fine Gael Ard-Fheis was . . . accurate when he said 'that the fundamental basis for

⁵⁶⁸ See Val O’Doonan, “Flann’s Final Fanfare”, *Storymaps Dublin* [<http://storymap.ie/flanns-final-fanfare/>]

⁵⁶⁹ “Cruiskeen Lawn”, *The Irish Times*, Wednesday, January 16, 1952, p.4.

⁵⁷⁰ Their party conference.

our economics was sound’.”⁵⁷¹ O’Nolan doubtless read MacEoin’s less-than-neutral assessment, and two days later he struck. His column, headed “Towards a New Ireland – I”, announced the opening of the “Annual Cruiskeen Ard-Fheis”, to take place in Dublin’s Mansion House. Its senior members are described in terms reminiscent of *Ulysses*’ “Cyclops”: “The chairman was Seán de Hambuig, B. Comm., H. Dip. in Ed.; vice-chairman, Lieutenant-General Gogaí O gaoith, P.C., S.I.M.T, T.C, Dip. Lib. T., U.C.D”, a list whose pomp contrasts bathetically with the actual qualifications appended. The “President of the Clown Cruiskeen, Sir Myles na Gopaleen (da)”, gives his speech in Irish, transmuted awkwardly into Anglicized phonetic spelling so that, for instance, Finne Faíl becomes “Faena Fayl”, “agus” “ogus” and “go leor” “go layr”.⁵⁷²

The next day, Myles reported that the Ard-Fheis “continued in solemn form yesterday”, pointedly obeying, for once, the conventional rhythms of the news cycle to chronicle his parody event. This second entry, “Towards a New Ireland – II”,⁵⁷³ is focussed on “[t]he ancient mother tongue. The dilcid vocalism of our four fathers”. Myles’ personification of the provinces, which calls to mind *Finnegans Wake*’s four “abecedeed”⁵⁷⁴ old men, culminates in a decision to rename the Leinster House: previously called the *Teach Laighean* (a name which “made the place sound like one of Lyons’ Corner Houses”) the *Cruiskeen Ard-Fheis* decides it will henceforth be dubbed the MULE-COUL HOUSE, “a word made from the first two letters of each province”. Parodying both the Gaelic League’s earnestness regarding language (not to mention their desire for it to be cemented through bureaucratic means) and politicians’ clumsy appeals to the same, this fictional name echoes the linguistic strategy of the columns themselves, in which the specific tenor of local speech is humorously fragmented via the same breaking apart of language which lies at the core of modernism’s cosmopolitan innovation. That the Ard-Fheis report appears next to “Fishy Story From Ceylon” – a genuine news item with a similarly formal, parataxic, past-tense register – gifts Myles’ language play further charge and points towards another target of the column’s critique: newspapers’ political coverage. Like cluster bombs, Myles’ columns are inclined to wound any writing in their vicinity.

⁵⁷¹ General MacEoin, “Drop in External Assets Offset by Home Development”, *Irish Times*, Monday, February 13, 1956, p.7.

⁵⁷² “Cruiskeen Lawn”, *The Irish Times*, Friday February 17, 1956, p.6.

⁵⁷³ “Cruiskeen Lawn”, *The Irish Times*, Saturday, February 18, 1956, p.8.

⁵⁷⁴ *FW* (140:13).

Turning to columns which take reporting specifically as their subject reveals similar strategies at work. Headlined “To-day in Parliament”,⁵⁷⁵ a title borrowed from BBC program,⁵⁷⁶ one column laments that

there seems to be no writer sufficiently patriotic to compile an anthology of IPPB. I mean Irish Professional Politicians’ Bosh. I agree that it was make harrowing reading, but it would also in parts illuminating and amusing.⁵⁷⁷

In England, Myles explains, Hansard and similar publications keep the public up to date. Ireland, he suggests, is in need of a similar service, especially as “newspaper reports are necessarily very attenuated”. “I think the Official Report here should be made compulsory reading in the national and secondary schools”; forcing young people to read “bosh” might help them learn “to discern blather instantaneously”. This proposal is followed by a discussion of electoral corruption in the young Republic’s supposed “democracy”, becoming more serious as the column unfolds. This is not an unusual occurrence in *Cruiskeen Lawn*, which, contrary to the increasingly “easy” reads of most twentieth century journalism, constantly forced readers to evaluate its current levels of sincerity. The use of a supposedly informative, chronologically-specific headline to top a broad, ironic opinion piece implicates the formal features of newspapers in such journalism, as well as slyly insinuating that whatever is going on that day in parliament, it is sure to be “bosh”. Again, placed alongside actual, supposedly “attenuated” newspaper writing, Myles’ column is not only positioned in entertaining bathetic contrast to the surrounding material, but also a reminder to readers that they ought to be on the lookout for “blather” in the *Times*’ political reporting. Thus the column comments on industry-scale discourses with equal particularity and mischievousness, using formal play to emphasise its critique of politicians and those who disseminate their words.

⁵⁷⁵ “Cruiskeen Lawn’, *The Irish Times*, Friday, August 26, 1955, p.6.

⁵⁷⁶ Cf. “70 years of Today in Parliament” at Portcullis House <http://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/evolutionofparliament/2015-parliament-in-the-making/get-involved1/2015-parliament-in-the-making-events/70-years-of-today-in-parliament/>

⁵⁷⁷ “Cruiskeen Lawn”, *The Irish Times*, Friday, 26 August 1955, p.6.

9. Decent and native

If the Irish government and its press failed, in Myles' view, to adequately handle domestic affairs, then their interactions overseas were little more encouraging. Portrayals of Irish concerns were a particular bugbear, whoever they issued from, with Myles expressing equal ire at simplistic depictions of Ireland published overseas and myopic depictions of foreign news published in Ireland, a sign, as he saw it, of the insular parochialism which marked his fellow countrymen.

It is worth explicating on context here. By the time *Cruiskeen Lawn* debuted in the *Irish Times*, Ireland had long been partially – in some overseas organs, even primarily – defined via reference to its diaspora. Migration away from the island remained high during Myles' tenure: Alvin Jackson's history of modern Ireland narrates how mass migration during the famine meant that by the 1890s around 40% of those born in Ireland were living overseas; in the period "from the mid 1930s until the end of the twentieth century", a further million and a half of those "born on the island of Ireland" left.⁵⁷⁸ Writing in the *Irish Times* in 2011, historian Enda Delaney identifies the 1940s and 1950s as a particular migration flashpoint, comparing them to other "lost" decades and describing how "mass emigration reached levels . . . reminiscent of the 1850s, in the aftermath of the Great Irish Famine".⁵⁷⁹ While many of these Irish-born migrants settled in the United Kingdom,

long-distance migration to Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and Canada also took place in the 1950s and 1960s, and, in the case of Northern Irish migrants, with financial support from governments seeking to secure 'white' migrants.⁵⁸⁰

This large, diverse Irish diaspora was a key component both in constructing portrayals of the Irish abroad and in formulating the nation's own conception of its national character. Newspapers printed in countries which hosted a large Irish population, particularly England and America, often made recourse to shallow stereotype: Declan Kiberd's *The Irish Writer and the World* (2009), for instance, notes how court reports in "[t]he newspapers of Victorian England are studded with the fey, feckless, fighting Irish". "Male defendants were inexorably depicted as 'a broth of a boy', 'as fine a sprig as ever

⁵⁷⁸ Alvin Jackson, *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 131-2.

⁵⁷⁹ Enda Delaney, "Traditions of emigration: The Irish habit of going away", *Irish Times*, 02 November 2011, web. <http://www.irishtimes.com/blogs/generationemigration/2011/11/02/traditions-of-emigration-the-irish-habit-of-going-away/>

⁵⁸⁰ Jackson, *The Oxford Hanbook*, p.132.

flourished in the Old Emerald Isle', or introduced as 'Big Blarney' or 'Poor Paddy'", stage Irish epithets which were "the newspaper variant of the music hall phenomenon".⁵⁸¹ Later reporting, as *Cruiskeen Lawn* shows, was often little better. Indeed, it was not rare for the column to include small extracts taken from the more ludicrous articles in the international press, incorporated under subheadings such as "As Others See and Hear Us".⁵⁸²

While *Cruiskeen Lawn* was critical of the foreign press, however, it equally refused to indulge in what R.F. Foster calls "[t]he oddly Anglocentric view that stressed simple and continuous opposition of Norman and Irish".⁵⁸³ Myles had no qualms about rounding on his fellow Irish journalists for their own troubling portrayals of "Irishness", especially when they indulged in sentimentalising the country's diaspora. Despite being a vocal supporter of emigration – "We should not praise ourselves unduly but neither should we be shy about our role in global affairs. It has been, and continues to be, a big one", declares one column on the emigration of doctors –⁵⁸⁴ Myles had little time for the self-romanticism of such reporting, and was unwilling to countenance the myth of the noble émigré. In 1951, he produced what he declared a "historic" article, written in the form of a long speech addressed to "the Irish people" and bearing "even thus humbly in a newspaper, tidings far more sombre than those of the H-Bomb".⁵⁸⁵ "So fine is this notion – *have patience, there, I'll come to it in a minit* – so fine is this notion that it explains away James Joyce", Myles promises, before finally revealing his "discovery": "ALL IRISH PERSONS LIVING IN IRELAND ARE EXILES". This he follows with a "(*Momentous pause*)", before explaining that "Irish persons who stay at home as distinct from becoming the lord mayors of great American metropolitan communities" become exiles in their own country. In the same vein, an open letter to President Kennedy fills a *Cruiskeen Lawn* column in June 1963 under the title "Aw, Minster President!".⁵⁸⁶ Well aware that he is writing against popular opinion ("ah yiss, I can hear a reader say, trust that laggardly furrier to be th'oney wan to strike a discordant note!") Myles gives the president a long explanation of the Kennedy clan's history, as well as an update on Wexford ("you correctly trace your ancestral origin to that

⁵⁸¹ Declan Kiberd, *The Irish Writer and the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.22.

⁵⁸² "Cruiskeen Lawn", Wednesday, May 31, 1944, p.3.

⁵⁸³ R.F. Foster, "Editor's Note", *The Oxford Illustrated History of Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.1.

⁵⁸⁴ "Cruiskeen Lawn", *The Irish Times*, Wednesday, July 6, 1961, p.9.

⁵⁸⁵ "Cruiskeen Lawn", *The Irish Times*, Monday, February 12, 1951, p.5.

⁵⁸⁶ "Cruiskeen Lawn", *The Irish Times*, Friday, June 28, 1963, p. 12.

spot”) which is now full of “runners, swaddlers and yallabellies”. The column includes a photograph of Newtownmountkennedy post office in Wicklow, with no explanation provided and the reader left to guess its specific relevance –other than, one supposes, it being perhaps the most ludicrous appearance of “Kennedy” O’Nolan could find, and therefore the best suited to deposing the romantic notion that the president was available to be claimed via his Irish ancestry.

At other points, Myles addresses stereotypes through a form of parody which allows him to simultaneously address Irish parochialism. Kiberd identifies two long-standing “stock types” around which the most stereotypical representations of the Irish had long clustered: “the hot-headed soldier and the brainless but loyal servant”. Although these two figures were complicated in the nineteenth-century, they are still recognisable in essentials as the characters which *Cruiskeen Lawn* most often places at the heart of its satire. One column on the escalating war in Russia – serialised in the collection *At War* –⁵⁸⁷ refers to “distinguished Corkman” “Marshal Tim O’Shenko”,⁵⁸⁸ who has attained a position of eminence in the red Army” and bears “the best wishes of every right-thinking Irishman”. A typographical error allows *Cruiskeen Lawn* to construct a sketch of another soldier, “Tomoshenko”, who he has seen mentioned in the *Evening Mail*: “Tom, of course, would be the brother”. Tom’s stereotypically “Irish” upbringing is described, through schooling at Rockwell to a “BA at the National”. “It is indeed”, muses Myles, “a far cry from the National to the wastes of Soviet Russia. *Quae regio in Earlsfort Terrace nostril non plena laboris?*”⁵⁸⁹ Elsewhere, “The Brother” is said to have passed on his views on Spain, as given to him by an English man, Mr Carse:

The brother takes a poor view of the war.

He does?

He says you’ll see Spain in before Easter.

How does he know that?

⁵⁸⁷ Flann O’Brien, *Flann O’Brien At War*, ed. John Wyse Jackson (London: Duckworth, 1999), p. 28.

⁵⁸⁸ Actually Marshal Timoshenko, a Russian soldier.

⁵⁸⁹ A quotation Jackson identifies as a corruption of Virgil’s “*quae regio in ferris nosti non plena laboris?*” which references the National University’s address of Earlsfort Terrace.

He does be across in London buying paper bags and twine. He says we have no idea. He gives the war another ten years, twelve with Spain in. Himself and Mr Carse had a long talk in a private hotel where the brother stays.

Who is Mr Carse?

An English pal.

Is Mr Carse in the confidence of the British Government?

The brother says he is the first Englishman he ever met that has his head on the right way. A great friend of Ireland, too, married to a Cork girl, so the brother says. Mr Carse takes a very poor view of hostilities beyond in America.

*I am sorry to hear it.*⁵⁹⁰

These characters – Tomeshenko and the brother – are subtle invocations of the two tropes Kiberd locates at the centre of Irish stereotyping. The latter is a naïve fraternal everyman who receives his view on the Spanish war verbatim from an English friend; the former one of a legion of Irish soldiers who have gone to serve overseas, the portentousness of which is invoked only to be undermined by a corrupted Virgil quotation, again reminiscent of “Cyclops” bathos. In both cases, O’Nolan includes locally-comprehensible signifiers, such as The Brother calling Mr Carse “a great friend of Ireland . . . married to a Cork girl” and Tomoshenko’s attendance of specifically named schools, which play on the perceived provincialism of the Irish public by “translating” foreign affairs into a specific, banal, local register. These characters hark back to earlier iterations of the stage Irishman to dramatise modern Irish provincialism; as such, *Cruiskeen Lawn* implicitly drawing parallels between the Irish public’s self-perception and the mocking personas constructed on the English stage. The readiness with which such stock types are taken up by the press is addressed simply: by literally “staging” their conversations in the space of the newspaper column itself.

If these foreign news items borrow from the tropes of the music hall, then others extend the same imbricated set of concerns into a more contentious area still: the survival of the Irish language. Being so closely intertwined with the history of English colonisation, the use of Irish was already a fiercely politicised matter by the time of Myles’ birth. Taken up by prominent poets and playwrights as part of their struggle for a national republic of

⁵⁹⁰ Although the original item seems to be missing from the *Irish Times* archive, the column was reprinted as “Bog Days”, *The Irish Times*, October 3, 1973, p. 3.

letters, public appeals for Irish were often also appeals to the Revivalist version of history and many of the most visible agitators for the language, Pádraic Pearse and Eoin MacNeill among them, privileged certain poetic registers of Irish over everyday spoken ones, invigorating a carefully-assembled bardic tradition while neglecting a vernacular one. Myles' early columns were known to take this up as a favourite subject.⁵⁹¹ As Long notes, “[t]he supposed impossibility of discussing the war in Irish, as it lacked the appropriate terminology, was the focus of the very first, bilingual *Cruiskeen Lawn* column”, during which “a child demands to know the Irish for ‘Molotoff Bread-Basket’”. This farcical scene, Long writes, mirrors the concerns of *An Béal Bocht*, where “[j]ustice, supposedly outside of language . . . is in this case absolutely anglophile and anglophone”.⁵⁹²

As *Cruiskeen Lawn* progressed to become a column consistently written in English, Myles returned to the question of Irish's continued civic relevance through more experimental means. English-language headlines on national issues were sometimes written in Irish orthography,⁵⁹³ ironically adopting the stylistics of the Revival to draw a contrast between the antiquated form of the language being valorised and its actual suitability as a language of modern politics and democracy.⁵⁹⁴ On other occasions, Myles created more complex fusions of Irish and English in the body of his column. One item entitled “In Eireann I nAllo”⁵⁹⁵ is exemplary in this regard, beginning in Irish and switching partway through to a language which, although it visually resembles Irish, is not:

Sheán Buidhe: Fohait ár iúr méin traighing thú sae, Sairdint?

Sairdint Tharbhaigh: Aigh tink dae ár tócuing abamht a bhuman cóld Agnes, a biùtiful accomplas eigh supós.

Sheán Buidhe: Méic amht a bharant for thur airéist.

Here, Myles draws teasingly on the differences between English and Irish pronunciation to construct a phonetically transliterated version of the former language. The ruse forces the reader to recognise a demarcation between Irish as written on the newspaper page and

⁵⁹¹ It is worth also noting, as evidence of Myles' willingness to privilege comprehensibility over authenticity, that he eventually dropped the *urú* from the name “Myles na gCopaleen”, rendering it “Myles na Gopaleen” in later columns.

⁵⁹² Long, *Assembling*, p.116.

⁵⁹³ This had recently undergone a process of standardisation in the 1940s. Cf. Chríost, p.78.

⁵⁹⁴ “Cruiskeen Lawn”, *The Irish Times*, Thursday, 23 August, 1956, p.6.

⁵⁹⁵ “Ireland in the old times”; another item apparently missing from the *Irish Times* archive, this article was reprinted in a tribute to O’Nolan on the fifth anniversary of his death. “In Eireann I nAllo”, *The Irish Times*, Thursday, April 1, 1971, p.10.

Irish as spoken: to non-speakers, each line of the passage appears at first glance incomprehensible; an Irish speaker, meanwhile, experiences the strange sensation of reading what looks like one language but is in fact another. The subject of the men's conversation – listening in to an Irish-language meeting and eventually asking for “a bharant” to be made out for the Irish-speakers’ “airéist” – nods to the controversy surrounding Irish as an extra-judicial language, while the “Sairdint's” accent – “aigh tink” – translates the Stage Irishman into a interstitial dialect most readily comprehensible not to English audiences, but to the *Gaeilgeoirí* whose own incomprehensibility had not so long ago been used to justify colonial intervention.⁵⁹⁶ Mocking both the failure of those in power to understand the language of their subjects, and, through various misspellings and unusual tics peppered through the column's Irish, those same Irish-speakers, *Cruiskeen Lawn* constructs a portrait of a language caught between the rock of misunderstanding – and the hard place of stasis.

10. At the bottom of the Liffey

Cruiskeen Lawn's critique of cultural paralysis extends beyond language. If neither the fierce nationalism of the revival nor the bureaucratic officiousness of the new state administration allowed Ireland a sufficiently optimistic and cohesive national identity, then in Myles' view contemporary Irish art also failed to respond. Like the speaking of Irish, the question of what Irishness means in cultural terms – what literature one should read, how one should be seen on the global stage, even what accent one should speak with – were already profoundly political concerns, and Myles took them on with the same acerbic play. One column of October 1943 is exemplary in this regard. Consisting of an index, rather than catechism, of cliché, the column attempts to taxonomise the most visible signifiers of Irishness, under the auspices of researching “the contributions of the Irish nation to the Oxford Dictionary (“slogans, shamrocks, shandy and shillelaghs”).⁵⁹⁷ A related list of tropes appears in another column that year, in which Myles begged his readers to write in if they are Irish:

⁵⁹⁶ Cf, among others, Gillian O'Brien's “Patriotism, professionalism and the press: the Chicago press and Irish journalists, 1875-1900”, *Irish Journalism Before Independence: More a disease than a profession* [eBook edition], ed. Kevin Rafter (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011).

⁵⁹⁷ “Cruiskeen Lawn”, *The Irish Times*, Wednesday, 13 October, 1943, p.3.

Explain what it feels like to be Irish. State at what age you first realised that you were an Irish person. When did you have your first fight? At what age did you make your first brilliant 'Irish' witticism? At what age did you become a drunkard? If you conceive yourself to be a cultural chauvin, please state whether your fixations are concerns with footballs, horses, folk dances, political frontiers or merely languages.⁵⁹⁸

The reader, Myles' claims, can write in confidence: "Remember that I too was Irish. Today I am cured. I am no longer Irish. I am merely a person", a joke which suggests that the very notion of a distinct national character might be its own means of self-effacement. Elsewhere, the idea of a set of nationalised "folk 'culture' norms" is mocked as "ludicrous": "Indian, Icelandic and Kerry peasants will bore you with identical 'stories'". The Irish revival is compared to the C.I.E, with the "resemblance [residing] in endless issue of proclamations, speeches, denials, threats and rumours but above all by a pervasive fatuity".⁵⁹⁹

These hollow attempts at establishing a specifically "Irish" character are, for Myles, at best a distraction from the actual mechanisms which scupper Irish art – at worst, an inhibiting influence themselves. The matter of book censorship, for example, became a recurring topic particularly in the later years of *Cruiskeen Lawn's* run. The list of prohibited books, which Donal Ó Drisceoil recounts was "better known among cynics as the 'Everyman's Guide to the Modern Classics'",⁶⁰⁰ became tied up with what he identifies as an "international interwar movement to assert Catholic cultural and social influence",⁶⁰¹ helping to heighten the extent to which modernist literature of the mid-twentieth century was set in opposition to Gaelic Catholicism.⁶⁰² Most of the leading writers in Britain and the US found themselves banned at some point; O'Brien, along with Elizabeth Bowen, was one of the few Irish writers who did not.⁶⁰³ For the *Irish Times*, this censorship risked "merely . . . [feeding] the national vice of self-complacency", and their editorial suggested that instead "parents schools and Churches' should set moral examples to the young".⁶⁰⁴ Unsurprisingly, Myles was a critic of the state's interventionist policies, once joking that

⁵⁹⁸ "Cruiskeen Lawn", *The Irish Times*, Monday, May 31, 1943, p.3.

⁵⁹⁹ "Cruiskeen Lawn", *The Irish Times*, Friday, January 15, 1960, p.9.

⁶⁰⁰ Donal Ó Drisceoil, "A Dark Chapter: Censorship and the Irish Writer", *The Oxford History of the Irish Book, Volume V: The Irish Book in English 1891-2000*, Ed. Clare Hutton and Patrick Walsh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 285.

⁶⁰¹ Ó Drisceoil, "A Dark Chapter", p.288.

⁶⁰² Ó Drisceoil, "A Dark Chapter", p.287.

⁶⁰³ Ó Drisceoil, "A Dark Chapter", p.294.

⁶⁰⁴ Senia Pašeta, "Censorship and Its Critics in the Irish Free States 1922-1943", *Past and Present* 181 (Nov 2003), p.207.

one would have to buy a new bottle of ink to mark up the scandalous passages in *Ulysses*, and writing, in response to a letter suggesting he might find an Irish publisher for *The Third Policeman*, “You are surely joking There ARE publishers here all right, but only for muck or religious dribbling. Though Joyce’s other books are available, ULYSSES is never seen in the bookshops”.⁶⁰⁵

Frequently, he adopted the overly-officious register of the government bureaucrat to mock attempts to “govern the activities of certain journals”.⁶⁰⁶ In one column, full of extended ellipses which create long sections of “missing” white space on the page, a censor gibbers incoherently:

Gentlemen thank you, Joie – glugl-gwagh-gngh-glawgh? – nono, not now!
(makes no attempt to open file – taps it emphatically with fanned fingers)

. . .

two stockbrokers leave hurriedly with their eyes full of nodded, winked, semaphored orders . . .⁶⁰⁷

This is not so say, however, that Myles’ believed Irish art to be a fertile field succeeding but for the dampening influence of the censor’s ink bottle. Indeed, his forays into literature are marked by the same tendency towards denunciation as his reporting on civic and foreign matters. As a novelist, O’Brien’s writing is characterised by take on its playful tropes traditionally praised in Irish and Anglo-Irish writing, whether it be the tragicomic, repetitive, thoroughly unromantic drudgery of *An Béal Bocht*’s impoverished peasants or the almost mythologically experimental surrealism of *The Third Policeman*. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that his columnist persona was unafraid to take on the sacred cows of Irish writing – especially those associated with the Celtic Revival or the various institutions set up around Ireland’s culture industry. J.M. Synge, according to *Cruiskeen Lawn*, is “a counterfeit bauble” which “began to be admired outside Ireland by reason of its oddity and ‘charm’”.⁶⁰⁸ In a column headed “W.B. Loud Glade”, Myles jokingly wonders if “there ever has been an inspired misprint of the word YEATS, making it appear YEAST? Both, mind you, are noted for ebullience, for the capacity to transmute the base

⁶⁰⁵ Brian O’Nolan to Mr. Robert Bierman, July 13, 1956. Letter. From Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Brian O’Nolan papers, 1914-1966, Box 51/3/4.

⁶⁰⁶ “Cruiskeen Lawn”, *The Irish Times*, Wednesday, 14 November 1945, p.2.

⁶⁰⁷ “Cruiskeen Lawn”, *The Irish Times*, Thursday, 1 June 1944, p.3.

⁶⁰⁸ “Cruiskeen Lawn”, *The Irish Times*, Friday, 28 August 1942, p.3.

into the precious".⁶⁰⁹ Aside from the sustained book-handling series, the WAAMA is also targeted in columns such as one promising to create a "Dublin WAAMA league", whose members are "permitted to salute genuine members of WAAMA in the street" and qualify for a series of involved distinctions, such as automatically becoming "a Friend of the Friends of the Irish Academy of Letters".⁶¹⁰ The Abbey Theatre appears repeatedly as a site whose ludicrous fictions take place in the audience and the wings just as much as on stage: one early column, for instance, tells the story of a man who had no time to change outfits backstage, and so put each costume on top of each other until he "grew in the course of an hour into a gross puffy Colossus . . . as irritable as a bag of cats. His appearance in pyjamas in the last act is still re-membered by the older Abbey-goers".⁶¹¹ In another long-running series of columns, Myles devises a scheme to have various people throw their voices, staging interventions voluntary and involuntary in the audience, with many twists and complications.

So, too, are those who think that the Irish are a naturally artistic people taken to task. "People who call to my lodgings for advice", Myles muses, "often ask me whether being Irish is itself an art-form. I am not sure that the answer can here be yes" – although it would, of course, "save us so much trouble if we could all answer in the affirmative. 'Paudrig Crohoore, R.H.A.' would be a grand way out; that each citizen should at birth be acknowledged to be an artist would save us all a lot of trouble and embarrassment."⁶¹²

Yet there remains a sense in *Cruiskeen Lawn* that aesthetic strategies might provide a route forward for Ireland, as Myles attempts to mediate an approach to art which reflects his own locally-situated, cosmopolitan-styled writing. Admittedly blurred at times, sometimes unsubstantiated but always attentive to the question of authenticity, Myles' vision for Irish art echoes the principles that guide *Cruiskeen Lawn* itself. To this end, there is one obvious exception to Myles' near-universal scorn. Although Joyce is mocked in items which, for instance, identify a recent *Irish Times* interview as being with "Dr. O. Gogarty, veteran author of 'Ulysses'",⁶¹³ his works are also the subject of several uncharacteristically straightforward *Cruiskeen Lawn* items. Columns explaining Joyce's

⁶⁰⁹ "Cruiskeen Lawn", *The Irish Times*, Saturday, April 30, 1955, p.10.

⁶¹⁰ "Cruiskeen Lawn", *The Irish Times*, Monday, September 29, 1941, p.2.

⁶¹¹ "Cruiskeen Lawn", *The Irish Times*, Monday, September 8, 1941, p.3.

⁶¹² "Cruiskeen Lawn", *The Irish Times*, Friday, 31 July 1953, p.5.

⁶¹³ "Cruiskeen Lawn", *The Irish Times*, Wednesday, June 27, 1945, p. 3.

texts make infrequent but nevertheless significant appearances in the slot, so that the regular Myles reader could expect to discover not only the plot details of the *Dubliners* story “Counterparts” but also where Joyce allegedly made a “mistake” in “his attempt to heighten his condition of tragedy”.⁶¹⁴ While the column is not entirely serious – there are joking asides peppered through it – it is markedly different to the majority of literary writing in *Cruiskeen Lawn*. Other columns on Joyce follow the same pattern. American Joyce scholars come in for a roasting in, for instance, “Joyce & Others”, a column which begins with a discussion of Adaline Glasheen’s *A Census of Finnegans Wake* (1957), going on to declare that

I do not think I have ever heard or read comment on Joyce’s work that did not seem to me to be fundamentally mistaken and the man himself – whom I once met – was by no means the last to be amused.⁶¹⁵

Elsewhere, he compares the “nuclear fission of language” which Joyce instigated with nuclear tests being conducted in America and Russia.⁶¹⁶ Similarly, while raging against yet another apostrophe placed in *Finnegans Wake* – “[t]hat apostrophe (I happen to know) hastened Mr Joyce’s end” – in an issue of “decent and native” journal the *Bell*, Myles becomes strangely serious, suggesting that “[t]o be insensitive to what is integral is, I fear, not among the first qualifications for writing an article on Mr Joyce”.⁶¹⁷

His most revealing comment, however, comes during the column on “Counterparts”, where Myles’ description of Joyce’s artistry might equally be a cipher for his own. “Joyce”, he writes, “was a great master of the banal in literature. By ‘banal’, I mean the fusion of uproarious comic stuff and deep tragedy. For in truth you never get the one without the other, unless either be fake”. The line is instructive in two senses: in that it reveals Myles’ definition of the “banal” to be a “fusion of uproarious comic stuff and deep tragedy”, and for intimating that these two modes are always symbiotically twinned. The mix of comedy and tragedy that typifies Irish literature is thus equated with a further category, banality, with what appears to be a relatively minor comment on Joyce therefore coming to encapsulate two of the most fundamental truths of *Cruiskeen Lawn*: that the everyday is filled with both comedy and tragedy, and that neither of these two things can be accounted for except in

⁶¹⁴ “Cruiskeen Lawn”, *The Irish Times*, Wednesday, July 20, 1955, p.8.

⁶¹⁵ “Cruiskeen Lawn”, *The Irish Times*, Monday, July 7, 1958, p. 6.

⁶¹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁷ “Cruiskeen Lawn”, *The Irish Times*, Thursday, August 25, 1960, p.8.

conversation with each other. Myles' column, which literally takes on daily affairs in Dublin and elsewhere, operates firmly within these principles, placing civic, cultural and societal affairs simultaneously in both comic and tragic registers in order to pass commentary on them. Young writes that "Myles did Duchamp one better in refusing to remove the banal from its context".⁶¹⁸ Yet for Myles, the banal is always exceptional, and the ludicrous can be found in any piece of "news".

In that my study of *Cruiskeen Lawn* sits at the centre of several concentric circles, so its implications are best understood as effecting a series of linked but disparate fields. For Flann O'Brien studies, it constitutes a significant re-situating of the author's journalism: in that studies of O'Brien have so far rarely paid attention to *Cruiskeen Lawn*'s formal features, this chapter might prompt further examination of how the series functions not only as text, but as part of a cultural object. (With twenty-six years of columns to digest, there is certainly more work that could be done in this regard). Irish studies more generally might benefit in the opposite sense: for while plenty of work has been undertaken on Irish newspaper writing, it is only relatively recently that scholars have sought to destabilise those "oddly Anglocentric" dyads of home and abroad, local news and foreign. Traditional perceptions of Irish culture as insular and guarded still pervade too frequently, despite a growing body of work concerned with more dynamic intra- and international networks. My study of Myles' column as it engages with Irish news journalism and specifically the *Irish Times* has been here necessarily limited to pointing out specific correspondences. A more sustained study of *Cruiskeen Lawn*'s counter-hegemonic tactics might, however, reveal new approaches to the conjuncture of nationalism and modernity in the Irish press. Returning to Moretti's triad of global form, local content and local form, we can characterise *Cruiskeen Lawn* as a destabilising alternative to mainstream newspaper reporting which brings this complex relationship to the fore.

So, too, might this chapter prompt new areas of investigation in modernist studies, extending the current vogue for periodicals into an equally detailed investigation of the mainstream press. The formal play of *Cruiskeen Lawn* encourages us to consider newspapers as cultural objects, just as it did Myles' original public, and the same

⁶¹⁸ Young, "Fact/Fiction", p.118.

methodologies used in this chapter might equally be applied to writers from T.S. Eliot to T. Sturge Moore (whose archive, held in the University of London Library at Senate House and given less attention than it deserves, contains a rich vein of review material and other press writing).⁶¹⁹ The column's pseudonymous status and play with authorship also permit new ways of thinking about news media: ones which recognise the role of the individual author but equally the limitations of that role. While the more cynical among what we now think of as modernist writers may have seen the mainstream media as a heterogeneous force, today's scholars have little excuse. In a world where news media is more present than ever – it is, one suspects, only so long before someone updates Man Ray's newspaper woman using smartphone imagery– Anderson and Highmore's anxiety over the news' ability to divide and order the world from its patrician perch still resonates (as, with humans exposed to increasing quantities of information data, does H.D.'s class of dreams). Myles' challenge to readers, to be critical, attentive consumers of news media, is as instructive as it ever was. That *Cruiskeen Lawn* was able to claim an imaginative space in a popular publication and refashion it using a set of techniques drawn from the imbricated ground of Irish writing and literary modernism should, at the very least, assist in breaking down the distinction between the twentieth century's avant-garde and its mainstream. The self-consciousness with which Myles takes up the formal tropes of newspaper reporting complicates the usual routes by which we understand modernist aesthetics to have been incorporated into established spaces. Finally, as in the rest of the "instructive" items considered in this thesis, O'Nolan's complex, shifting approach to truth – to his column's own status as non-fiction – invites us to turn again to form and genre more broadly and examine its fault lines more closely. There its truth here – but it is told slant.

⁶¹⁹ "Sturge Moore Collection", Senate House Library, London, <http://www.senatehouselibrary.ac.uk/our-collections/special-collections/printed-special-collections/sturge-moore-collection>

From the BBC to *The Way to the Sea*: a journey through new media

“Rome”, the narrator of the *The Way to the Sea* (1936) begins, “sends her legion into the corners of the discovered world, and her ships are crowding English waters”. The film has only just started. On screen, the lapping waves which opened it have already been replaced by a centurion’s banner, giving the date, AD 286, in a suitably archaic-looking font. Underneath these dramatic visuals, the orchestra kicks into life, its opening phrase as foreboding as it is ceremonial. The mood is dramatic, with an edge of kitsch, even camp, portentousness that allows the viewer to ask if what we see is being presented with an entirely straight face. If this is a vision of the past, we might wonder if it is a past as much constructed as remembered. As the film continues, and we move forward in time towards the present day, history unfolds in a seemingly inevitable cycle of conflict and invasion. The fonts and music change with each era – Norman; Tudor; Napoleonic – until, at last, we arrive in the twentieth century, when, we are told, a new railway line is being constructed.

Ostensibly created to entertain and educate audiences about the new electrified railway line to Portsmouth, *The Way to the Sea* is one of several film collaborations between Benjamin Britten and W.H. Auden. The film, an extension of their famous work for the General Post Office Film Unit – of which the 1936 production *Night Mail* is the best known – in fact reveals itself to be a deft satire on the conditions which underpin the leisure and travel industries which other, more straightforward films of the era advertise. In this way it, and Britten and Auden’s other films, intervene in a wider documentary culture. Spanning across different media forms – from the BBC’s radio broadcasts to the cinema newsreels – and mindful of the wishes of the peacetime state, this culture aimed to recalibrate the relationship between the individual and society. Yet it is the very tropes which encode such broadcasts with instructive authority – from “voice of God” narration to the innovative use of synchronised sound – which also provide a means of resistance. In fact, avant-garde works across different media forms re-appropriate the formal and ideological demands of this emergent broadcast culture to pass comment on the society of interwar Britain. Just as BBC broadcasts by figures such as Virginia Woolf and Elizabeth Bowen toy with the aural, linear nature of the radio form, *The Way to the Sea* plays with the authority emphasised in other broadcasts to reveal what is usually concealed: the history of conflict,

and threat of future violence, which marks the very sites which holiday-makers enjoy. In this way, it offers an alternative relationship between the self and society – one which demands responsibility of the individual while also enacting their alienation.

To understand *The Way to the Sea* does this, however, requires us to take a figurative journey of our own: not only through the development of the documentary film industry which it lampoons, but through that industry's own aesthetic and ethical roots in early radio culture, particularly that of the young BBC. Literary modernism's enamour with new media is increasingly a topic of interest in modernist studies, and not only along obvious lines of investigation: the poly-vocalism of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, the channel-hopping prose of *Finnegans Wake* (which gives way to the precisely modulated voices of Beckett), and the fragmented, repetitive writing of Gertrude Stein have all been read as drawing inspiration from radio technology. I wrote in the introduction to this thesis that my proposed expansion to the field is a lateral one, invested not primarily in bringing new authors into the modernist fold – although revisiting the boundaries of what we consider "modernist" is a generative side-effect of that expansion – but in revealing a new way of reading genre as situated in the media landscape of a specific political time (and place). In fact, a similar expansion has already occurred with studies of modernism and radio. This work may make less noise than the geographically-focussed remapping of the New Modernist Studies, yet this seam of research is as significant as recently-proposed revisions to the space and time of modernism. For, in demanding that we take modernism's aural culture as seriously as its visual and textual cultures, radio studies not only open our eyes (or, rather, our ears) to a rich body of work for radio but also signals a reminder that modernism, and not just modernism for radio, was scripted in, and produced in often fraught concert with, an age of electronic media innovation for popular audiences.

To better understand the implications of this shift, it is useful to dial back to 1992, and specifically to the introduction to *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio and the Avant-Garde*. Edited by Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead, this volume set out to address what its publisher's blurb called "perhaps the most conspicuous silence in contemporary theory and art criticism" by surveying the sound art of artists such as André Breton, John

Cage and William Burroughs.⁶²⁰ The book had a lasting impact on what was, indeed, a curiously quiet field up until the early nineties. For our purposes, however, its most significant observations appear in the introduction, where Kahn and Whitehead explain that “[w]e only begin to really hear *about* sound as a cultural identity with the introduction of Cros’ paleophone and Edison’s phonograph right into the midst of ascendant modernist and avant-garde culture”.⁶²¹ One suspects, however, that this association it did not come as too much of a surprise to scholars of literary modernism, whose complicated chronologies and geographies are conspicuously indebted to the distance-and-time-traversing technologies of the radio, the telephone, the transatlantic telegraph, the gramophone and the film reel. This much was established by 1987, when Hugh Kenner’s *The Mechanic Muse* designated *The Waste Land* “a telephone poem, its multiple voices referable to a massive short-circuit at the central exchange”.⁶²² Kenner’s litany of the ways that technology shaped modernism pre-echoes Kahn and Whitehead’s comments: “The wireless”, he writes, “superimposed the voices of twenty countries (*Finnegans Wake*), newsreel quick-cutting helped prompt *The Waste Land*. Words moved on wires; distant voices sounded in your ears; you could traverse London or Manhattan underground”.⁶²³ This was, in short, an era in which the most innovative producers of high culture were drawn urgently to the question of sound and its effects. Yet for Kahn and Whitehead, the sounds of the paleophone and phonograph do not simply soundtrack the “ascent” of modernist art by fortuitous chance. “The timing of the two was perhaps no coincidence”, they add to the above, characterising the era’s new sound devices as “a technological incursion into apperception and communication during the heyday of imperial expansion”.⁶²⁴ Modernism’s dalliances with empire are, of course, well-documented, including in the scholarship on travel and movement which informed the first chapter of this thesis. Whitehead and Kahn’s advance on Kenner was to recognise the triangular structure which links this imperial ambition with sound technology and the avant-garde –

⁶²⁰ Publisher’s blurb, “Overview”, *The MIT Press Website*. <https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/wireless-imagination>

⁶²¹ *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio and the Avant-Garde*, ed. Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992), p.5.

⁶²² Hugh Kenner, *The Mechanic Muse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 36.

⁶²³ Kenner, *The Mechanic Muse*, p.9.

⁶²⁴ Kahn and Whitehead, *Wireless Imagination*, p.5.

the practical and theoretical implications of which have set the tone for subsequent radio studies.

More recent volumes have sought to clarify and complicate the roots of this history, as well as turning in more detail to the ontological specifics of the radio form. Nowhere is this more evident than in the edited collection *Broadcasting Modernism* (2009), another landmark publication at least partially responsible for the recent prominence of radio in modernist studies. In it, editors Debra Rae Cohen, Michael Coyle and Jane Lewtry not only stress the rapidity of radio's growth – “from a point-to-point medium to a worldwide communication network in the course of a mere decade” –⁶²⁵ but also highlight the unease many modernists felt when faced with radio's, and later film's, capacity for reaching a mass audience. The concern, as ever, was that “popular might mean uncivil”,⁶²⁶ as if being heard by so many different people, into whose homes radio waves were beamed indiscriminately, might paradoxically expose an emergent broadcast culture to an unbearable cacophony of voices. In drawing attention to this typically modernist anxiety, *Broadcasting Modernism* encourages scholars to recognise the breadth of radio's influence – and the twentieth-century intellectual's awareness of that influence. “Even popular writers not much interested in the avant-garde”, they write, “were alive to the impact of radio on culture”.⁶²⁷

Where recent studies of newspapers tend to overlook the importance of the newspaper as cultural object, then, equivalent studies of radio have made this cultural dimension central. As Matthew Feldman, Erik Tønning and Henry Mead put it in the introduction to their 2014 *Broadcasting in the Modernist Era*, “radio studies have become increasingly hospitable to literary and cultural perspectives” – a hospitality which brings the field in line with cultural studies, which has long acknowledged that the political and social history of radio is intimately connected with its artistic practice.⁶²⁸ The influence of radio technology on modernist literature is particularly well-documented, both in terms of formal innovation and in terms of how the uni-directional nature of radio informs debates

⁶²⁵ *Broadcasting Modernism*, ed. Debra Rae Cohen, Michael Coyle and Jane Lewtry (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2009), p.1.

⁶²⁶ Cohen, Coyle and Lewtry, *Broadcasting Modernism*, p.2.

⁶²⁷ Cohen, Coyle and Lewtry, *Broadcasting Modernism*, p.2.

⁶²⁸ Matthew Feldman, Erik Tønning and Henry Mead, “Introduction: Broadcasting in the Modernist Era”, *Broadcasting in the Modernist Era* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), p.8. Work on broadcasting situated under the scholarly rubric of “cultural studies” rather than “literary studies” will appear throughout this chapter.

over the self and society in the period. Much of this work follows Kenner's formula, focussing primarily on how the technology of the latter impacted on the literary strains of the former. In *Broadcasting Modernism* alone, chapters explore Stein's "late romance" with the medium,⁶²⁹ consider Samuel Beckett's "ordeal" with radio⁶³⁰ and study the "radiogenic" literature of F.T. Marinetti,⁶³¹ James Joyce⁶³² and Wallace Stephens.⁶³³ The authors of *Broadcasting Modernism*, however, are also attuned to the metaphysical questions prompted by wireless technology. Sarah Wilson, for instance, explains how Gertrude Stein, "wrestles with the idea of radio as a kind of public sphere – a forum in which self, other and community can be constituted through talk".⁶³⁴ Cohen's own chapter, meanwhile, takes on the subject of how the "disembodied voices" of early literary modernism "gave way . . . to a thematising of voice" in later works.⁶³⁵ Steven Connor's essay on Beckett similarly stresses the physicality of radio, reminding us that "if radio does appear to come from nowhere, it can never in fact do so", wryly adding, "the radiophonic fantasies of mystics and psychotics aside".⁶³⁶

If *Broadcasting Modernism* and subsequent research on modernism and radio – which, as even a cursory glance at the ongoing research of key practitioners such as Cohen, Todd Avery and Emily C. Bloom shows, continues to develop in complexity and depth – shows itself to be consistently attentive to the cultural context in which radio programs were seen and heard, however, surprising omissions remain. Perhaps most unusual is the fact that little work has explicitly integrated a study of radio's development with recent research aimed at complicating the boundary between the categories of "modernism" and "realism" work. This oversight seems particularly strange given how both radio studies, and studies which re-visit the boundaries of "modernism" as a generic category, constitute part of a more general turn towards examining modernism's relationship to the mainstream. We might postulate that this is partially due to the fact that,

⁶²⁹ Sarah Wilson, "Gertrude Stein and the Radio", p. 107.

⁶³⁰ Steven Connor, "I Switch Off: Beckett and the Ordeals of Radio", pp. 274-293.

⁶³¹ Timothy C. Campbell, "Marinetti, *Marconista*: The Futurist Manifestos and the Emergence of Wireless Writing", pp. 51-67.

⁶³² Jane Lewty, "'What They Had Heard Said Written': Joyce, Pound and the Cross-Correspondence of Radio", pp. 199-220.

⁶³³ J. Stan Barrett, "Updating Baudelaire for the Radio Age: The Refractive Poetics of 'The Pleasures of Merely Circulating'", pp. 257-273.

⁶³⁴ Wilson, "Gertrude Stein and the Radio", p. 107.

⁶³⁵ Debra Rae Cohen, "Annexing the Oracular Voice: Form, Ideology, and the BBC", pp. 142-57.

⁶³⁶ Connor, "I switch off", p. 276. The radio work of W.B. Yeats will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

while radio's influence on literary modernism has, as we have seen, been well-recognised, less work exists that is centred on modernism *on air* specifically. Yet there is far from a paucity of the latter: again, in *Broadcasting Modernism* alone, there are chapters on the broadcasts of T.S. Eliot,⁶³⁷ Edna St. Vincent Millay⁶³⁸ and the Bloomsbury group.⁶³⁹ I would suggest, then, that the relative unpopularity of this specific framework is more likely due to a matter of generic designation: with these radio items read primarily as an extension of each author's written *ouvré* or, more rarely, an expression of their writerly persona, few critics consider modernist broadcasts in terms of genre.

The importance of doing so, however, is easily realised. In his essay "Documentary/Modernism: Convergence and Complementarity in the 1930s", Tyrus Miller makes a case for recognising the interdependence of modernism and documentary realism. Via a productive reading of György Lukács "naturalist-modernism continuum" – setting aside the theorist's less interesting "anti-modernist evaluate spin" and drawing an association with Viktor Shklovsky's reading of the documentary film – Miller complicates the designations of "modernist" and "realist", writing that "formally innovative experimentalism and naturalistic explorations of everyday life were not so much opposed as instead *complementary* moments of a broader modernist poetics" [Miller's emphasis].⁶⁴⁰ It is only in this light, he suggests, that presence "of modernist writers, visual artists, and musicians" in the documentary film movement makes sense, and "the mixtures of radical montage, reportage, state- or commercially-oriented advertising, and surrealist defamiliarization" in the era's innovative films "reveal their underlying coherence".⁶⁴¹ Miller cites experimental filmmakers such as Humphrey Jennings, Julian Trevelyan and Len Lye, the magazine *Close Up*, and, indeed, Britten and Auden as examples of artists who were at the least keen observers of, and often key participants in, this documentary movement. This perspective, he suggests, also allows us to understand radical reportage project Mass Observation as not only the most prominent dispatch from the front lines of realism and

⁶³⁷ Michael Coyle, "'We Speak to India': T.S. Eliot's Wartime Broadcasts and the Frontiers of Culture", pp. 176-195.

⁶³⁸ Lesley Wheeler, "Materializing Millay: The 1930s Radio Broadcasts", pp. 238-256.

⁶³⁹ Todd Avery, "Desmond MacCarthy, Bloomsbury, and the Aestheticist Ethics of Broadcasting", pp. 158-175.

⁶⁴⁰ Tyrus Miller "Documentary/Modernism: Convergence and Complementarity in the 1930s", *Modernism/modernity* 9:2 (April 2002), p. 226.

⁶⁴¹ Miller, "Documentary/Modernism", p. 226.

modernism, but one indicative of a “generic inclusiveness” of the surrealist prose poem in the documentary form.⁶⁴²

In this way, Miller’s work reminds us of the necessarily fragmented nature of surveillance. For, if we understand documentary realism as a sincere attempt to catalogue and describe the world, then its discontinuities, absences, and moments of alienation are not so different to what Miller identifies as the concerns and stylistics of those modernists who “interrogated the ways in which subjective perception and thought mediated any possible apprehension of the world, and . . . sought to account for the decisive material role that media such as language, paint, and bodily movement played in articulating the artwork’s relation to reality”.⁶⁴³ And, if documentary works easily give up their modernist inflection, the reverse is also true – reading modernist works of documentary non-fiction specifically as non-fiction allows us to understand their approach to documenting the world.

In this chapter, I will extend Miller’s argument to consider documentary culture more broadly, while also narrowing focus to look specifically at those works which combine the theoretical motivations, and related stylistic symptoms, of “modernism” within the realm of documentary. While there are a number of deft, thoughtful studies of both modernism and the radio and modernism on film – with Laura Marcus’ *The Tenth Muse* (2007) deservedly the best-known of the latter – there are, to date, no major studies which consider modernism’s documentary culture as it develops simultaneously across different media forms. In what follows, I will suggest that to best understand non-fictional works for radio and film requires us to situate them not only against the development of their respective technologies, but also as part of a wider, post-World War One British media culture with shared ideals and formal ambitions – formed alongside explicit ties to the state. Linking together recent work on the politics of modernism’s mainstream iterations with state-linked, educative broadcasts on air and on screen, I will undertake a necessarily limited but hopefully nevertheless revealing study of a wider “broadcast culture” which during the interwar years. It is in this context, I will suggest, that we can fully understand how Britten and Auden’s documentary film work reveals the possibilities for resistance against the already-present conventions of that culture.

⁶⁴² Miller, “Documentary/Modernism”, p. 231.

⁶⁴³ Miller, “Documentary/Modernism”, p. 225.

Many of these subversive gestures, however, are relatively subtle, and to understand them requires us to close-read the pair's collaborative films as texts which engage subversively with form. Yet just as radio and documentary films of the period share many ideological and textual strictures, so, too, do modernist responses to and in each medium share certain traits. Observing these shared traits allows us to bring their impact into focus, highlighting how modernist formal play permits the artist to stage various interventions in to documentary culture's ostensibly informative portrait of post-war life and society. In the case of *The Way to the Sea*, I will argue, it is this self-conscious use of form which reveals the circumspection, cynicism and amusement that marks Britten and Auden's engagement with documentary culture; an ambivalence suggested not only via Auden's script, but through a deft counterpoint of music, image and word. In this way, the film poses a challenge to its own supposed agenda while refusing to slip into easy parody. As such, it joins other works which re-appropriate common devices from both radio and film to expose the fissures the media's documentary culture even as they adhere, to varying degrees, to its principles – forcing us to recognise the complex, shifting relations and contingencies which come into view the moment we attempt to understand the category of “modernism”.

1. Understanding Auntie

In this respect, we might suspect it is no accident that both Woolf and Bowen's radio broadcasts often return to speech and language as favourite subjects. To best understand the content of these broadcasts, however, requires that we first consider the culture in which they were produced. Given the breadth of the BBC's influence, it seems prudent to begin any investigation of broadcasting in the inter-war years with a history of that institution. The presence of rich archival holdings which catalogue internal affairs of the BBC may at least partially account for the breadth of scholarship which takes as its focus the planning and commissioning of talks, rather than the content of the broadcast themselves. The publication of several books in recent years which deal specifically with the development of the BBC as an institution attest to the detailed and comprehensive analysis such archives permit: from wide-ranging studies such as Charlotte Higgins' *This*

New Noise: The Extraordinary Birth and Troubled Life of the BBC (2015) to more specific investigations like Kate Murphy's *Behind the Wireless: A History of Early Women at the BBC* (2016). Together, these and other recent publications allow not only an insight into the exact process by which the BBC developed from its infancy, but also – more importantly for our purposes – a thorough account of the clash of ideologies which shaped the institution's ethics and, by extension, twentieth-century broadcast culture more generally.

2. Inform, educate and entertain

It is important to remember two things about the early years of broadcasting in Britain: how few people held control over its output, and how strategically that output was managed. It can be difficult, in today's age of plentiful channels and college radio stations, with the echo of the sea forts still in our ears, to understand what an enormous infrastructural undertaking early radio was – and how much its development across Europe relied on state support. In fact, its origins lay in not just the state, but in statecraft. As is the case with other media in this thesis, the development of radio was at least partially prompted by the variegating threat of conflict in Europe, as well as the possibilities it afforded for the maintenance of English empire. In his essay "Early Television and Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*: New Technology and Flawed Power", Finn Fordham makes this link explicit, writing of how advances in European broadcasting were "spurred on" by a "techno-military rivalry and the threat of war".⁶⁴⁴ The nature and tone of radio broadcasts, and later of documentary films, was often guided by such overseas interests and, relatedly, regeneration of British industry following the First World War and subsequent economic depression. The sense of patriotic civic responsibility which, as we shall see, formed the bedrock of BBC management under the influence of its first director general, John Reith, was only heightened by this context.

Debates concerning the moral purpose of the BBC were particularly fraught during the formative years of the company. Higgins' *The New Noise* outlines the internal tensions

⁶⁴⁴ Finn Fordham, "Early Television and Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*: New Technology and Flawed Power", in *Broadcasting in the Modernist Era*, ed. Matthew Feldman, Erik Tønning and Henry Mead (London: Bloomsbury Academic), p. 39.

of the BBC – what she calls the “clash of aesthetic tones” –⁶⁴⁵ personified in the figures of Reith and Hilda Matheson. “Reith”, she writes, “recognised one of the most fundamental qualities of broadcasting: it is superabundant”.⁶⁴⁶ The scalability of the medium with little further outlay helped inform what Reith saw as its immense democratising function: wireless, he explained, “may be shared by all alike, for the same outlay, and to the same extent . . . The genius and the fool, the wealthy and the poor listen simultaneously . . . there is no first or third class”.⁶⁴⁷ That the BBC had a monopoly on broadcasting from the early 1920s only added to Reith’s sense that the new radio medium was to be a great leveller. “[I]n his hands”, Higgins writes, “[broadcasting] was moulded into something that was not merely a kind of pleasing technological curiosity, but a phenomenon to ennoble those who used it”.⁶⁴⁸ To Reith, the BBC was responsible for the intellectual health of its listeners: compared to the older, fragmented industry of print journalism, the formative years of broadcasting allowed a possibility to start afresh, making sure that the company’s chosen material enriched the lives of its listeners. By 1925, when a Parliamentary Committee of Broadcasting advised that the infant BBC ought to become a public corporation, the patrician responsibility of the organisation – too important to be left in the hands of private companies – was firmly established.⁶⁴⁹ “It was Reith”, Higgins explains, “who attached this Arnoldian, culturally unifying ideology to the idea of broadcasting”.⁶⁵⁰ It was an association that was to pervade, as we shall see, far beyond the corridors of Broadcasting House.

If this sensibility helped procure crucial early state support for broadcasting, however, it also encountered dissent – including from Reith’s colleague Matheson. The BBC’s first director of talks, Matheson was interested in pursuing a more radical agenda than Reith’s (although Woolf, with whom she shared a lover in Vita Sackville-West, once described her as “an earnest middle-class intellectual” with an “earnest aspiring competent wooden face”).⁶⁵¹ “[F]irmly plugged into a network of writers, intellectuals, social reformers and politicians, including some of the most impressively high-flying women of her

⁶⁴⁵ Charlotte Higgins, *This New Noise: The Extraordinary Birth and Troubled Life of the BBC* (London: Guardian and Faber & Faber, 2015), p. 38.

⁶⁴⁶ Higgins, *This New Noise*, p. 9.

⁶⁴⁷ John Reith, *Broadcast Over Britain* (1924), q.t.d. in Higgins, p. 9.

⁶⁴⁸ Higgins, *This New Noise*, p. 14.

⁶⁴⁹ Higgins, *This New Noise*, p. 14.

⁶⁵⁰ Higgins, *This New Noise*, p. 9.

⁶⁵¹ Q.t.d. in Higgins, *This New Noise*, p. 26.

generation”, Matheson was instrumental in recruiting many of the day’s cultural luminaries, including H.G. Wells, to speak on air,⁶⁵² particularly after the ban on controversy in broadcasting was lifted in 1928. Where Reith focussed on upholding his Arnoldian standards, Matheson advocated for the freedom to give her contacts’ intellectual curiosity a proper airing. Her “modernism”, however, perhaps inevitably garnered disapproval from some of her colleagues. Reith wrote in his diary in March 1930 that he was “developing a great dislike of Miss Matheson and her works”, and in late 1931, a talk by Harold Nicolson that she was involved in which praised *Ulysses* (1922) and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928) became a “battleground”, with the BBC eventually ruling that the then-banned texts were not to be mentioned by name on air.⁶⁵³ In response, Nicolson penned an article for *The Spectator* entitled “Are the BBC too Cautious?” and an open letter published in the *Times*, also voicing displeasure at the edits to Nicolson’s talk, was signed by T.S. Eliot, G. B. Shaw, the Woolfs, Rose Macaulay and Rebecca West, among others.⁶⁵⁴ Not long after, Matheson resigned.

What might reductively be called the BBC’s tension between the establishment and the radical is therefore more accurately described by Higgins as the “Reithsian or Mathesonian” tones of the body. This was just one of several in a series of highly-visible debates over the nature of the BBC and broadcasting more generally. Both Reith and Matheson, for instance, became the subject of listeners’ ire for their supposed “highmindedness”.⁶⁵⁵ “Why”, went the line of reasoning, “does the BBC bother with niche culture, to be enjoyed only by a few?” “Others”, Higgins notes, “wonder why it promulgates mass culture which, they argue, the market could easily provide”.⁶⁵⁶ What was for Reith about education should have been, many believed, about pleasure. In his 1988 book *Culture for Democracy*, D. L. LeMahieu explains that the extended franchisement of the British people in the postwar years helped fuel such debates (and, we might suppose, extended the sense of legitimacy and belonging which helped citizens feel entitled to participate). “What culture was appropriate for . . . democracy became a question pitting the forces of the market-place against the influence of an articulate minority”, he

⁶⁵² Higgins, *This New Noise*, p. 25.

⁶⁵³ Higgins, *This New Noise*, p. 32.

⁶⁵⁴ Avery, “Desmond MacCarthy”, p. 49.

⁶⁵⁵ Higgins, *This New Noise*, p. 38.

⁶⁵⁶ Higgins, *This New Noise*, p. 38.

explains.⁶⁵⁷ Yet, in the end, “highmindedness” won out, and the broadcaster’s cultural power eventually became such, LaMahieu argues, that “[t]o argue against the programming policies of the BBC often amounted to an admission of one’s own philistine tastes”.⁶⁵⁸

3. Joining the corps

For many modernist writers, the worry was less that the BBC would squander its finances than that it would squander its access to the nation’s homes – or, worse, actively misuse its powers. John Middleton Murray wrote in 1925 of what he called an “instinctive aversion to wireless” which pervaded his class.⁶⁵⁹ For Woolf, radio risked awarding greater powers to a group whose hold on culture she already despised: the middlebrows. P. Caughie explained how Woolf “blamed middlebrows, especially the BBC, for creating strife between highbrows and lowbrows”.⁶⁶⁰ This was not only about content, however. “Many have remarked upon Woolf’s characteristic ambivalence towards wireless as a means of dissemination and communication”, writes Peter Fifield. “A more precise formulation of her position, however, would be to say that her take on broadcasting is always primarily political.”⁶⁶¹ Other writers, too, were cognizant of the act of distributing their voices as an inherently political act. Avery’s *Radio Modernism: Literature, Ethics and the BBC, 1922-1938* (2006), the most comprehensive monograph on the subject, explains how widespread the engagement with radio as a political device was when he writes:

One would be hard-pressed to imagine a greater ethical disparity than that obtaining between T.S. Eliot’s deontic evangelicalism, based on a firm belief in transcendent moral values, and the Bloomsbury Group’s vigorously immanent ethical aestheticism. And yet both of those positions, and many others in between, found expression on air between the wars.⁶⁶²

⁶⁵⁷ D. L. Le Mahieu, *A Culture for Democracy: Mass Communication and the Cultivated Mind in Britain Between the Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 3.

⁶⁵⁸ LaMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy*, p. 188.

⁶⁵⁹ Quoted in Le Mahieu, *A Culture for Democracy*, p. 180.

⁶⁶⁰ P. Caughie, “Virginia Woolf: Radio, Gramophone, And Broadcasting”, *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 332-347.

⁶⁶¹ Peter Fifield, “‘I often wish you could answer me back, and perhaps so do you!’: E. M. Forster and BBC radio broadcasting”, in *Broadcasting in the Modernist Era*, p. 137.

⁶⁶² Todd Avery, *Radio Modernism: Literature, Ethics and the BBC, 1922-1938* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 139.

In fact, Avery notes, “Bloomsbury’s involvement in radio is . . . an important example of how some modernist intellectuals bridged the cultural great divide”,⁶⁶³ with their “belief in the irreducible value of conversation” dovetailing with “radio’s novel ability to perforate social borders, mix social classes, and effect a general democratisation of moral valuation”. Even T.S. Eliot “never considered that radio broadcasts represented a trivialisation of his talent”,⁶⁶⁴ and the poet broadcast frequently on the BBC’s Indian Section.⁶⁶⁵ In October 1929, an editorial in *The Listener* celebrated the “conversion” of intellectuals to the wireless, “discussing the circumspection with which some traditional intellectuals had initially approached this new mass communications medium”.⁶⁶⁶ “The broadcasting of a wide variety of ethical opinion”, Avery continues, “was one of the signature achievements of John Reith and Talks Department producers in the early years of radio”.

Yet this relative breadth of opinion, at least as far as the intelligentsia were concerned, was not enough to ward off concern and critique. The ethical dilemma that some saw as being inherent in radio’s form posed particular difficulties. “The sound of totalitarianism in Europe”, Fifield writes, “was that of the authoritative voice speaking through the wireless to the populace, encouraging them to realise the vision of themselves presented by their leader”.⁶⁶⁷ This association was difficult to circumvent. In his book *Sonic Modernity* (2013), Sam Halliday makes the distinction between “sociality” and “sociability”, citing early radio theorists Hadley Cantril and Gordon W. Allport who “attempt to characterise what we would now call the ‘virtual’ crowd of radio listeners”.⁶⁶⁸ “Virtual” is the operative word here: being a one-way medium, with no ability for listeners to respond to the broadcaster in the immediate term, radio “testifies to and depends on what we have called sociality without necessarily enhancing sociability”.⁶⁶⁹ To speak on air, Fifield implies, is to enter into a discourse with an audience that cannot answer back – something which was seen as a concern even before the motives of the speaker were taken into

⁶⁶³ Todd Avery, “Desmond McCarthy”, p. 159.

⁶⁶⁴ Michael Coyle, “We Speak to India”, p. 177.

⁶⁶⁵ Jeffrey M. Heath, *The Creator as Critic and Other Writings by E.M. Forster* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2008), p. 628.

⁶⁶⁶ Avery, *Radio Modernism*, p. 36.

⁶⁶⁷ Fifield, “I often wish”, p. 59.

⁶⁶⁸ Sam Halliday, *Sonic Modernity: Representing Sound in Literature, Culture and the Arts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 69.

⁶⁶⁹ Halliday, *Sonic Modernity*, p. 69.

consideration. What remains one of the most readily-identifiable tropes of the BBC broadcast, then – that of the single, authoritative, instructive voice, clear and steady through the radio – was, from its establishment, a fraught aspect of the medium.

If circumventing this political dimension of broadcasting was impossible, the means of on-air resistance were also limited. The strictures which the BBC insisted upon to create readily comprehensible, clear broadcasts forestalled, or at least softened, the more strident attempts to engage in new, thoughtful ways with the broadcast form. This made it difficult to effect an assault equivalent to that which modernism's disruption of convention waged on the form of the novel or poem. As Melba Cuddy-Keane explains in her study of Woolf's engagement with new technology,

Spontaneity was considered too dangerous; the general procedure for a talk show was that the participants would be invited to the studio for information conversation, a typist would take notes from which a script would be produced, and the participants would then return to read from the script for live broadcast.⁶⁷⁰

In the recording booths, talks assistant Lance Sievking had framed notices behind each microphone, reading "If you sneeze or rustle papers you will deafen thousands!!!"⁶⁷¹ Writing to her husband Harold Nicolson after recording, at the request of Matheson, a broadcast on "The Modern Woman", Sackville-West wrote that the whole experience was "very queer", with "lots of menacing notices" and strictures.⁶⁷² Woolf, Cuddy-Keane writes, "was once asked to sit on a BBC Committee for correct pronunciation".⁶⁷³ This obsession with providing a smooth listening experience extended to limits on formal innovation, and there were few attempts to explore new ideas. In 1924, "A Comedy of Danger" down a mine shaft "set a landmark in radio for its use of an aural setting But it seems to have been a brief and isolated experience."⁶⁷⁴ Other experiments, such as Seivking's innovative work *Kalaedoscope I* (1928) which "dramatized a struggle between Good and Evil through sound" were similarly not repeated. While radiophonic art was becoming more radical in Europe, then, the BBC became increasingly conservative not only in its ethics, but, as Higgins notes, in its aesthetics:

⁶⁷⁰ Melba Cuddy-Keane, "Virginia Woolf, Sound Technologies and the New Aurality", *Virginia Woolf and the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, ed. Pamela L. Caughie (New York: Garland, 2000), p. 77.

⁶⁷¹ Higgins, *This New Noise*, p. 16.

⁶⁷² Qtd in Higgins, *This New Noise*, p. 20.

⁶⁷³ Higgins, *This New Noise*, p. 77.

⁶⁷⁴ Higgins, *This New Noise*, p. 78.

By the mid-1930s, control of programming passed from production departments to a small proud of administrators; their standardising policies, combined with pressure from a right-wing national press, defined the BBC as a conservative, middle-class institution.⁶⁷⁵

4. Bloomsbury on air

This is not to say that there was not pressure to innovate. As LaMahieu writes, “reformers needed to recapture or invent aesthetic traditions which adapted to the peculiarities of a given technology”:⁶⁷⁶

[T]he development of popular national daily newspapers, the cinema, the gramophone, and other forms of mass entertainment threatened to upset tradition patterns of British culture Writers, artists, musicians, critics, and their numerous sympathisers responded in a variety of ways. Some retreated into self-conscious isolation from the popular and the profane. Others engaged in detailed polemics against mass media. Still others embraced new technology and sought to uplift tastes.⁶⁷⁷

Most modernists’ radio broadcasts, however, sound relatively conventional when compared to the breakdown of form and syntax practiced in contemporary literary modernism. Indeed, it was not until the 1940s, when broadcasting technology became more sophisticated, and its conventions more established, that many authors felt at liberty to make complex, playful broadcasts. It was in this era that Louis MacNeice, like George Orwell and several other writers, began his broadcasting career, producing what the poet Paul Muldoon has described as “propaganda with pizzazz”.⁶⁷⁸ The introduction of the so-called “Third Programme” in 1946, which aimed to provide highbrow, Leavisite broadcasts for an educated audience, was particularly influential in this regard. It was in this space, for instance, that Nikolas Pevsner was able to give his influential talks on modern architecture, demanding that he be allowed to start *in media res* despite his producer’s requests for clear introductions.⁶⁷⁹ At around the same time, Graham Greene was able to begin a talk on the topic of “The artist in society” by proclaiming that he did not consider society much in his own work. “Of course, I can always fake up a relation to society. I’m quite capable of

⁶⁷⁵ Higgins, *This New Noise*, p. 78.

⁶⁷⁶ LaMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy*, p. 178.

⁶⁷⁷ LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy*, p. 2-3.

⁶⁷⁸ Quoted BBC Northern Ireland, *Castles in the Air: The Life and Work of Poet and Broadcaster Louis MacNiece*, exhibition booklet, <http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/northernireland/bbcnistory/Exhibitions/castlesontheair/LouisMacNeicebooklet1.pdf>

⁶⁷⁹ Stephen Games, *Pevsner: The Complete Broadcast Talks: Architecture and Art on Radio, 1945-1977* (London: Ashgate, 2014), p.6.

saying that it's the duty of the writer", he muses wryly, adding that the writer must, at the very least, "avoid the terms in what the party leaders and publicists try to plant the discussion".⁶⁸⁰

Where a similar sense of hesitancy and irony is expressed in earlier programs from the 1920s and 1930s, however, it is largely done so via a set of subtler, surprisingly homogenous, techniques. Limited by the strictures of the BBC, these modernists nevertheless managed to leverage certain literary flourishes in their work for radio. Archived audio shows that techniques such as extended silences, unusual syntax and disrupted chronologies were not used on air – no doubt predominantly due to the strictures of the BBC and its careful producers, ever mindful of the easy listening that the company set out to provide its audiences – particularly when the signal may be weak. These disallowed many of most ostentatiously radical techniques: silence and the use of several languages do not sound well on air, and unusual use of punctuation, fonts and the space of the page is, obviously, impossible. Irony, however, can operate successfully in almost any medium (including, as we shall see, music) – as can repetition, textual intricacy and the use of unusual perspectives and chronologies. While there is no disputing Coyle, Cohen and Lewty's claim that authors' broadcasts were reasonably heterogeneous in subject, then, it should also not surprise us that writers whose work elsewhere drew on a range of literary styles were forced, in their radio work, to make recourse to a limited series of techniques. Bound by the homogenizing formal constraints of the BBC, these writers were forced to dip into the same toolbox in order to lend colour and experiment to their writing for this nascent form. It is these commonalities which allow us to better understand not only modernism's on-air iterations, but the films later developed among, and as a response to, a concomitant documentary culture.

Pevsner's difficult beginnings are, of course, an example of one such technique, with his refusal to compromise the complexity of his broadcasts a small modernist gesture within the sanctified space of the BBC's culture coverage. (Although some, including Avery, point out that the "lower status" of cultural talks within the BBC made them a relatively free arena when compared to the even stricter standards governing items such

⁶⁸⁰ "The artist in society", feat. Graham Greene, Elizabeth Bowen, V.S. Pritchett. Date unknown- date on BBC disks 1948-09-21, but possibly a dubbing of a recording from 1948-07-10. No announcements included. BBC Third Programme, Sound and Video archives, British Library.

as news programs.)⁶⁸¹ For other writers, complexity meant the clever use of repetition and wordplay – a tactic which also allowed the speaker to toy with the enforced chronology of radio broadcasts. One of the few surviving recordings of Woolf's talks, an excerpt from a broadcast entitled "Craftsmanship", attests to the power of this relatively understated technique. The program, from a series entitled "Words fail me", deals with the limitations of language, and is notable for containing frequent repetition and rhyme – certainly far more than one finds in any of Woolf's literary works. Replete with mesmerizing repetitive liturgies, the broadcast sounds an echo of structuralist semiotics in its interrogation of the interrelatedness of words. The things we associate with words – "other meanings, other memories" – render language unstable for the author; in fact, it is "one of the chief difficulties for the writer today". "A word", Woolf intones, "is part of other words",

In the old days, of course, when English was a new language, writers could invent new words and use them. Nowadays it is easy enough to invent new words – they spring to the lips whenever we see a new sight or feel a new sensation – but we cannot use them because the English language is old. You cannot use a brand new word in an old language because of the very obvious yet always mysterious fact that a word is not a single and separate entity, but part of other words. Indeed it is not a word until it is part of a sentence. Words belong to each other, although, of course, only a great poet knows that the word "incarnadine" belongs to "multitudinous seas." To combine new words with old words is fatal to the constitution of the sentence. In order to use new words properly you would have to invent a whole new language; and that, though no doubt we shall come to it, is not at the moment our business.⁶⁸²

Here, in this passage which seems to echo something of Reith's purist snobbery – not for nothing, after all, did the BBC's Royal Charter put "inform" and "educate" before "entertain" –⁶⁸³ it is the word "word" itself which is repeated. Interspersed throughout the passage, it sounds as a signal to the listener, a touchstone around which Woolf's ideas circle and return to. It is rendered in different contexts to the extent it becomes unfamiliar, so that its repeated invocation defamiliarises the word even as it constitutes the centre of her thoughts.

Similar moments of repetition and play occur throughout the broadcast. When discussing the slew of critical voices that have arisen in recent years, Woolf says there are "at this moment at least a hundred professors lecturing on the literature of the past" and

⁶⁸¹ Avery, *Radio Modernism*, p. 51.

⁶⁸² Virginia Woolf, *Craftsmanship*, 1937-04(?), excerpt from 3rd programme in radio series "Words fail me", 1CDR0033124, BBC Sound Archives LP 1317.

⁶⁸³ *Entertainment-Education and Social Change: History, Research, and Practice*, ed. Arvind Singhal, Michael J. Cody, Everett M. Rogers et al, (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004), p. 244.

“hundreds and hundreds of young men and women. . . passing examinations in English literature with the utmost credit”. Here, the repetition of “hundred” echoes the multitude of critical pens the writer wishes to invoke. Yet, she asks, “do we write better, do we read better than we read and wrote four hundred years ago when we were un-lectured, un-criticised, untaught?” This series of compound adjectives is followed by an answer: no, for words are “un-teachable”. “Educated words”, Woolf advises, “[are] as good as uneducated words, cultivated words as good as uncultivated words”. They cannot be taught or regulated, but instead defy those who would have them be “lifted out on the point of a pen and examined separately”.

They hang together, in sentences, paragraphs, sometimes for whole pages at a time. They hate being useful; they hate making money; they hate being lectured about in public. In short, they hate anything that stamps them with one meaning or confines them to one attitude, for it is their nature to change.

Like the repetition of “words” itself, the repeated “they hate” enacts the same defamiliarisation which, Woolf suggests, any person who attempts to access languages straightforwardly is faced with. Combined with the sense of being hemmed in that the accrual of so many compound adjectives, leaning on the negative, affects, and Woolf’s use of on-air repetition goes a long way to disrupting the supposed ease and efficiency of the very medium through which she speaks to her audience: language.

Other writers show how repetition and related techniques could also be made to serve explicitly political ends. Bowen, for instance, used a version of Woolf’s repetitive litanies in her talks on a range of subjects, from culture and travel to her musings on the situation in post-Revolutionary Ireland. Bowen, perhaps, thought about oral delivery more than most. Not only did she “undoubtedly” have some knowledge of radio via her husband, who became Secretary at the BBC’s Central Council of School Broadcasting in 1935, but she also had a stammer.⁶⁸⁴ In his introduction to an edited collection of her talks, Allen Hepburn explains that this “caused headaches for producers and editors”, who would have to “cut tape by tiny fractions”.⁶⁸⁵ Her stammer, however, was lessened by being allowed to speak naturally and freely, with less reference to a script. Thus, argues Hepburn, we find in her talks that “[t]he cadence of the spoken voice – the tendency to reiterate and to

⁶⁸⁴ Allan Hepburn, *Listening In: Broadcasts, Speeches, and Interviews by Elizabeth Bowen* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 2-5.

⁶⁸⁵ Hepburn, *Listening In*, pp. 6-7.

overstate that can occur in conversation – takes precedence over the accuracy of finely honed prose”.⁶⁸⁶ Yet to attribute Bowen’s repetitions and “overstating” solely to the natural flow of spoken voice is to under-estimate both the evident deliberateness of her technique and its effect on the listener. Instead, then, I would suggest, she – like Woolf – exaggerated these natural qualities of everyday speech to formally radical ends, engaging in an interplay of documentation and experimentation akin to that which Miller identifies more broadly in the “complimentary moments” which inform the culture of the period. Hepburn goes on to cite a document at the Harry Ransom Centre, in which Bowen declares that “[w]riting for the air frenzies me: it is such a new and different technique”.⁶⁸⁷ She also, he notes, “understands the democratising function of the medium”,⁶⁸⁸ and believed that “[r]eviewing books on the radio was a means of extending the parameters of literary culture”.⁶⁸⁹

This did not mean, however, that Bowen followed the Reithsian tradition of ennobling listeners through educative broadcasting. Instead, her talks are shot through with irony – often, irony specifically aimed at mocking the ennobling potential of culture. Describing the fate of the characters in Hester Chapman’s *I Will Be Good* (1945) during a broadcast on new and recent fiction, Bowen jokes: “Need it be said that the respectable Englishwoman’s influence on this group of continentals is disastrous? . . . Left to themselves, these people would have taken their own courses. Woe to them, that they had an authoress in their midst!”⁶⁹⁰ In a later talk, “Ireland Today”, Bowen pokes fun at the garrulousness of the Irish, saying:

Speech, and speech with a bias, is the nation’s delight. Lord, loudly talkers cluster in pubs, congregate in the villages after Mass, mill through horses, pigs or cattle upon a fair day. There is a love of language, an endless enterprise of in vocabulary. In no other English-speaking country with so much verse and volume, subtlety or force, Irish-English as spoken, not only gains charm from the intonation, it has an integral rhythm of its own.

⁶⁸⁶ Hepburn, *Listening In*, p. 7.

⁶⁸⁷ Elizabeth Bowen, “Autobiographical Note”. Two versions, dated 1948 and 1962, Harry Ransom Centre Box 1, File 5. q.t.d. Hepburn, p. 10.

⁶⁸⁸ Hepburn, p. 12.

⁶⁸⁹ Hepburn, p. 18.

⁶⁹⁰ Elizabeth Bowen, “Book Talk - New and Recent Fiction”, circa 1945, in *Listening In: Broadcasts, Speeches, and Interviews by Elizabeth Bowen*, ed. Allan Hepburn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 80.

Given that Bowen is, herself, an Irish writer, albeit not one with an obviously distinguishable accent,⁶⁹¹ identifying “speech with a bias” as “the nation’s delight” is also a subtly self-effacing comment, which a thoughtful and attentive listener might equally hear as a commentary of Bowen’s own “speech” on the wireless. The busyness of the image Bowen presents, built up through asyndentic lists of noisy people and animals and emphasised via alliteration – “lord, loudly”, “love of language”, “endless enterprise”, “cluster” and “congregate” – which enacts an “integral rhythm”, akin to that which Bowen names as a central feature of Anglo-Irish speech. Later in the same talk, this alliteration is used to poke fun at the commodification of Irish culture overseas. After identifying various reactionary aspects in that culture, which “may draw abreast with modernisation”, but “can not compete with the modern world” – due to problems which range from the “ugliness of Ireland’s ecclesiastical buildings” to the absence of “maternity-centres and child-welfare projects”, both of which “still confront a sort of mystical opposition – who dare touch the sanctity of the home?” – Bowen notes that Ireland’s chief exports run contra to “the also-prevailing strictness, caution, and in some respects, Puritanism of life”. “Smoky-toned Irish tweeds, smoky-flavoured Irish whisky, both reaching back in origin” are, Bowen notes in amused tones, “the most picturesque popular of her products”.

As with Woolf, however, the most affective technique in Bowen’s radio broadcasts is the use of repetition. Musing on the process of falling out of love with an author, in a talk entitled “Books That Grow Up With One”, Bowen proclaims that there is “a hateful sadness about returning to a former favourite only to find the magic gone. Those pages, now, are nothing but cold print – words, words, words: unevocative! Unevocative, yes, and worse.” Just as the repetition of “words” in Woolf’s talk on “Craftsmanship” enacts the alienation the writer feels from language, for Bowen, it enacts the reader’s distance from a formerly beloved text: where once the writing held, we might imagine, a deep sense of meaning, now it presents itself only as repetitive units of language. Moreover, for Bowen, there is a certain inevitability to this process, also represented through incremental repetition. “Let’s imagine”, she says, “a book that one reads first (say) at fifteen; again at twenty-two; again

⁶⁹¹ Few, if any, of the primary identifying features of Anglo-Irish dialect are present in Bowen’s recorded speech. See Raymond Hickey, “Identifying dialect speakers: The case of Irish English”, *Recent Developments in Forensic Linguistics*, ed. Hannes Kniffa (Frankfurt: Lang, 1995), pp. 217-37.

at thirty-four; again when one is in one's forties; and again, one hopes, three or four times before one dies".

For Bowen, as for Woolf, part of the power of this repetition stems from the enforced chronology of radio broadcasts. Woolf's texts often butt against linear experience of reading – for instance, when square brackets are used in *To The Lighthouse's* (1927) famous "Time Passes" segment to interpolate the story of a degrading house with updates from the lives of its inhabitants – in an attempt at simultaneity also trialled by James Joyce in the "Wandering Rocks" chapter of *Ulysses* (1922), and, later, through innovative page layouts in modernist-inflected texts like Alasdair Grey's *1982, Janine* (1984). Radio, however, permits no such experiment. Authors like Bowen and Woolf, then, make a virtue of necessity. In the case of Bowen's ageing reader, the listener must "live" through each age alongside the subject, with every "again" indicating the next stage of life. In Woolf's case, the listener must follow each idea as she presents it in turn, returning each time to the word "word" itself, which gradually accrues abstraction as the talk progresses. The listener cannot skip ahead or rewind – short of turning off their set, they are bound to hear each instance of each word as the author intended it. Meaning, therefore, is allowed to unfold gradually, with repetition mediating the relative impact and sense of individual words.

5. Movie time

The documentary film is also bounded by the chronological restrictions of broadcast – just one of the formal aspects it shares with radio broadcasts. Lara Feigel's 2010 monograph *Literature, Cinema and Politics 1930-1945* is replete with examples of how film-makers used the chronological strictures of documentary films to radical ends, from the "complex interplay of space in time" in Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin, Symphony of a Great City* (1927)⁶⁹² to the disruptive simultaneity that Gilles Deleuze reads in the avant-garde work of Alain Robbe-Grillet.⁶⁹³ Yet, with its simultaneous visual and aural stimuli, it also offers further

⁶⁹² Lara Feigel, *Literature, Cinema and Politics 1930-1945: Reading Between the Frames* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 168.

⁶⁹³ Feigel, *Literature, Cinema and Politics*, p. 215.

possibilities for the artist. The possibilities – and limitations, and even anxieties – of sound, for instance, similarly form a key thread in Feigel's study. Nor is she alone in this regard. Marcus' *The Tenth Muse*, for instance, ends with a discussion about the GPO Film Unit and particularly its use of sound. *Coal Face*, Marcus writes, was produced only shortly after the GPO obtained a sound studio (although she notes that it was *Night Mail* which was, as she puts it, "the only [GPO] film to receive wider public circulation".)⁶⁹⁴ Pioneering in its use of sound, the Unit hired Alberto Cavalcanti, the Brazilian-born avant-garde producer, to oversee the sound in *Coal Face*. It was a move that paid off: *Coal Face* won a medal of honour at the 1935 Brussels International Film Festival,⁶⁹⁵ confirming the importance of sound for the GPO and inaugurating a tradition of innovative interplay between image, music and text.

The remainder of this chapter takes up this story where Marcus' study leaves it. Following the Britten-Auden collaboration that began with their work on *Coal Face* through their later work for the GPO and on to subsequent employment for the commercial Strand Films, I will show how the form of the documentary film, much like the form of the BBC-regulated radio broadcast, allowed innovation not only in spite of its strictures, but via a playful re-appropriation of the very conventions which the documentary film industry enshrined in cinema culture. To understand Britten and Auden's contribution, and the innovative films they contributed to, then, requires one to place the innovation of the Film Unit in its proper historical context.

Like radio, documentary films and newsreels adhered to certain cultural conventions, the formulation of which was considered explicitly along ethical lines formed, at least in part, alongside the wishes of the state. This, however, is not surprising: not only was the BBC originally overseen by regulators from the General Post Office,⁶⁹⁶ whose influential film unit will be the main subject of the latter part of this chapter, but staff regularly conversed

⁶⁹⁴ Laura Marcus, *The Tenth Muse: Writing about Cinema in the Modernist Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 435.

⁶⁹⁵ Ian Aitkin, *The Concise Routledge Encyclopaedia of the Documentary Film* (London: Routledge, 2013), p.180.

⁶⁹⁶ "BBC Runs by itself", *Billboard*, June 23, 1945, p. 13.

across the two industries. Leading figures also found common ideological ground. As Paul Swann writes in his study *The British Documentary Film Movement, 1926-1946*, “[t]he state became involved in film production largely because of the belief that motion pictures could have an impact on a mass audience thought to be immune to other types of appeal”,⁶⁹⁷ part of what he identifies as a new, post-war approach to governing which involved “an obligation to consult and inform the people”.⁶⁹⁸ It is not difficult to see how Reith’s vision for the BBC suited this new domestic policy. The documentary film movement, too, included many co-operative voices. In his 1935 book *Documentary Film*, director Paul Rotha highlights how close the line is between education and propaganda: “in most cases”, he writes, “it would be extremely difficult to define where instruction begins and propaganda ends”.⁶⁹⁹ The importance of the latter, he continues, has been heightened by the development of mass communication technology. “In the same way that the nineteenth century saw the development of machinery for large-scale production of industry”, Rotha explains, “so the last thirty years have seen the perfection of machinery to advertise the products of modern industry”.⁷⁰⁰ Similarly, while “the first world war undoubtedly began this era of mass-persuasion”, it was the subsequent “rapid development of the radio and the cinema” which then “trebled the importance of this new factor in the social structure”:

There can be little question that the immense persuasive properties of the two electric mediums – cinema and radio – have played an incalculable part in the shaping of mass-thought in post-war Europe. It is being generally recognised, moreover, that propaganda may become, as indeed in some countries it already is, one of the most important instruments for the building of the State.⁷⁰¹

Rotha goes on to contrast the explicit control leveraged over propaganda by the Russian government and, in Germany, by Joseph Goebbels, with the “propaganda instruments in America and this country” which, “[w]ith the exception of radio in Britain”, had been permitted “to develop for the most part under the control of private enterprise”.⁷⁰²

⁶⁹⁷ Paul Swann, *The British Documentary Film Movement, 1926-1946* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. vii.

⁶⁹⁸ Swann, *The British Documentary*, p. 2.

⁶⁹⁹ Paul Rotha, *Documentary Film: The use of the film medium to interpret creatively and on social terms the life of the people as it exists in reality*. 3rd edition (London: Faber, 1952), p. 57.

⁷⁰⁰ Rotha, *Documentary Film*, p. 57.

⁷⁰¹ Rotha, *Documentary Film*, p. 57.

⁷⁰² Rotha, *Documentary Film*, p. 58.

A cynical viewer of many 1930s English documentary films may wonder, however, how different the output of a self-policing propaganda industry is to one explicitly managed by its government. The documentary film industry was deeply excised, in particular, by the task of assisting in the revival of British industry in the post-war years. Figures like John Grierson and William Crawford, head of the Empire Marketing Board, introduced to the industry techniques influenced by American advertising and public relations, which relied on a glossy respectability and the notion of fostering a (correctly) informed public, educated to make the right decisions via what Crawford called “the engineering of consent”.⁷⁰³ It was not difficult for directors to transfer these techniques to film-making on behalf of British industry.

To do so, they utilised every technique possible, extending the formal principles of the BBC broadcast into a new medium and adding further, entertaining facets, from cheerful music to underscore the delights of industry to the use of snappy title cards.⁷⁰⁴ The single narrative voice that caused consternation on air was also retained on screen. The ability to separate and remix sound was a relatively recent innovation when Britten and Auden began their tenure at the GPO – recent and, at least for Rotha, one of the most significant to date. “The disembodied voice”, he wrote later, “may be used to make reference to the visual action without showing the origins of the comment”. For many film-makers, this allowed a means to emphasise the authority of the speaker. As Charles Wolfe writes in his essay “Historicising the ‘Voice of God’: The place of vocal narration in classical documentary”, “this voice is constructed as fundamentally unrepresentable in human form, connoting a position of absolute mastery and knowledge outside the spatial and temporal boundaries of the social world the film depicts”.⁷⁰⁵ These “voice of God” narrators often further emphasized their authority through the use of facts and figures relating to the topic of the film. Unlike in a radio broadcast, this voice was also often assisted in its task by the use of thematic music, which underscored the different tones and moods depicted on screen, and of course by visuals, which could be used to illustrate

⁷⁰³ Swann, *The British Documentary*, p. 3-4.

⁷⁰⁴ In *The Tenth Muse*, Marcus identifies a strand of public debate concerned specifically with writing for film, including anxieties over the use of inter-titles and leaders. (Marcus, p. 9.)

⁷⁰⁵ Charles Wolfe, “Historicising the ‘Voice of God’: The place of vocal narration in classical documentary”, *Film History 9:2 Non-fiction Film* (1997), p. 149.

the message of each documentary. In this way, the film's three semantic channels – of image, music and text – could work in concert to educate and entertain the viewer.

This is particularly evident in the case of films which deal with industry, of which transport films are a well-represented subset. Although these films take a variety of focusses, for our purposes it is the prevalence of commentary which links transport explicitly with national industry which is of most interest. The output of the prolific British Pathé, which produced over 500 different films on the subject of industry in the 1930s, is indicative in this regard.⁷⁰⁶ In *The Romance of a Railway: The History of an Achievement* (1935), for instance, the narrator's voice intones that

The history of a nation's progress is the history of her sons' achievements, their hopes and disappoints, their failures and successes. English history during the past hundred years provides no finer example of this than the story of that great railway which linked London with the West Country.

The framing of shots, and the music which accompanied them, served to accentuate such messages. *By Electric to Brighton* (1933), the title card of which boasted of "6 new trains an hour as part of a new '£2,750,000 electrified service to 'London by the Sea'", shows footage of an electric train coming towards the camera and then, after it arrives in the station, the Lord Mayor of Brighton and his entourage also advancing forward to read a statement on the new railway, with jolly music underpinning the pomp and ceremony of the occasion.⁷⁰⁷ Similarly, in the 1932 film *British Industries "Show the World"*, which profiles a fashion show at White City, the camera pans from the current Duchess of York, spectating, to the models showing new outfits and back again, while cheerful music plays and the narrator boasts that "you don't have to go to Paris to be really smart. Glorious creations, and all British".⁷⁰⁸

There is one film in particular that exemplifies the use of these and other textual codes. Produced by the Midland & Scottish Railway London, *Anytown* (1936) is a "[s]ocial documentary showing the importance of the rail service to a typical northern industrial

⁷⁰⁶ According to British Pathé's digitised archive, there were 514 different films produced on the topic of industry between 1930 and 1940.

⁷⁰⁷ *By Electric to Brighton* (sound version), British Pathé, 02 January 1933. Film ID 693.05, sort number 33/001, British Pathé archive.

⁷⁰⁸ *British Industries "Show the World"*, British Pathé, 25 February 1932. Film ID 663.43, sort number 32/016, British Pathé archive.

town in the 1930s".⁷⁰⁹ As the title suggests, the film seeks to show what could be one of many industrial towns across the north; as if to emphasise this point, shots of the "Anytown" railway sign often have a large question mark superimposed.⁷¹⁰ Like *The Way to the Sea*, it opens with a series of introductory shots to set the scene for the events that follow; unlike *The Way to the Sea*, however, *Anytown* opens not with history but geography, as the film takes us on a tour around the town with its shopping street, civic buildings, the union offices, pubs, hotels and workers heading to a colliery. "In all its aspects", the narrator intones, "it is a living, pulsating hole". "But", he continues, "it cannot live without those vital arteries through which its life blood ebbs and flows. Its very existence depends on transport." Much of the early part of the film is dedicated to how this "life blood" – which primarily means, we realise, the products of local industry – is facilitated by the railway. Shots of mill workers tending to bobbins in a factory are interspersed with close-up shots of lathes, colliery machinery and smelting works, accompanied by the mechanistic, repetitive chromatic figures of "Iron Foundry" (1927) by Soviet composer Alexander Mosolov.⁷¹¹

Well-known orchestral compositions similarly accompany subsequent shots: as the film goes on to discuss the rail distribution system that brings food to Anytown, the allegro from Tchaikovsky's 5th symphony, which underscores several sections of *Anytown*, swells to its triumphant finish, before giving over to the unaccompanied sound of the train. There is more to be said about the sequences that follow, which show the movement of goods across these isles – with brief shots of operators, giving instructions down the phone in clipped tones – and overseas, and of people arranging meetings and social visits with reference to the train timetable. But for our purposes, the most interesting segment comes later, around three-quarters of the way through the film, when – having toiled in industry for twelve minutes – the workers of Anytown take their annual holiday. Signs proclaim that businesses are "closed for wakes week", and the narrator explains that "in every home there is excited preparation for the journey".

⁷⁰⁹ "Anytown (1936)", BFI Archive Record 1118 (<http://collections-search.bfi.org.uk/web/Details/ChoiceFilmWorks/150009353>)

⁷¹⁰ The town in question is actually Rochdale, Greater Manchester, from where hails the author of this thesis.

⁷¹¹ Previously part of a suite entitled *Steel*, "Iron Foundry" established its association with the beauty of industry when it accompanied the critically-acclaimed ballet *The Spirit of the Factory*, or *Ballet mécanique*, at the 1931 Hollywood Bowl.)

Industry's wheels are stopped. Smoke no longer pours from her chimneys. This industrial town pauses for a space, to renew its vigour and refresh its toilers. But there is no pausing, no rest, for transport.

"Holidays!", the narrator suddenly blurts. "It's a magic word, isn't it? Symbolising all things to all people." The film shows families playing on the beachfront lidos of Blackpool, juxtaposed with footage of the empty streets back home. Golfers play and sweethearts walk in the woods as the chimneys of Lancashire stand silent and smokeless. When the workers return home, however, the mood is sombre. People leave the train with their belongings in silence, with no music playing, although with many of them turning to look at the camera. "Back return the people, refreshed, ready for another year – suntanned, strengthened, their minds filled with happy memories."

Anytown is not the only film that links holidays with industrial labour. *Holiday* (1930), designed to show "the delights of Blackpool", was just one other example, with Pathé Newsreels doing a particularly strong line in travel films: their offerings included *Navy's "At Home"* (1927),⁷¹² in which people travel to Portsmouth Naval Dockyard to see the ships and submarines, *Hey ho! Come to the Fun Fair* (1931) about Margate,⁷¹³ and the optimistically-named *...And every bit as nice as Miami!* (1930) –⁷¹⁴ also about Blackpool, and made to advertise domestic holidays where one can watch the parade of "pretty Lancashire lasses". Often, these films also imbue travel with a moral value, such as in the 1924 Pathé Gazette reel showing British schoolboys taking *A Healthy Holiday*.⁷¹⁵ The boys, dressed in uniform, go walking in Aberystwyth, and are even taken to shake the hand of the mayor. In *The Navy's "At Home"*, sailors on shore leave sing sea shanties to entertain holiday makers. In these films, travel is either intrinsically valuable because it is "healthy", patriotic, or, more often, a necessary break that fortifies one for more work. As such, they sell both holidays and industry simultaneously, linking leisure to Britain's post-World War One regeneration.

⁷¹² *Navy's "At Home"*. 18 August 1927. British Pathé. Film ID 694.22. Canister G 425.

⁷¹³ *Hey ho! Come to the Fun Fair*. 25 June 1931. British Pathé. Film ID 942.08. Canister EP 215.

⁷¹⁴ *... And Every Bit As Nice As Miami!* 24 April 1930. British Pathé. Film ID 828.10. Canister G 1705.

⁷¹⁵ *A Healthy Holiday*. 24 April 1924. British Pathé. Film ID 228.11. Canister G 1078.

6. The General Post Office

If each of these above films might reasonably be said to exemplify the relationship between the artistry of film-making and the wishes of the peacetime state, no other body was quite as effective an intermediary as the Grierson-led GPO. “[N]owhere else”, writes Swann, “was there an individual like Grierson capable of educating and pushing filmmakers and civil servants alike”.⁷¹⁶ Created when the Empire Marketing Board was transferred to the Post Office in 1931,⁷¹⁷ the General Post Office Film Unit rapidly gained a reputation for producing innovative films concerned with social reform; William Coldstream echoed mainstream opinion when he described their output as “left-wing propaganda”.⁷¹⁸ Despite its left-wing slant, however, the GPO Film Unit’s key interests were remarkably similar to those of the BBC: Britain’s overseas cultural ambitions, and the need to educate domestic audiences. (Susan Sydney-Smith is just one of the critics who have noted “an allegiance cemented by the common interests” of both bodies’ leadership.)⁷¹⁹ Unlike the BBC, however, the GPO did not enjoy a monopoly. To ensure its success, then, the Unit joined various other commercial artists who “by working within certain segments of the market system . . . sought to enlighten and improve the visual literacy of the British public”.⁷²⁰ Simultaneously, it communicated with Whitehall, primarily through Grierson’s “dealings with senior civil servants”.⁷²¹

In his essay “The GPO film unit and ‘Britishness’ in the 1930s”, Scott Anthony expands on this formulation, explaining how the Labour government looked to the BBC, ICI and other organisations’ “quasi-corporatist” examples to guide post office reform.⁷²² In support of this, he cites a pamphlet produced by Sir Stephen Tallents, head of the Empire Marketing Board and later manager at the GPO,⁷²³ called *The Projection of England*

⁷¹⁶ Swann, *The Documentary Film*, p. 17.

⁷¹⁷ Kildea, *Benjamin Britten: A Life in the Twentieth Century* (London: Penguin, 2014) p. 101.

⁷¹⁸ Kildea, *Benjamin Britten*, p. 101.

⁷¹⁹ Susan Sydney-Smith, *Beyond Dixon of Dock Green: Early British Police Series* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), p. 27.

⁷²⁰ LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy*, p. 141.

⁷²¹ Swann, *The British Documentary*, p. vii.

⁷²² Scott Anthony, “The GPO film unit and ‘Britishness’ in the 1930s”, *The Projection of England: A History of the GPO Film Unit*, ed. Scott Anthony and James G. Mansell (London: British Film Institute, 2011), p. 11.

⁷²³ Tallents made his employment by the GPO, in 1933, conditional on his taking the EMB Film Unit with him. He later helped form the British Council and eventually became Deputy Director General of the BBC under Lord Reith. See “Tallents, Sir Stephen (1884-1958)”, *BFI Screen Online*, <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/people/id/1179594/> (29 December 2016)

(1932). As its title suggests, the pamphlet argued that Britain and particularly England ought to “project” its image overseas. Tallents believed that “a new type of national personality was emerging as the geography of the globe was reshaped by developments in transport and media communications”⁷²⁴ and, as *The Spectator* review of the pamphlet neatly summarised, “England . . . might well show the best of itself to the world for the benefit of the world”.⁷²⁵ Tallents’ work at the GPO, of which he became director in 1933,⁷²⁶ was guided by this principle. “The films of the GPO film unit”, Anthony explains, were therefore “part of Tallents’ attempt to create a kind of cultural short-hand, able to embody the organisation’s values in popular forms” such that they might be easily distributed.⁷²⁷ Part of this task involved bringing to light the usually hidden infrastructure which underpinned British leisure and industry in such a way that it might be entertaining to a mass audience:

Productions like *The Horsey Mail* (1938), *Night Mail* and *North Sea* (1938) show how everyday feats are underpinned by social and technological infrastructure that is seemingly all pervasive while at the same time being almost imperceptible.

What may at first appear, to the untrained modern eye, to be amusing educational films about trains and the post quickly reveal themselves to be part of a larger project intimately linked with state power, empire and the shifting geopolitical boundaries of inter-war Europe. “There is even a case”, Anthony muses, “for seeing Tallents’ conception of projection as a kind of cultural Keynesianism [through which cultural output would bring improved returns], as well as being a precursor to contemporary notions of ‘soft power’”.⁷²⁸

If this liberal approach sounds more conventional than that taken by many classically “modernist” artists, however, this is not to say the GPO Film Unit’s output was not innovative and experimental – in fact, its fondness for experiment worked in concert with, rather than in contradiction to, its politics. In *Documentary Film*, Rotha names “craftsmanship that takes full advantage of artistic values” as one of the “simple powers” which is “capable of persuasive qualities without equal” – essential for the “mass persuasion” he sought to effect.⁷²⁹ For Grierson, like the film-makers at Pathé, the artistry

⁷²⁴ Anthony, “The GPO film unit”, p. 11.

⁷²⁵ “The Projection of England by Sir Stephen Tallents”, *The Spectator*, April 16, 1932, p. 30.

⁷²⁶ Sydney-Smith, *Beyond Dixon*, p. 27.

⁷²⁷ Anthony, “The GPO film unit”, p. 12.

⁷²⁸ Anthony, “The GPO film unit”, p. 13.

⁷²⁹ Rotha, *Documentary Film*, p. 58.

the Unit brought to its films both helped them make dull subjects engaging, and elevated the documentaries above the drab lower register – and unsophisticated politics – of the newsreel. As Grierson explained in his 1933 essay “The Documentary Producer”:

The subject matter for education and propaganda is seldom easy. You are not asked to look for the exciting bits and the exciting themes and shoot those. You are generally asked to hunt about in some seemingly dull subject and find a way of putting it on screen.⁷³⁰

Doing so successfully, however, allowed one to experience the “liberal satisfaction of serving such interests as education and national propaganda” – the latter, he adds, is “on any sensible definition . . . itself a species of education”.⁷³¹ That the means to achieving this satisfaction rely on a well-developed aesthetic is made clear by Grierson’s comments on other non-fiction film forms. “The peacetime newsreel”, he wrote, “is just a speedy sin-snap of some utterly important ceremony”, designed to capture and transmit “the babblings of a politician (gazing sternly into the camera)”.⁷³² Shorter, “magazine items” are described as pieces of cheap journalism which “avoid on the one hand the consideration of any solid material, and escape, on the other, the solid consideration of any material”.⁷³³ “Their reaching out for the flippant or popular touch”, Grierson intones, “is so completely far-reaching that it dislocates something. Possibly taste; possibly common sense.”⁷³⁴ To be successful, these different pronouncements suggest, a film must toe several lines simultaneously: politically educative and useful for national propaganda, but not in thrall to politicians’ soundbites; taking its material seriously, but not becoming dry or dull; and, lastly, but most importantly, never losing sight of the bounds of good taste.

This last point is particularly revealing when read in the context of the Britten-Auden collaboration. “By the time *Coal Face* was made in 1935”, Yasuko Suga explains in his essay “GPO films and modern design”, “experimentation had become an obsession. *Night Mail* would never have been the film it was without the imaginative orchestration of sound, music and verse”.⁷³⁵ This, too, was worth signalling to the public: “The co-ordinating

⁷³⁰ John Grierson, “The Documentary Producer”, *The Documentary Film Reader: History, Theory, Criticism*, edited by Jonathan Kahana (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 216.

⁷³¹ Grierson, “The Documentary Producer”, p. 215.

⁷³² John Grierson, “First Principles of Documentary”, *The Documentary Film Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 217.

⁷³³ Grierson, “First Principles”, p. 217.

⁷³⁴ Grierson, “First Principles”, p. 218.

⁷³⁵ Yasuko Suga, “GPO films and modern design”, *The Projection of England*, p. 103.

booklet” for *Night Mail*, produced by Patrick C. Keely, “was also an important luxury product, which showed that the GPO could ‘afford’ to be experimental and avant-garde” –⁷³⁶ a signal to the left-wing, bourgeois audience garnered through Arts Theatre screenings⁷³⁷ that the Unit’s films matched not only with their politics, but with their tastes.

It is details such as this that have provoked a recent turn in the scholarly treatment of the GPO. Where past criticism has focussed primarily on the talent of Grierson and his colleagues, more recent scholarship has turned to this aesthetic experiment with a questioning eye, “arguing”, as Swann puts it, that the Unit “effectively appropriate [documentary] forms for a fairly narrow, not to say élite, point of view”.⁷³⁸ It is true, of course, that the Arts Theatre screenings and overtly avant-garde stylistics of the materials that accompanied the Film Unit’s productions suggest a rarefied audience, and it would be remiss to discuss the ways in which the GPO was pioneering without asking for whom their innovation was intended. Yet – as is so often the case in debates of this kind – the true character of the GPO lies somewhere in between. Even if we turn a cynical eye to the high-culture styling of the Film Unit, there is little reason to doubt that the attempt to educate viewers was, like Reith’s mission for the BBC, meant in earnest – and carried out successfully. Aside from Grierson’s extensive comments on the importance of “propaganda”, we know from Britten’s diaries that a fair degree of internal control was maintained over the Unit’s output, with the composer at one point joking that he had been at the studio to “do abit more recording (sentence omitted by commentator) – & see film as it now stands in cutting [sic]”.⁷³⁹ That the Unit could be trusted to self-regulate as it pursued its educative agenda was confirmed by the testimony given by E.T. Crutchley when he testified to a parliamentary Select Committee that “the objective of [the] film unit is to educate and communicate, not to sell things exactly”.

The unit was eventually earmarked as a possible candidate to become the “official film production unit” in the event of war – leading Swann to point out that plans for wartime publicity “were notable for the manner in which they specifically disregarded the documentary movement, with the exception of the tame General Post Office Film Unit”, but

⁷³⁶ Suga, “GPO Films”, pp. 20-1.

⁷³⁷ Suga, “GPO Films”, pp.105-8.

⁷³⁸ Swann, *The Documentary Film*, p. 2.

⁷³⁹ Benjamin Britten, *Journeying Boy: The Diaries of the Young Benjamin Britten, 1928-1938*, ed. John Evans (London: Faber, 2009), p. 267.

which we might equally read as evidence that the Unit's output was felt to have wide enough public appeal that it might be used to successfully communicate the government's objectives to the people of Britain if the need arose. There is, after all, little use in a propagandist who cannot speak to the people. As with Pevsner, Woolf, and various other writers' contributions to the BBC, the question of whether experiment therefore performed a legitimising function is a valid one – and one only complicated further by the specifics of Britten and Auden's involvement in the project.

The final part of this chapter will consist of two parts: the first surveying *Coal Face* and *Night Mail*, and the second an in-depth reading of *The Way to the Sea*. Aside from, as I shall demonstrate, showing how the formal tropes of 1930s documentary cinema and, more generally, of early twentieth-century broadcast culture can be re-appropriated to gesture not to authority and certainty but to tension and conflict, these films provide us with an object lesson in the complicated relationship between modernism and documentary realism. In an introduction in the *Documentary Film Reader* (2015), Jonathan Kahana addresses the apparent conflict between documentary and modernism when it comes to film-making, echoing Miller's comments about the relationship between the two more generally.

How can the same period that gave rise to the notion of documentary as a vehicle for social reform, concerned with the common people and with modern, institutional solutions to their problems – a genre that needed to be simple and direct to be effective – was also [sic] a time of great experimental and artistic invention, of filmmaking that could be abstract, intellectual, beautiful, or difficult?

Like Miller, Kahana suggests that the categories of “documentary realism” and “modernism” do not so much represent two opposing impulses which coincide in the early twentieth-century, but instead different expressions of one impulse: a pressing concern with “the problem of *now*” (Kahana's emphasis).⁷⁴⁰ The apparently distinct focuses – and attendant aesthetics – of “modernism”, with its interest in the self, and “documentary”, with its interest in society, are therefore more blurred than much criticism has previously acknowledged. A different story is revealed by the works themselves: “[r]eviewed as

⁷⁴⁰ Kahana, *Documentary Film*, p. 133.

studies of bodies, machine, and movements”, he writes, “documentary modernism looks less like a requiem for the individual than a series of games, experiments, pranks, or celebrations, trying out alternatives to a society of the self”.⁷⁴¹ The problem of “now”, we can intuit, is therefore the problem of the dialectic of the individual and society during the rapidly-changing political and social landscape of the early twentieth century. As we look at Britten and Auden’s cinematic collaboration, it is a problem worth keeping in mind.

These days, it can be tempting to think of the name “Benjamin Britten” as a shorthand for a particular brand of Englishness, enshrined in BBC Radio 4 specials and the Aldeburgh Festival’s place in the society calendar. Yet anyone with more than a passing familiarity with either the composer’s work or his life couldn’t fail to recognise the radicalism Britten brought to music. A gay man and a pacifist at a time when to be either could expose one to anything from disapproval to danger,⁷⁴² Britten spent the first few years of the 1930s at the Royal College of Music in Kensington. Already the bearer of “pronounced left-wing political views”,⁷⁴³ he observed London to be inhospitable and at times depressing, even as it afforded him the opportunity to see operas and performances at leisure – income providing. As his biographer Paul Kildea explains,

In any direction from his boarding house on Prince’s Square, Bayswater, he encountered evidence of the rapid expansion of the capital, made possible by tube trains and sewers, and saw the scars and rewards of more than a hundred years of industrialization.⁷⁴⁴

At the RCM, Britten was placed on a diet of “harmonies, counterpoint, Bach fugues, choral writing and Palestrina voice-leading”.⁷⁴⁵ For all its conservatism, however, the syllabus had value; while the student Britten already exhibited an “untamed and modernist individuality”,⁷⁴⁶ it is certainly true that his skill for citation mined his college encounters

⁷⁴¹ Kahana, *Documentary Film*, p. 137.

⁷⁴² Josh Epstein’s *Sublime Noise: Musical Culture and the Modernist Writer* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2014) is both illuminating and suitably wry in terms of understanding the contemporary visibility of Britten’s sexuality.

⁷⁴³ Paul Kildea, *Benjamin Britten: A Life in the Twentieth Century* (London: Penguin, 2014), p. 67.

⁷⁴⁴ Kildea, *Benjamin Britten*, p. 58.

⁷⁴⁵ Kildea, *Benjamin Britten*, p. 64.

⁷⁴⁶ Kildea, *Benjamin Britten*, p. 67.

with the old masters for many years after (although the fugue came to figure only glancingly, as a “fallback”,⁷⁴⁷ in Britten’s later work). As Kildea writes,

Britten’s music is full of old forms and techniques: waltzes, scherzos and variations by the cart-load; a cortège-worth of funeral marches; a tarantella here and a sarabande here; much pastiche and parody.⁷⁴⁸

At least some of this pastiche was likely absorbed not via his tutors, but over the airwaves. The student Britten was a keen, if not easily impressed, listener of wireless programs, via a set borrowed from other tenants in his boarding house.⁷⁴⁹ After graduating, he would continue to listen to a range of music via the radio, recording his impressions in his diary, which is replete with references to after-dinner programs, poor-quality BBC symphonies⁷⁵⁰ and, on one occasion in 1932, on a “putrid” machine, “a typical Beethoven Prom”, “done with [conductor] Wood’s usual exaggeration and lack of detail”.⁷⁵¹ If the BBC’s programming was often lacklustre, however, the media also provided the means of encountering exciting new work from overseas not included in the stolid diet prescribed by his tutors. Listening to a January 1931 BBC Radio broadcast of the riotous Ivor Stravinsky, Britten declared the composer’s work “bewildering & terrifying. I didn’t really enjoy it, but I think it’s incredibly marvellous and arresting”.⁷⁵² Not long after, travels around Vienna would compound his sense that there was by contrast “something lacking” in the English scene, confirming what he diagnosed as a “febleness” in the English musical culture championed on air.⁷⁵³

The double-edged sword of industry encountered by Britten in London, as well as the contradicting inclinations revealed by his career as a composer – between innovation and citation, ruralism and an urge to look outward to the continent – came to bear upon his film scores for the GPO Unit. In April 1935, the unit found itself seeking a young composer. For Britten, the timing could not have been better:

⁷⁴⁷ Kildea, *Benjamin Britten*, p. 65.

⁷⁴⁸ Kildea, *Benjamin Britten*, p. 66.

⁷⁴⁹ Britten, *Journeying Boy*, p. 60.

⁷⁵⁰ See references to both radio and live performances in *Journeying Boy* pp. 83, 96, 99, 138, 197, 451.

⁷⁵¹ Britten, *Journeying Boy*, p. 116.

⁷⁵² Q.t.d. Kildea, *Benjamin Britten*, pp. 77-8.

⁷⁵³ Kildea, *Benjamin Britten*, p. 70.

In February, and again in April, Britten sat down with some of those English gentlemen in the BBC he so disdained, a full-time position with the corporation on the table. No such grim scenario was tested, for almost from nowhere, at the end of April, [Edward] Clark's secretary phoned and invited Britten to contact 'a certain film impresario, M. Cavalcanti', who invited him to lunch that day A few days later Britten put his business cards in his drawer, moved back into the boarding house on Cromwell Road and began work for the GPO Film Unit.⁷⁵⁴

At the same time, the Film Unit was busy enlisting another man to work on their films. Auden was invited to write scripts for two films then in production, *Coal Face* (1935) and *Night Mail* (1936), with Britten signed on to provide the scores.

This was not just a bringing together of aesthetics but of ideas – a fact particularly evident in Auden's influence on Britten's politics. The teasing stylistic innovation which marks their films is best read in this light. "It seems to me", Donald Mitchell writes in his T.S. Eliot Memorial Lecture addressing their collaboration, *Britten and Auden in the Thirties*, "[that] the idea of public instruction through parable-like works of art – the whole notion of an informed, educated public – was a prominent part of the thinking of the time". Yet there is something specific to the aspect of Auden's character that Mitchell calls the "undoubtedly didactic dimension . . . released and no doubt encouraged by the instructional face that the GPO Film Unit presented to the world".⁷⁵⁵ By the time Auden left for the Spanish front towards the end of 1935, Britten was converted. "With a click of Auden's fingers", Kildea writes, Britten was "transformed from a political neophyte into a polite student activist".⁷⁵⁶ (In his diary, Britten wryly joked "how W.H.A loves his moral!" – although he also called that moral "more urgent than ever to-day . . . when the world is sick with fear of war, & yet its' [sic] bloody leaders are dragging it steadily into it".)⁷⁵⁷ To Grierson and Rotha's ideas about propaganda and education, then, and to the GPO Unit's already left-wing leanings, the Britten-Auden collaboration added a further political dimension: one informed explicitly by the pair's socialist and pacifist leanings.

⁷⁵⁴ Kildea, *Benjamin Britten*, p. 101-2.

⁷⁵⁵ Donald Mitchell, *Britten and Auden in the Thirties: The Year 1936, The T.S. Eliot Memorial Lectures delivered at the University of Kent at Canterbury in November 1979* (London: Faber, 2000), p. 88.

⁷⁵⁶ Kildea, *Benjamin Britten*, p. 107.

⁷⁵⁷ *Journeying Boy*, p. 340.

7. At the Coal Face

*And as for the manuscripts—by every post . . .
 I can't improve on Pope's shrill indignation,
 But hope that it will please his spiteful ghost
 To learn the use in culture's propagation
 Of modern methods of communication;
 New roads, new rails, new contacts, as we know
 From documentaries by the G.P.O.
 — Auden, from "Letter to Lord Byron" (1937)*

The films that Britten and Auden collaborated on at the GPO Film Unit vary in content, technique and style, but have one thing in common: complexity. Marked by the innovative camera work and involved narration for which the Unit was known, the films are littered with Britten's musical pastiche and underpinned by Auden's sometimes sardonic, but rarely cynical, commentary. Although their time at Unit was brief – lasting only from 1935 to 1936 – and the number of films Britten composed for only just nudges double figures, with Auden featuring on only a handful of those, there is nevertheless a clear development of tone and proficiency over that period. In what follows, I will trace one thread of this development, concerned specifically with films concerned with transport and industry,⁷⁵⁸ from *Coal Face* (1935) to *Night Mail* (1936) and on to another production company, Strand Films, for whom Britten and Auden created *The Way to the Sea* (1936). By reading the better-known *Night Mail* alongside its stylistic siblings, I shall show how even the relatively short duration of the Britten-Auden collaboration provided the means of developing a subversive, amused style which repurposed the conventions of documentary films to both undermine the doctrinal authority normally associated with the genre, and, in the case of *The Way to the Sea*, reveal the undercurrents of nationalism and conflict that underpinned the sale of holidays and industry on-screen.

Part of this reading will necessarily involve comparing Britten and Auden's films with less experimental, more "mainstream" films of the period. Yet if, as I will suggest, the pair's collaborations were not populist, they were nevertheless popular, being among some of the best-known films that the GPO produced, with the 1936 *Night Mail* perhaps the most

⁷⁵⁸ Britten and Auden's third GPO production, *Negroes or God's Chillun*, written in 1935 but released – much neutered – in 1938, is a patrician study of empire which is so thematically distinct so as to lie beyond the boundaries of this study.

famous documentary film of the 1930s.⁷⁵⁹ Swann notes that “[t]he new documentaries that did receive great popular success such as *Night Mail* and *North Sea* were not, significantly, of the straightforward pedagogical type of film”.⁷⁶⁰ If this is true, and the break from the straightforward, didactic “educational” films prevalent in the period allowed the GPO Film Unit’s output to receive greater acclaim, than it is likely that Grierson’s hire of Auden is at least partially to thank for their success. In his study *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s*, Samuel Hynes summarises Auden’s literary project thus:

Auden was urging a kind of writing that would be affective, immediate and concerned with ideas, moral not aesthetic in its central intention, and organised by that intention rather than by its correspondence to the observed world. The problem that he posed was not simply a formal one – finding an alternative way of writing a Georgian lyric or a realistic novel – but something more difficult: he was asking for alternative *worlds*, worlds of the imagination which would consist of new, significant forms, and through which literature could play a moral role in a time of crisis.⁷⁶¹

What the poet eventually formulated, Hynes goes on to explain, was a type of art he termed “parable-art”. “The distinction”, Hynes writes, “between parable and propaganda seems to me a useful one”. Where propaganda teaches ideology, “parable-art” teaches broader lessons about mankind’s conduct. In this respect, parable performs not as a didactic instrument but “like a myth”, rendering “the feeling of human issues”. “It all comes together: poetry is parable-art, parables teach (but love, not ideology), and that is what a strict and adult pen must do in times of expanding fear and savage disaster. Art remains Art, but it performs a social role.”⁷⁶²

At the GPO Film Unit, Auden, with Britten’s assistance, was to create “parable-art” whose pedagogical function was embedded as much in formal innovation as in linguistic play – disassembling a mythos around the purity and function of the medium as much as its subject matter. Marcus has observed how the “literature-film relationship [was] central

⁷⁵⁹ “Night Mail”, in Philip Reed’s pamphlet accompanying *Britten on Film: Coal Face, Night Mail & Other Scores*, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group and the City of Birmingham Symphony Chorus, NMC, 2007, published by Faber Music.

⁷⁶⁰ Swann, *The Documentary Film*, p. 15.

⁷⁶¹ Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (London: The Bodley Head, 1976), p. 13

⁷⁶² Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, p. 14-5.

to the documentary movement's self-definitions".⁷⁶³ Reflecting on *Coal Face*, Rotha wrote how the film was, to him, a "poem", which could be credited with helping to expand the forms permissible in the film industry beyond the straightforward mode used in early documentary films.⁷⁶⁴ Nor was this simply a case of citing from other popular media (although pastiche was, as we shall see, a key part of Britten's composition process for the GPO films). According to Joris Ivens' "Reflections on the avant-garde documentary", one of the things that makes documentary films so valuable is the purity of their form. "It's impossible", he writes, for documentary "to fall into theatre, literature, or music hall entertainment, none of which is cinema".⁷⁶⁵ The work of Britten and Auden might lead us to question this assertion – in fact, we might postulate that choosing to hire a young composer and noted poet constitutes a deliberate attempt to blur the boundaries between cinema, literature and, if not music *hall* entertainment, certainly music as an entertainment in its own right. Add to that inclusion of Auden's poetry within the films themselves, and it is easy to see how, rather than preserving the purity of the documentary form, the GPO films set out to deliberately pollute it.

The counterpoint between word, image and sound plays an important role in Britten and Auden's collaborations from their first film together: *Coal Face*. "[N]on-synchronised sound and speech," Rotha wrote, was "one of the most fascinating and experimental aspects of the sound medium", introducing the possibility of play into what had hitherto been one of the most difficult aspects of a film to manipulate. This development allowed film makers, for the first time, to mediate the relationship between the film's various semantic channels on a frame-by-frame basis – either to ensure that all three worked in concert or, as was frequently the case in more experimental media, to produce discordant relationships between what viewers could hear and what they could see. It is this latter affect that provides *Coal Face* with the means to represent the alienation of the mine workers it

⁷⁶³ Laura Marcus, "'The Creative Treatment of Actuality': John Grierson, Documentary Cinema and 'Fact' in the 1930s", *Intermodernism: Literary Culture in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 189-207, p. 190.

⁷⁶⁴ Rotha, *Documentary Film*, p. 115.

⁷⁶⁵ Joris Ivens, "Reflections on the Avant-Garde Documentary", *Documentary Film Reader*, p. 197.

profiles. Kildea summarised this film as being an “odd marriage of proletarian and high culture”. Yet, while it is impossible to prove beyond doubt that the mismatched discomfort of the film is intentional, the radical re-appropriation of the narrator’s authority, juxtaposed against camerawork which echoes the formalist montage style popular in 1920s Soviet film,⁷⁶⁶ and the eerie, unified yet fragmented voices of Britten’s score suggest that discordance is deliberately worked into its formal, as well as stylistic, aspects. Oscillating between intimacy and abstraction, the film simultaneously presents the mine workers as individuals and as a conglomerate whole, enacting a tension between the self and society which lies at its core.

The narrator’s almost exclusive use of figures and statistics to narrate the mechanics of the mines is indicative of the film’s sometimes abstracted tone. “Coal mining”, the film explains, “is the basic industry in Britain”. Whereas *Anytown* frames its presentation of industry in terms of use value, however, *Coal Face* opts instead for raw figures. “The coal mines of the country employ 750,000 men”, the narrator tells us, against shots of pit heads silhouetted against low, dark clouds. “Head stocks, winding gear, conveyer belts, washing sprays, shunting yards, slag heaps: this is the surface plant of every mine.” The film then lists the “principle by products of coal”, “gas, coke, tar, dyes, oil, and benzoal” – in fact, there are a full two and a half minutes of these sorts of lists and statistics before the *Coal Face* joins the men working down the mine. Even when it comes to discussing what the coal is used for, the narrator is practical, rather than evocative. We are told that “transport and distribution double the price of coal”, then provided with details of precisely how much is used to produce electricity, to fuel trains and shipping, and for exports overseas.

⁷⁶⁶ Elan Gamaker, “Whose strife is it anyway?: The erosion of agency in the cinematic production of kitchen sink realism”, *The Philosophy of Documentary Film* ed. David LaRocca (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017), p. 328.

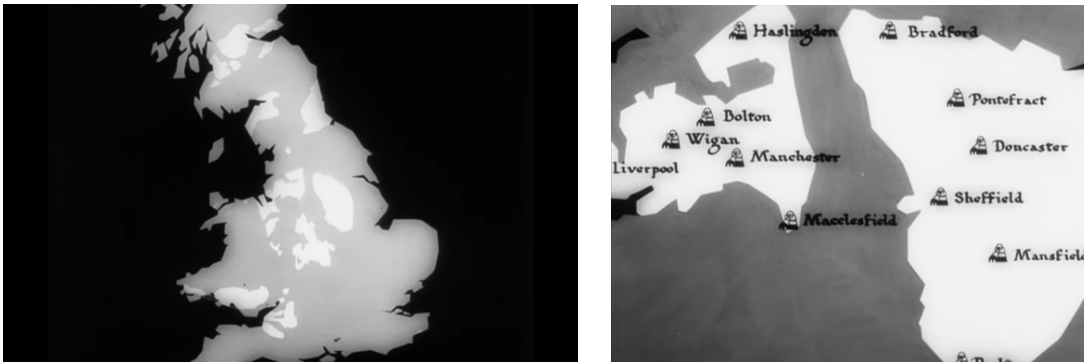


Figure 6: Stills showing maps, from *Coal Face*.

The geography of the mines, too, is subject to this taxonomising. While a geological graphic of Britain is shown, with the island's coal fields highlighted, the narrator intones the names of the “chief coal-producing centres” across Scotland, the North of England, and Wales. Further images then show each of these areas in turn, including the site of pits, while the narrator explains how many men work there, and how many tonnes of coal are produced at each site each year. Pictured in mutually bland black and white, these places are rendered homogenous, abstract from any real-world locale. In this sense, they become akin to what Marc Auge terms “non-places”: places in which are navigated through textual signs, rather than via specific aspects of the landscape or environment. No sense is given of distinct characteristics which might be understood as arising at each location – even though subsequent sociological studies show that coal regions, aside from mining at various depths and sometimes using different techniques, were subject to different political pressures, and attempted different resistances as jobs were threatened by the Depression.⁷⁶⁷

If this disimpassioned listing is markedly different from the tales of mining produced by other self-consciously left-wing sources – the most famous of which is surely the 1937 essay “Down the Mine” by George Orwell, in which miners are described as doing “an almost superhuman job”⁷⁶⁸ in dirty, cramped surroundings – then its exhaustively logical approach nevertheless harnesses the authority of the narrator to radical ends. The

⁷⁶⁷ See David Greasley, “The Coal Industry: Images and realities on the road to nationalisation”, *The Political Economy of Nationalisation in Britain, 1920-1950* ed. Robert Millward and John Singleton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 55-57.

⁷⁶⁸ George Orwell, *Selected Essays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1957), p.52.

presentation of figures, for instance, is extended to describing the men's working conditions, allowing *Coal Face* to give a sense of the suffering inherent in a miner's working life. "The temperature", we are told, "often reaches 80 degrees", and the miner works "a 7 ½-hour shift . . . in cramped position. Often he scarcely has the room to swing his pick." Adding to the list of pit locations and by products, the narrator also introduces us to "the Davy safety lamp", used to detect gas leaks underground – an inclusion which reminds us of the riskiness of the job, an aspect re-enforced when we are told that one in five miners is injured each year.

While these figures communicate some of the difficulty of the miner's profession, however, they still do so through abstract rather than evocative means. This tone, however, stands in sharp contrast to the intimate images of working miners that accompany this portion of the film, in which we first see the men undressing before the camera angle changes to show a series of tight, close shots which show the torsos of working men. It is in these images that critic Marsha Bryant identifies the homoerotic gaze of the camera, which she reads in relation to Auden's eroticised poetry elsewhere. "[B]righter lighting", she explains, "makes the exposed torso flesh glisten, closer framing effects a figurative dismemberment of the miner's body, and camera angles position the viewer as voyeur".⁷⁶⁹ Whether or not one reads homoerotic intentions into these shots, the presence of the miner's white flesh against the black walls of the mine certainly makes for a striking image; one that brings us into close contact with the figures whose lives, backgrounds and local ties are elided by *Coal Face*'s focus on information. Yet just as the layout of the coal fields, list of by products and numeric facts fragment the working of the mine into its disparate parts, so the men's bodies are broken down into shorts of a torso or a leg. "The camera moves closer to the miner", explains Bryant, "allowing the light to sculpt flesh contours and render sweat and body hair visible. This camera position . . . enables the further fragmentation of miners' bodies".⁷⁷⁰ The result, then, is a strange mixture of intimacy and alienation, heightened further on one of the rare occasions when the camera focusses on the miner's faces. Watching their 1:30 am lunch break, we are shown a moment of snatched conversation between two of the men – only to realise that their

⁷⁶⁹ Marsha Bryant, "W.H. Auden and the Homoerotics of the 1930s Documentary", *Caverns of Night: Coal Mines in Art, Literature, and Film*, ed. William B. Thesing (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), p. 116.

⁷⁷⁰ Bryant, "W.H. Auden", p. 117.

accents do not match those one might hear on the Scottish coalfield the narrator has told us we are seeing. This detail leaves us with the sense that miners, like the fields they work in, are fungible, unmoored from local associations and rendered interchangeable by their profession.



Figure 7: A man mines coal in a still from *Coal Face*.

This interplay of the intensely intimate and the de-personalised is reflected in the ambiguity of Britten and Auden's contribution. Basil Wright, according to an unpublished letter to sent to E.W. White and quoted by Walter White, termed *Coal Face* "a pure experiment with the sound track", identifying it as the place where "Auden and Britten used for the first time the spoken voice reciting from official reports of mine disasters and from lists of coal-mining job-names – in rhythm, sometimes unaccompanied, and sometimes with percussive".⁷⁷¹ This music, a whispered, minor-key, mechanised chanting of roles – "foreman. Driver. Skipper. Overman. Onsetter. Coal! Inspector. Banksman. Barrowman" – begins faintly, as if heard from deep underground, when the men first appear on screen; allowing us to understand that the chanting voices belong to the miners themselves. As such, Britten and Auden's music literally gives voice to the figures whose bodies, and indeed spoken voices, are fragmented and unmoored elsewhere in the film.

This gesture is overtly political in nature. Historian Stephanie Ward has catalogued the rise of left-wing politics, from increased support for the Labour Party to communism, in

⁷⁷¹ Basil Wright, unpublished letter to E.W. White dated 1 April, 1948, qtd Walter White, *Benjamin Britten, His Life and Operas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), p. 23-24.

the coal fields of the 1930s.⁷⁷² Although the political activism of miners was not as visible to mainstream audiences as it was to become fifty years later, the reading of mine report disasters by a chorus of the men themselves would be a difficult symbol for audiences to miss – especially the sort of left-wing, educated audiences that the GPO sought to appeal to.

With this in mind, we can begin to read the homogenising impulses in *Coal Face* as less an attempt to distance the audience from the workers, and more an attempt to present the men as a unified force, despite the different roles they name. That each man forms a single part of a bigger whole is emphasised by the mechanistic quality of Britten's music, which invokes not only the rhythmic movements of the men as they hew away at the mine's walls, but also the machinery of the mine. In one scene, for instance, a man is shown shunting coal along a rail, his steps accentuated by an echoing bass drum. At other moments, the men sing in a round, with the counterpoint of their different vocal lines invoking the eerie sound of machines moving below. Yet the tension between the men's human voices and their part in this wider machinery introduces a complication not present in other soundtracks of a similar tone and rhythm, including *Anytown's*. If the men are speaking with one voice, and working as one body, they nevertheless speak as men.

It is only when the men arrive at the surface, their chanting getting faster and faster as they do so, that a tonal shift occurs. At this point, the men's song gives way to women's singing, heralding a shift to the domestic sphere as we watch the men return their chips to the foreman and return to their identical terraced houses. "A miner's house", the narrator explains, "is often owned by the pit. The life of the village depends on the pit". This comment, which again reduces the miners to a single mass, stands in ironic contrast to the words sung by the women, a setting of Auden's poem "O lurcher-loving collier, black as night" which tells the story of a woman and her miner lover:

O lurcher-loving collier, black as night,
 Follow your love across the smokeless hill;
 Your lamp is out, the cages are all still;
 Course for heart and do not miss,
 For Sunday soon is past and, Kate, fly not so fast,

⁷⁷² Stephanie Ward, *Unemployment and the State in Britain: The means test and protest in 1930s south Wales and north-east England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 17.

For Monday comes when none may kiss:
Be marble to his soot, and to his black be white.⁷⁷³

The Romantic imagery of this verse aside, most interesting for our purposes is the individualism and specificity of this romance, in which the miner's love interest is given a name – Kate – and the miner a personality and interests (the lurcher, a cross between a sight-hound and another type of dog, such as a terrier, is traditionally used for racing, similar to a greyhound).⁷⁷⁴ Yet, sung together by the women's chorus, the poem takes on the feeling of a shared mythology or piece of popular culture. That it accompanies the narrator's explanation of how the village people's livelihood depends on the mine serves to contrast this romantic tale with the reality of the economic duress under which the miners live. Again, *Coal Face* is caught between the intimate and the estranged, with each of its elements – sound, image, and text – acting together to represent the tension between the miners as individuals and as part of a working genus. What Kahana calls the question of “now” – the question of how self and society interact, a pressing concern for both documentary films and for modernism – thus resolves only in irresolution.

If *Coal Face* refuses to make its different elements cohere, however, *Night Mail* was to prove a more polished work. (It is worth noting that, by this point, Auden and Britten had finally met in person – their first meeting is recorded in Britten's diary of July 1935, as Reed reminds us.)⁷⁷⁵ Yet while its experiment is hailed as the more successful, the film as a whole is equally fragmented in its way. Most of the documentary is a relatively straightforward, if innovatively-produced, film which follows the Down Postal Service as it makes its journey from London to Euston to Scotland, showing the postal workers on board the train as well as the station staff who manage its progress north. Shots filmed from the side of the train show the drama as post-bags, hung waiting along the line by local workers, are

⁷⁷³ W.H. Auden, “O lurcher-loving collier”, *The Dog beneath the Skin. Plays, and Other Dramatic Writings by W.H. Auden, 1928-1939*. Vol. 1. of *The Complete Works of W.H. Auden*, ed. Edward Mendelson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 421.

⁷⁷⁴ See, for instance, Thomas Burgeland Johnson, *The Sportsman's Encyclopedia* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1848), p. 258.

⁷⁷⁵ Philip Reed, “Britten at the Cinema: *Coal Face*”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Britten*, ed. Melvyn Cooke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 64.

caught in the train's nets and taken on board. Snatches of conversation are replayed to the audience as local trains are shunted to make way to the Postal. The narrator explains the number of letters brought from each location: "Trains from Bristol, Cardiff, Manchester, Stoke, Liverpool and Birmingham bring a thousand bags of mail from the North between 10.57 and 11.39pm." Britten and Auden's poetic and musical sequence, meanwhile, is confined to the final minutes, during which the film drops many of the hallmarks of a documentary mode and shifts to a looser, more evocative tone. At this point, the camera zooms out to show the train passing through hills, a plume of white smoke rising against the landscape, and the facts and details of the prior twenty minutes give way to Auden's famous poem.

Certain themes, however, run throughout the film, and it is in following these themes from the first section to the more experimental second that we can best understand how *Night Mail* employs the textual codes of mainstream documentary films to teasingly undermine the straight-laced authority such features usually upheld. Like *Coal Face*, *Night Mail* is interested in geographies; unlike *Coal Face*, however, the route of the train demands geographical specificity. In fact, one of the film's central dramas offers an object lesson in the importance of precision, when a badly-addressed envelope is found in the on-board sorting office. "There are seven sorting vans on the postal special", the narrator explains, and each "has 48 pigeon holes representing a town. As the train progresses, the names, scribbled in chalk . . . must be changed". One envelope has been placed in the wrong division, however, and a postal worker must use a guide to identify the location in which it should be placed. At other points, the narrator gives a litany of place names – "[t]rains from Lincolnshire and Derbyshire connect at Tamworth; trains from Warwickshire and Leicestershire connect at Rugby" – which detail the connections of services attempting to reach the Night Mail. Both of these moments give us a postal-worker's eye view of geography: the latter passed on with the authority of the narrator, and the former by placing us, via the camera, inside the room (or, in this case, train car) where the conversations regarding the envelope take place. And if there is a risk that this systematic recounting of timetables and pigeon-holds might yield a similar abstraction to that represented by the maps of *Coal Face*, the camera shots of station interiors, such as that shown at Crewe, and passing landmarks, such as the Edinburgh bridges, locate the film in specifics. That the film uses actual LMS and postal service workers – a point of

authenticity it makes sure to emphasise during the opening titles – further contributes to this spatial groundedness, for instance when we see the English crew disembark to swap for a Scottish shift before the train reaches the border.

Night Mail's emphasis on the visual, and on the people who appear in the film, as explanatory tools more generally makes the narrator's role less central – particularly when it comes to selling the importance of the service. The authority of the disembodied narrator's voice is still relied upon to communicate the raw data of the Post Office's achievements, emphasised by the script often following the form of official listings or communications with its absence of verbs: "400 million miles every year. 500 million letters every year." Unlike in *Coal Face*, however, where the intimacy of the miner's bodies contrasts with the abstract terms in which their lives are described, in the documentary portion of *Night Mail* the script and images work in concert. As a post-bag is taken in by the train's nets, for instance, we are told that "[t]hose letters were posted in Bletchley half an hour ago" – the speed of their collection on camera mirroring the quick turnaround that the narrator describes. Other scenes show the importance and accuracy of the service, like that of geographical accuracy, via scripted scenes. At one station, a signalman calls one of his colleagues. "That you, Larry?" he asks. "You'll have to shunt the local. I've got the postal on." Passengers on the local service, initially disgruntled as their train is stopped, become understanding as they watch the Postal Service pass. At another moment, men working on the line are told to stand clear as the train passes. "That'll be the postal", one mutters. "Well on time", says another. Where the relationship between the viewer and worker in *Coal Face* oscillates between intense proximity and alienating distance, then, in *Night Mail* the postal workers and other characters take on some of the authority of the narrator, passing on details to the audience about the service they engineer. There is undoubtedly a class element to this – where *Coal Face* toys with the trope of the working masses, *Night Mail* is coloured with the efficiency and formality of the state's Post Office – but there is also, relatedly, a different relationship between the individual and the wider bureaucracy of industry; much like, indeed, that presented in many other documentary films of the period. With the legitimizing trappings of the General Post Office behind it, the postal service in *Night Mail* is able to carry a more personal, human-centric film, rooted in specific geographies and more open to idiosyncratic narrative details.

Yet it is precisely these details that are manipulated in the final section of the film, which – as Auden’s “Letter from Lord Byron” hints at with its winking line about “documentaries by the GPO” – is not delivered with an entirely straight face. Again, Britten and Auden introduce a tension between the rhythmic patterns of machine industry and the (flawed) individual of the humans who benefit from it, with image, music and text all working to produce a humorous, conflicted portrait of the postal service and its users. As the camera moves away from filming individual postal workers, or shooting from the perspective of someone leaning out of the side of the train, to show the vehicle from a distance, so the subject of the film shifts from the specific details of the postal service to the more general theme of communication. Simultaneously, the focus moves from the workers on the service to the ordinary people who send and receive letters in Auden’s poem. They, too, are stock types; but stock types which are flawed and human. In this sense, the content of the poem contrasts with its formal presentation on screen. Auden’s poetry is read out in a flat pitch yet pacey tone, managing to be both reminiscent, in its monotony, of the neutrality required of a BBC reporter and of the urgent, unchanging rhythms of a train travelling at speed:

Letters of thanks, letters from banks,
 Letters of joy from the girl and the boy,
 Receipted bills and invitations
 To inspect new stock or visit relations,
 And applications for situations
 And timid lovers' declarations
 And gossip, gossip from all the nations,
 News circumstantial, news financial,
 Letters with holiday snaps to enlarge in,
 Letters with faces scrawled in the margin,
 Letters from uncles, cousins, and aunts,
 Letters to Scotland from the South of France,
 Letters of condolence to Highlands and Lowlands. . .

Just as Bowen’s radio segment on the garrulous Irish used alliteration and asyndetic lists to enact the idea of a relentlessly talkative people, so Auden’s poetic description of the various letters being delivered by the Night Mail train suggests a repetitive, endless task. Letters are categorised ceaselessly, with not a concluding “and” in sight – until suddenly three emerge, quickly itemising, as if listing from an official ledger, other types of post. The dense structure of rhymes, para-rhymes and internal rhymes – “thanks”/“banks”,

“situations”/“declarations”/“all the nations”, “cousins and aunts”/“south of France” – only add to this mechanised feel.

So, too, does Britten’s score. Britten was heavily involved in the production of *Night Mail*, not only assisting with the recording of trains but also in the set-up of interior shots. The score, which, with eleven parts, utilised the largest ensemble that the GPO ever used, pushed the innovative stylistics of *Coal Face* in a new, more polished direction. In *Night Mail*, the combination of the orchestral score and field recordings work together to create what Reed calls a “*musique concrète*-like section using an array of conventional and unconventional percussion . . . to replicate the sounds of the train and the places through which it passes.⁷⁷⁶ Throughout Auden’s poem, Reed explains, the “tension created in the title music between the keys of A and C major is played out . . . For much of this Britten employs repetitive one- or two-bar patterns that accompany the commentator’s rhythmic voice”.⁷⁷⁷ The tension between these keys, and the short, repetitive patterns that mediate it, creates a sense of ongoing irresolution equal to that generated by Auden’s words as the train strives to complete its overnight shift.

Yet the climax of the film is not the triumphant celebration we might expect. If Britten was able to utilise his involvement in field recording, and his uncommonly large ensemble, to create an innovative form of diagesis to accompany Auden’s poetry, his attentions were not wholly focussed on mimetics. We know from Britten’s diaries that some of the GPO films he most enjoyed are those shot through with humour.⁷⁷⁸ Listen closely to *Night Mail*, and you will detect the pastiche with which Britten was enamoured as a music student – the portions of the score that draw from Schubert’s setting, in *Winterreise*, of Wilhelm Müller’s “Die Post”,⁷⁷⁹ being the most audible example. Other moments cite not from specific items but from more general traditions. The music that ends the piece, for instance, culminates in a final flourish whose grandeur is so ostentatious as to be out of place in a film of this type. This finale does not obviously cite from one particular piece of music, but instead draws on a recent tradition of Hollywood scores which, borrowing from a European romantic tradition of classical music,⁷⁸⁰ utilize leitmotifs attached to certain

⁷⁷⁶ Reed, pamphlet for *Britten on Film*, p. 8.

⁷⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷⁸ See his comments on comedy film *Mr Pitt and Mr Pott* in *Journeying Boy*, p. 261.

⁷⁷⁹ Kildea, p. 111.

⁷⁸⁰ “Film Music”, *The Harvard Dictionary of Music* ed. Don Michael Randel (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), p. 313.

characters or moods. By 1920, this technique was so ubiquitous that Edith Lang and George West's popular *Musical accompaniment of moving pictures* manual "could assert: 'This theme . . . should receive its ultimate glorification, by means of tonal volume, etc., in the finale of the film'"⁷⁸¹ Not only does this music sound out-of-place in the non-fictional, ostensibly educational documentary film, but it also jars tonally with the denouement of Auden's poem – which, rather than celebrating the successful conclusion of the Postal's long journey through the night, ends on a note as melancholy as it is personal: "And none will hear the postman's knock /Without a quickening of the heart. / For who can bear to feel himself forgotten?"

This series of contradictions – between the pace and tone of the narrator and the content of Auden's poetry; between the human lives of the individuals who use the service and the portion of the film that has come prior, which is "documentary" proper; and between this same human frailty and the triumph of Britten's score – creates a thematic space which reflects the distance between the feted, precisely-controlled glory of the "Night Mail" and the lives of the people who use it. In this way, Britten and Auden assist in constructing a tonal melange which is able to tease apart, by virtue of its internal tensions, the complex relationship between institutions and individuals which other documentary films, BBC broadcasts, newsreels, and indeed key facets of "documentary culture" more broadly, seek to simplify. It is a technique that sounds a further note of subversion within the GPO's already left-wing output, questioning the values of the film unit even as it constitutes part of that output. Free from the constraints of the General Post Office, it would go even further.

8. Beside the seaside

The Way to the Sea is easily miscategorised. In the introduction to her essay "Kiss me quick: the aesthetics of excess in 1930s literature and film", Lara Feigel explains how the "contrast between the dinginess of the urban home and the sparkling possibilities of the coast are made explicit in the 1936 GPO documentary film, *The Way to the Sea*".⁷⁸² In

⁷⁸¹ Kathryn Kalinak, *Setting the Score: Music and the Classical Hollywood Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992) p. 64.

⁷⁸² Lara Feigel, "Kiss me quick: the aesthetics of excess in 1930s literature and film", *Modernism on Sea: Art and Culture at the British Countryside*, ed. Lara Feigel and Alexandra Harris (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), p. 16.

fact, as Mitchell reminds us, the film “was made not by the GPO Film Unit but by an independent company, Strand Films – the same unit that had earlier been responsible for *Peace of Britain*”.⁷⁸³ This is an easy mistake to make, especially given how well-known Britten and Auden’s work for the GPO, particularly *Night Mail*, has subsequently become. “*The Way to the Sea*”, Feigel writes, “was typical of the Griersonian tradition in documenting the process of shipbuilding from 286 AD to the present, and reminding the audience that the seaside day-trip is only rendered possibly by industry”. “Nonetheless”, she adds, “the focus of the film and of Auden’s commentary in particular is on the freedom possible at the seaside”.⁷⁸⁴ In this respect, it is significant that the film was, in truth, made by a different film company with a different set of priorities. What reads, when attributed to Grierson, as a Tallents-style exploration of how industry permits pleasure reads differently when considered outside of the interpretive concept of the GPO. Where *Night Mail* is concerned with the romance of industry, *The Way to the Sea* lampoons the splendour of the ordinary seaside holiday (and, I would suggest, that very “freedom” Feigel believes it valorises). “Unlike *Night Mail*”, Reed writes, “pastiche and satire lie at the heart of *The Way to the Sea*, the intent of which, one supposes, [commissioning company] Sothorn Railway remained blissfully ignorant”. Far from providing a potted history lesson, Reed identifies the opening sequences as mocking in tone, writing that “*The Way to the Sea* proves to be, in fact, a satirical, subversive documentary in which, during the historical sequence, conventional imperial attitudes are attacked”.⁷⁸⁵

For Feigel, *The Way to the Sea* and *Hindle Wakes* (1927), Maurice Elvey’s silent film adaptation of the 1912 play of the same name, both show the excitement of the seaside holiday – defying modernist anxieties about the will of the crowd, to focus instead on the glamour and freedom that seaside towns offer the working classes.⁷⁸⁶ “*The Way to the Sea* and *Hindle Wakes*”, Feigel writes, “both present the seaside crowd as congenial company”,⁷⁸⁷ in contrast with the “routine of the factory” at the opening of *Hindle Wakes*⁷⁸⁸ and the “ironing, cooking and washing” accompanied by “images of dingy urban houses”

⁷⁸³ Mitchell, *Britten and Auden*, p. 88.

⁷⁸⁴ Feigel, “Kiss me quick”, p. 16.

⁷⁸⁵ Reed, pamphlet for *Britten on Film*, p. 11.

⁷⁸⁶ Feigel, “Kiss Me Quick: The Aesthetics of Excess”, pp. 19-23.

⁷⁸⁷ Feigel, “Kiss me Quick”, p. 20.

⁷⁸⁸ Feigel, “Kiss me Quick”, p. 21.

shown in *The Way to the Sea*.⁷⁸⁹ It is certainly true that the opening sequences of the two films, in which workers escape on to the train to the sea, mirror each other. While Feigel's deftly historicised reading of this narrative device in the context of the early twentieth-century leisure industry is enlightening, however, her focus on what the films have in common does not extend to asking whether they might share another relationship: one of influence. This oversight seems particularly unusual given both the popularity of *Hindle Wakes*, and the positive critical reception it received on its release. As Heiða Jóhannsdóttir itemises in her essay "Hindle Wakes and its film adaptations", the film's impressive round-up included:

one reviewer remarking that this fine example of British film production proves 'there is little to fear for our future' A generously illustrated two-page article in the *Picturegoer*, places the 1927 *Hindle Wakes* in the context of a nascent formation of British national cinema and praises the film for providing a long-awaited opportunity to see 'the real England' on screen.

"The reviews", Jóhannsdóttir neatly summarises, "tend to assess the film according to its value for British filmmaking".⁷⁹⁰ Quickly absorbed into the cultural discourse which read film-making along national lines, this drama of a Lancashire mill girl's trip to Blackpool and the holiday fling she has there – a controversial plot at the time – was pressed into service as an "authentic" representation of working-class English life. Elsewhere, Feigel has described how the film likely went on to inform other, similar films, such as the 1934 *Sing as We Go*, scripted by J.B. Priestley. In both this and *Hindle Wakes*, she explains, avant-garde camera techniques provide the viewer with a characters' eye view of the pleasures of Blackpool, introducing a powerful haptic element to the cinemagoer's experience.⁷⁹¹ This later film also features a chippy working-class girl who heads to Blackpool, this time to seek work when the cotton mill she works at is closed down.⁷⁹² It, too, was popular, especially in the industrial North, and ran for two weeks in London's West End on a single bill.⁷⁹³

⁷⁸⁹ Feigel, "Kiss me Quick", p. 18.

⁷⁹⁰ Heiða Jóhannsdóttir, "Hindle Wakes and its adaptations", *Provocation and Negotiation: Essays in Comparative Criticism*, ed. Gesche Ipsen, Timothy Mathews and Dragana Obradović (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), p. 190.

⁷⁹¹ Feigel, *Literature, Cinema and Politics*, p. 38.

⁷⁹² The *Radio Times Guide* to Film called *Sing as We Go* "politically astute" (*The Radio Times Guide to Films* 2014. London, 2013, p. 1104).

⁷⁹³ John Sedgwick and Clara Pafort-Overduin, "Understanding audience behaviour through statistical evidence London and Amsterdam in the Mid-1930s", *Audiences: Defining and Researching Screen Entertainment Reception*, ed. Ian Christie (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), p. 109.

Whether or not Auden and Britten were citing specifically from *Hindle Wakes*, it is hard to disagree with the notion that they were citing from a recent tradition of films of which *Hindle Wakes* was an early, influential example. In fact, I would posit that not only is *The Way to the Sea* influenced by *Hindle Wakes*, but that its use of pastiche, irony, rhetorical drama and humour allow the tropes of the latter film, and of other works on seaside holidays, to be repurposed in order to address them within the context of a broader coastal tradition, haunted by the memory of conflict and spectral foreshadowing of war to come.

9. We seek the sea

If the experiments pursued in *Coal Face* allowed for the more successful *Night Mail*, then in *The Way to the Sea* we see Britten and Auden's ironic project extended to achieve its most prolonged, radical expression. In this film, he same artistic prowess Grierson used to solidify the Film Unit's reputation as a company which married left-wing politics with slick aesthetics a force that undoes the documentary film from the inside out – disassembling, rather than re-enforcing, the authority of the narratorial voice.

This is not to say, however, that *The Way to the Sea* does not resemble a Grierson production in parts. The portion of the film concerned with the electrification of the railway line, for instance, is set in this mould (although absent of music). In contrast to the rest of the film, this section is relatively straightforward both in terms of its style and the narrator's script. Men are shown in shirt sleeves, completing what we are told is "long and difficult work". Technical details are given about the process by which the line is being modernised, connecting the line to the national grid via automatic substations so that "the whole line" makes "one continuous circuit".

This film, however, allows pastiche and irony to take centre stage to an extent not permitted in Britten and Auden's work for the GPO. Unlike *Anytown*, which makes a point of showing travellers reading, working and dining in luxury during the journey, or *Night Mail*, *The Way to the Sea* awards little screen-time to the journey itself. This is just one of the ways in which the film refuses to conform wholly to becoming either a documentary about industry or a feature focused on the leisure industry. Rather, it engages in a radical pastiche of genres that its BFI Screen Online commentary describes as resembling "several different films – each in different non-fiction genres – squashed together in just

under ten minutes”.⁷⁹⁴ Here we find an informative documentary about the building of a new railway line embedded in a playful travel documentary, and that, in turn, embedded in a historical program about the naval and civic history of Portsmouth, in an opening sketch which stretches from the Roman invasion to the electrification of the London to Portsmouth train route from which the film takes its title. It is only at the end of the film, as the holiday-goers visit naval armaments on the coast before their return home, that these thematically and stylistically distinct threads come together, forcing viewers to acknowledge the interrelatedness of war, industry and leisure – which most documentary films cast as separate subjects, disguising the degree to which one’s holiday depends on the relative peace.

The opening sequence of *The Way to the Sea* lays the groundwork for this finale by introducing a narrative of war as a cyclical process, each iteration of which forces technological innovations. Although the film opens with a shot of the sea, with no sound except for the waves hitting the shore, we are told immediately that the story we are to hear is one of conquest and battle. We are told that it is the first invasion we see – that of the Romans, in 286 AD – which is responsible for the first buildings that formed the settlement now known as Portsmouth, “in a lonely creek on the South Coast of Britain, in Hampshire”. “In this natural harbour”, the narrator explains, “a port is built”. Each subsequent invasion is framed in similar terms of building and industry: Alfred the Great, for instance, who built ships “swifter and steadier than the Danes” to defeat the prior invaders, instigates the “beginning of the British Navy”. “Alfred the great has laid the foundation on which others shall build And, as it grows, there will grow with it and for it the town of Portsmouth”. Henry VIII then builds a new fortress at Southsea; to get there, he takes an old road, built to allow “lumbering wagons [to] carry men to the ships”.

During the 18th century, the town becomes “the glory and Bulwark of our Kingdom” due to its naval advantage, and “new and better roads are made, and Portsmouth is brought into closer touch with London via stage coach”. The dates and precise details narrated to the audience – such as the moment at which we are told Lord Nelson embarked “at 2 o’clock in the afternoon on Saturday, September 14th, 1905” – ground each of these encounters in a specific time and place; yet the repetition of title cards, even

⁷⁹⁴ Patrick Russell, “The Way to the Sea (1936)”, *BFI Screen Online*, <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/1337428/>

though each bears a different date, nevertheless gives the sense of moving through a history which is marked by repetitive cycles of invasion. That the narration eventually moves from providing this potted history of conflict to discuss, instead, the new “age of steam”, and that Britten’s music – which has been growing in strength with each new wave of invaders – eventually slows to a light, cheerful tune accompanying images of a passing landscape from the new railway line, does little to undermine the sense that the history of Portsmouth, and the transport that serves it, is also the history of conflict.

The film’s visual iconography, and musical motifs, emphasise this link. Images of statues that stand in the town, such as one of Alfred the Great, visually represent the link between the history of Portsmouth and the present day. This principle is taken even further when the narrator makes reference to Napoleon’s “last voyage”, and ghostly images of men fighting are overlaid on footage of the tall ships moored in the contemporary Portsmouth harbour: bringing together the historic battle, and the naval architecture that remains from it, in one shot. During this portion of the film, Britten’s bass drum – which has previously played little part, with cymbals carrying the score’s percussion – begins to pulse in a tight 4/4 rhythm, akin to war drums. As the “new age” dawns, and the narrator heralds an “age of steam; of industry; of railways”, both the images and music fragment in to two strands. On screen, images of industrial machinery are interspersed with shots of flags waving in the seaside wind, a strange combination which imbricates the development of new technology with the pleasures of the seaside. Similarly, while Britten’s drumbeat endures, fast and mechanised, the composer introduces a jolly wind fanfare over the top, allowing the two different moods to run simultaneously.

Yet, if this opening sequence – and the film’s closing sequence, on which more soon – serve to frame, and contextualise, the light-hearted holiday games that are the focus of the film’s central section, it would equally be a mistake to take them wholly at face value. For, while the narrator’s use of detail and his steady tone of his voice lend authority to his pronouncements, moments of overwrought, dramatic prose simultaneously introduce a comic element. Of the Danes, for instance, we are told that they are “fierce beyond other foes”, and that “the sea is their school of war”. At times, these linguistic flourishes take on an element of kitsch, such as when we are told that a Tudor fortification “whence runs for the length of a furlong a mud wall, armed with timber”, or when the 18th century is described as “[a] glorious age in the history of the Navy whereon, under the good

providence of God, the wealth and strength of the Kingdom chiefly depends". These purple snippets of prose are accompanied with the florid font and florid music to match. The use of period-specific fonts for each title card read as similarly kitsch, as does Britten's musical pastiche. A "sequence of typical character numbers (waltz, military march, etc.)", writes Reed, "were used to deflate the visuals, many of which were presented in an unorthodox manner". In this way, what may feign to be a serious survey of British naval history reveals itself to also be a playful sequence cast in a series of inauthentic modes aimed at lampooning the self-mythologising impulses of British cultural history. While there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of the film's intertwining of technological progress and conflict, then, any sense that this narrative constitutes a noble, glorious history of Britain is undermined by its stylistics.

This subversion is significant. In *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935), Walter Benjamin selects films as particularly illustrative of the damaging effects of reproducibility. "The technique of reproduction", he explains,

detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it activates the object reproduced. These two processes lead to a tremendous shattering of tradition Both processes are intimately connected with the contemporary mass movements. Their most powerful agent is the film. Its social significance, particularly in its most positive form, is inconceivable without its destructive, cathartic aspect, that is, the liquidation of the traditional value of the cultural heritage. This phenomenon is most palpable in the great historical films.⁷⁹⁵

For Benjamin, the reproduction which "[meets] the beholder or listener in his own particular situation" does not honour tradition – as film-makers of the era, such as Abel Gance, whom Benjamin cites, may wish it to – but liquidations that tradition. As if cognizant of this dynamic, Britten and Auden's film serves to undermine it. *The Way to the Sea* performs the inauthenticity of its own representation in a manner almost tailor-made to highlight the chap ridiculousness of "the great historical films". It does not attempt to honour the past, or demonstrate its relevance to the present moment, but rather performs its historic character to ostentatiously as to render any suggestion of true chronological translation ludicrous. In this way, its interplay of image, music and text undercuts any gestures that might "liquidate" that past by signalling overtly to its own status as (ironic) copy.

⁷⁹⁵ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", *The Cult Film Reader* ed. Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2008), p.32.

This same interplay also seeks to complicate the travel narrative at the film's core. Auden's script, full of winking asides and irreverent details, repeatedly undermines the ostensibly instructive roll of the narrative voice. His list of people who "seek the sea" is just one example of this. This taxonomy of holidaymakers is marked by the simultaneous specificity and irrelevance of its criteria: "Every kind of person", the narrator explains, as the camera pans across the crowd in the railway station, "is converging, each with his own idea of freedom":

People who work. People who read adventure stories or understand algebra. People who would like to be rich, or brilliant at tennis. People like you and me, liable to catch cold, and fond of their food, are brought all together here by a common wish: a desire for the sea!

Each of these "types" of people, whose announcement is punctuated by a flourish from Britten's orchestra, is notable for its absurd precision. Unlike in *Night Mail*, where the different letter-senders are identified by the sort of broadly-shared features we might expect – gender; family relationship; place of residence – the holiday-goers of *The Way to the Sea* are identified by specific hobbies and desires. Where the list of different people in *Night Mail* suggests vastness and diversity, then, in *The Way to the Sea* it indicates individuality. Even the sense of communal experience nodded to by "[p]eople like you and me" is undermined by the supposed common traits that follow. True, many people are liable to catch colds, and be fond of their food – yet these banal, quotidian tendencies sound a strange note compared to the thoughtful statements of shared humanity we might expect to hear, for instance, in the equivalent line in a Grierson documentary film. Rather than attempting to stress the depth of common understanding between the holiday-makers, then, we can understand Auden's purpose as something different: to show them as distinct, even flawed individual. These characters appear more interested in leisure and indulgence than in the ennobling, healthful effects of the seaside holiday – a set of priorities stressed even further when we are told that, upon boarding the train, "they fight for the corner seat facing the engine".

If it is hard to explicitly identify a moral judgement in this portion of Auden's script, what follows brings to the fore the socio-economic conditions that allow certain people to

take holidays while others cannot afford to. Tracing the route of the train south from London as it passes Battersea power station, the narrator intones:

A signal box. A power station. We pass the area of greatest congestion: the homes of those who have the least power of choice. We approach the first trees, the lawns and the fresh paint, the district of the . . . season ticket. Power which helps us to escape, is also helping those who cannot get away just now. Helping them keep respectable. Helping them to impress the critical eye of a neighbour. Helping them to entertain their friends. Helping them to feed their husbands, swept safely home each evening as the human tide recedes from London.

Auden's view of this Metroland, glimpsed from the train window, constitutes an ambivalent portrait of the working class. The notion of "keeping respectable", for instance, eludes to a broad set of discourses around what is "respectable" that became increasingly visible as a working-class self-identifying marker – and as a marker awarded to members of that class by the middle- and upper-classes – in the late nineteenth century, and endured as a type of social currency thereafter.⁷⁹⁶ It is just one of the signifiers Auden uses to point to the pressures of being part of this less-than-illustrious commuter belt. The obligations of gendered labour are also referenced, through images of housewives ironing and preparing to feed their husbands. These husbands, meanwhile, are described as being "swept safely home" on a "human tide" receding from the city. This image suggests a homogenising alienation of the working classes which sits in stark contrast to the amusing, frivolous specificity with which the holiday-makers were identified previously. Yet the lives of the commuters also include an element of sociability not present in the description of those who "seek the sea". Relationships with neighbours, spouses, and friends are all mentioned in the short passage, whereas the hobbies of those on the train to Portsmouth – reading adventure novels; dreaming of becoming rich, or good at tennis; indulging in food – are solipsistic activities. While Auden shies away from the valorisation of the working man that *Coal Face* and *Night Mail* indulge in, then, he equally refuses the easy narrative of working-class suffering.

That the lives of the holiday-makers may not be as rewarding as the commissioners of the film would have hoped is hinted at further in a later list, which describes the subsection of beach-goers who decide to take a boat trip at the harbour. This time, the different types of people are named in terms which play with the tropes established by

⁷⁹⁶ See Peter Bailey, *Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 30.

popular films such as *Hindle Wakes*. The harbour, Auden's script tells us, is a site of "pilgrimage for the student of history and the curious stranger". Those who "seek an island", however, are different:

All kinds of people. The married people who have begun to get on each others' nerves. The lonely, to look for an amazing romance. The consciously beautiful, sure of an easy conquest. The careworn, the unrewarded, the child-like.

This list extends the solipsism hinted at in the previous list of holiday-makers to explicit instances of individuals alienated from a partner (or potential partner), passing ironic comment on the ground-breaking sexual freedom portrayed in films like *Hindle Wakes* in the process. The flings Auden pokes fun at are not fulfilling and pleasurable, as they are for Fanny, who is confident enough in her skills as a weaver to trust her financial wellbeing, and is thus able to enjoy a fling with Alan during wakes week without feeling obliged to accept his subsequent offer of marriage. Instead, the seaside is presented here either as a place where the lonely go to seek not only a romance but an "amazing" romance – hinting at potentially unrealistic expectations regarding the seaside as a space of permissiveness and connection – or a place in which the "consciously beautiful" undertake what Auden, selecting a word which harkens back to the military history of Portsmouth, describes as a "conquest". Those already partnered fare no better: unlike the suburban wife who cooks while awaiting her husband's safe return from London, these couples have "begun to get on each others' nerves".⁷⁹⁷ The list ends with a series of qualities that indicate more general dissatisfaction with the demands of living: overly-taxed, unrewarded, and finally "child-like" – which, although it may be read as a positive trait in other contexts, in this passage reads less as "free-spirited" and more as "infantile".

Even those who seek activities aligned with the supposedly healthful qualities of the seaside holiday do not receive praise in Auden's script. In his essay "1930s architecture and the cult of the sun", Fred Gray describes how "railway posters and resort guides" emphasised aspects of the holiday such as "sun, health and physical activity"⁷⁹⁸ increasingly, with the aid of a posed "seaside girl". "The coming of the sun and the new resort architecture", he writes, was thus "also bound up with the explicit exposure of

⁷⁹⁷ In this sense, *The Way to the Sea* is tonally consistent with Auden's wider body of work: not for nothing has he been credited for having "Yeats' control of form and Eliot's dry wit" ("Auden, W.H.", *Who's Who in Twentieth Century World Poetry*, ed. Alan Parker and Mark Willhardt (London: Routledge, 2000), p.19.)

⁷⁹⁸ Fred Gray, "1930s Architecture and the Cult of the Sun", *Modernism on Sea* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), p. 162

supposed gender and sexual relationships at the seaside”.⁷⁹⁹ This association, never named outright in holiday literature but often hinted at, also forms the basis for the portrayal of health activities in *The Way to the Sea*. “Here”, the narrator says, “are some varieties of pleasure, permission and condolence”. The camera pans along the body of a woman in a bathing costume as the narrator describes the first of these “condolences”: “for the body, a favourable weather; the caress of sunlight.” Another, which is “[f]or the athletic and beautiful, the fullest opportunities to be active, and to be admired”, is accompanied by images of a man in a full suit and bowler hat watching women in their bathing costumes climbing a pool-ladder and jumping into the water. Finally, Auden offers to “the sedentary . . . the leisure of reminiscence and reverie”. Coming so soon after the desires of the “lonely” and the beautiful “seeking easy conquest”, the explicitly sexual tone of this sensual pleasure and admiration, relayed through the camera’s gaze, does not appear as jolly as the “seaside girls” would lead consumers to believe. Read together, Auden’s script and the images on screen reveal a behaviour that is not quite in keeping with the health-giving properties of the holiday championed by other documentary films. In *The Way to the Sea*, even these activities quickly become more about indulgence.

10. Accept your freedom

If there is a barbed ambivalence to these delights, the contingency of even pleasures such as these is nevertheless firmly underlined in the film’s final section. Here, *The Way to the Sea* returns to its opening themes of war and the cyclical nature of conflict. The kitsch pastiche of the film’s first sequence, however, is gone. In its place is a series of carefully-worded warnings, which draw associations between the holiday-makers’ fun and the looming threat of conflict. Like *The Navy at Home*, *The Way to the Sea* has its tourists meet sailors on shore leave, with one placing his hat on a young girl at a seaside fair. Unlike the serenading navy of *At Home*, however, who invoke patriotism while never signalling threat, the presence of the sailor in *The Way to the Sea* triggers a deeper exploration of the military’s presence explicitly focussed on the risk of further conflict. At first, the tourists’ visit to see the seaside armaments is signalled with the same enthusiasm which heralds each of the other pleasures they delight in during the trip. Following the formula used to signal each change of location thus far – “we seek the sea” and then,

⁷⁹⁹ Gray, “1930s Architecture”, p. 163.

before the boat trip, “we seek an island” – the narrator urges the crowd to “accept your freedom”, before again ventriloquizing the desires of the crowd: “we seek a spectacle!” The nature of this spectacle, however, quickly reveals itself to be as foreboding as it is exciting. Britten’s score throbs as the camera shows images of gunships and armaments along the shore. The crowd, seen from above, swell towards the “spectacle”, in a striking echo of an earlier shot of the crowd waiting in the train station. They are going, we are told, “to review the taciturn, aggressive devices” on the sea front.

To read these references properly requires us to first appreciate how contemporary depictions of the countryside were linked to the recent memory of conflict. In the documentary films of the 1930s, what the frame obscures is as significant as what it invites us to focus on. Lancashire’s factory towns sustained heavy losses during World War One, with towns sent off to fight together via the “pals” system, which grouped men from the same area into fighting units, on the understanding that morale would be higher if they were fighting side-by-side with friends – but which, in practice, often resulted only in friends dying side-by-side. Large crowds would turn out to watch these local regiments board the train to the coast, from where they would head to training camps and then on to the front: in Accrington, for instance, an estimated 15,000 people turned out to line the parade route to the station.⁸⁰⁰ In 1916, a central military training school for future Medical Officers was established at Blackpool,⁸⁰¹ and passenger steamers re-appropriated as minesweepers.⁸⁰² There was even a trench experience, called the “Loos Trenches”, established in the town – although as Richard Espley notes, it is unlikely that visitors would have been taken in by the cosy vision of the front line it presented: “residents of and visitors to Blackpool”, he writes “would have seriously doubted the euphemistic language of the Loos Trenches guidebook . . . They would have known first hand that many thousands of men would never return”.⁸⁰³ Along the East Coast, meanwhile, pillboxes, or

⁸⁰⁰ William Turner, *Accrington Pals: The 11th (Service) Battalion (Accrington) East Lancashire* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 1998), p. 62.

⁸⁰¹ Robert Atenstaedt, *The Medical Response to the Trench Diseases in World War One* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), p. 27.

⁸⁰² A. J. Tennent, *British Merchant Ships Sunk by U-boats in World War One* (Penzance: Periscope Publishing, 2006), p. 27.

⁸⁰³ Richard Espley, “‘How much of an “experience” do we want the public to receive?’: Trench reconstructions and popular images of the Great War”, *British Popular Culture and the First World War* ed. Jessica Meyer (Leiden: Brill, 2008), p.346.

blockhouses, were erected and Victorian coastal forts modernised and re-armed.⁸⁰⁴ That September, the first zeppelin bombings began over Lancashire; by the end of the war, “557 deaths, almost all of them civilian . . . were attributes to the German airship”.⁸⁰⁵

Yet the view from the train window did not, twenty years later, necessarily show the damage. That memories of the coast as a front-line, of railway stations as sites of loss and of the industrial North as the location of bombing raids do not figure in the mainstream travel films of the 1930s is not so surprising, however. Their brand of neo-Romanticism was, after all, produced to sell the railway as integral to the joys of British life. Just as the guide-books studied in the first chapter of this thesis locate English nationalism in the preservation of the countryside, as K.D.M. Snell and Faye Hammill observe of regional literature more generally,⁸⁰⁶ in British travel films, the ease with which one can reach this countryside is also figured as part of a broader patriotic discourse, within which British industry meets British landscape. Documentary films sought, therefore, to put one in mind of the joys of the seaside holiday, saleable as a place of respite from a life of industrial labour (to which one could then return, recharged and ready to once again participate fully in the national supply chain). It would take, we might suggest, a strange producer indeed to also include coastal armaments in this rose-tinted vision, even if, by the mid-1930s, Britain was in reality engaged in re-arming many of the locations featured on-screen.

Rotha, however, was that producer, introducing *The Way to the Sea's* foreboding, jarring shots of beachfront artillery and warships which make this usually hidden context impossible to ignore. One image is particularly striking: that of ships at sea launching charges into the water for the amusement of the holiday-makers. Although the crowd seems to enjoy this spectacle – and Britten’s wind section sounds cheerfully under the image – soon after, the camera angle changes to show the same scene from the back of a small boat, being chased by the same charges we have just seen. Now, rather than joining the holidaying crowds watching the show, we see the warship from the perspective of one under attack: a subtle yet incisive change of frame which reminds the viewer of the reality of purpose that exists behind the vision of mechanical splendour.

⁸⁰⁴ “Anti-invasion and Coastal Defences”, *Historic England* <https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/first-world-war-home-front/what-we-already-know/land/anti-invasion-coastal-defences/> (10 January, 2017).

⁸⁰⁵ C. Michael Hiam, *Dirigible Dreams: The Age of the Airship* (Lebanon, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 2014), p. 92.

⁸⁰⁶ See Chapter 1, p. 53.

This shot does not work alone. Kildea suggests that, following *Night Mail*, Auden's film work had been politically neutered to the extent that "nothing in [his] text supported [Rotha's] rebuke" –⁸⁰⁷ yet a close-reading of Auden's script, understood in concert with Rotha's images and Britten's score, reveals otherwise. Like the description of commuter's lives, this portion of *The Way to the Sea* combines moments of good cheer with troubling imagery. Here, however, this tonal ambiguity suggests not ambivalence, but an attempt to demonstrate that the moments of happiness cannot be understood except in relation to the horrors of conflict. Britten's score similarly oscillates from being dominated by foreboding drumbeats, echoing the rhythmic bass drum from the film's first section, to a pleasant motif that accompanies calls for enjoyment: "Let the day commemorate the successful accomplishment of our past. Let it praise the skill of designers and the anonymous contribution of mechanics. Celebrate the artless charm of the far-travelled sailor". These "artless" sailors, who will soon be involved in releasing charges into the water, flirt with young women, playfully throwing them into hammocks. "Let the fun", the narrator adds, "be furious". A military band, which marches through the crowd to Britten's drumbeat, is met by smiles and cheers.

It is not just play that is brought into relation with conflict, however. Rather, this final section of the film revives the theme of war as a force for technological progress, situating this relationship alongside the seaside-goer's activities. It is in light of this opening sequence that the "successful accomplishment of our past" comes to imply both the succession of victories that have rendered Portsmouth territory to be enjoyed, and the technological advances occasioned by that same succession of conflicts. The "anonymous contribution of mechanics" might therefore refer equally to the ships in the harbour or the trains that brought the crowd to view them. In this way, three core themes of the documentary outlined in three, stylistically-distinct segments – conflict history, transport, and holidays – come to be imbricated in the final scenes, making clear how the joys of the latter rely on the transport, and statecraft, of the two former.

Auden's script, contrary to Kildea's observation, makes this contingency explicit. "We are all invited", the narrator explains as the crowds move towards the shoreline armaments, "to inspect the defences of our dream" – a line which explicitly links the seaside fun with the maintenance of coastal armaments. The personification of these

⁸⁰⁷ Kildea, *Britten*, p. 112.

devices as “taciturn” and “aggressive” both stands as an overt rejection of the “euphemistic language” employed by attractions such as the Loos Trench Experience, and introduces an element of unpredictability; if the defences guarantee the safety of the “dreamers”, they are not entirely within their control, nurturing an inner aggression from which, we may understand, the tourists have been granted only a temporary reprieve. This sense of both contingency and unpredictability is highlighted further by Auden’s use of the refrain “let the”. This phrasing echoes the priest’s repeated calls to the congregation in the Catholic mass⁸⁰⁸ which begin “let us. . .”.⁸⁰⁹ Yet, unlike the priest, who has control over his congregation, the narrator of *The Way to the Sea* is unable to effect the status of the machines that line the South coast. Aside from lines such as “let the day commemorate the successful accomplishment of our past”, the script also includes pleas such as “[I]et the intricate, ferocious machinery be only amusing”. “Let the nature of glory be a matter of debate among all these people, both the just and the unjust”. The “voice of God” therefore becomes the voice of a prayer, given agency and desire but stripped of authority – a reminder of any individual’s lack of power when it comes to the wider forces of conflict.

It is testament to the gradual development of these themes that, when this line comes, it does not seem out of keeping to hear the suggestion that “debate” as to the “nature of glory” might occupy the holiday-makers; nor to hear them divided into the categories of “just” and “unjust”, moral descriptions that are more suited to the arena of war than to the leisurely space of the summer holiday. Instead, the comment serves to implicate those who enjoy the security offered by these defences in the conflicts that occasion them – a complicity extended to the film’s audience when the narrator continues: “people like you and me. Wanting to live.” This breaking of the fourth wall, like the film’s closing shot, places the viewer in the broader arena of conflict, forcing them to be counted within the logic of conflict while also categorising them as part of the crowd whose justness is the main dividing feature.

If the focus of Auden’s parable-art is to preach love, rather than didacticism, then these moments in *The Way to the Sea* preach something which, within the world of documentary

⁸⁰⁸ Auden’s own complicated relationship to Catholicism, and to faith in general, would become a prominent theme in later poems such as the *Horae Canonicae* (1949-55). For an overview of Auden’s varying theological feelings and positions see Tony Sharpe, “The Church of England: Auden’s Anglicanism”, *W.H. Auden in Context*, ed. Tony Sharpe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) pp. 79-88.

⁸⁰⁹ See e.g. David Bordwell and The Vatican, *Catechism of the Catholic Church Revised PB* (London: Burns and Oates, 2006).

propaganda, might be more radical still: moral responsibility. The final lines of the film end on this grave note. “Night”, the narrator intones; “the spectacle fades. The tiny lives depart with their human louts. Only the stars, the oceans and machines remain. The dark, and the involuntary powers.” Again, human lives are rendered subordinate to wider forces, while the war ship – shown onscreen to punctuate the remark about machines – joins the stars and the oceans to become the scene’s three unchanging certainties.

Thus do the motifs of choice and of powerlessness continue to layer over each other, culminating in this ambiguous portrait of a time in which the memory of recent conflict, which other films are so keen to erase, seems to stretch forward, unceasingly, into the future – and yet individuals are still capable of being either “just” or “unjust” (how, precisely, we are not quite told). Four years before Benjamin’s “storm . . . we call progress”,⁸¹⁰ Auden, Britten and Rotha’s film is a prescient reminder that the interwar years were, by 1936, already seen by some parties as a period of brief respite among decades of fighting.

11. A lens for the future

In this sense, as well as in a generic one, the film speaks to a broader range of scholarly interests than studies of documentary films. Aside from the fact that the literariness of Auden’s contribution invites textually-focussed readings, it is important to recognise how *The Way to the Sea*, to an even greater extent than *Night Mail* or *Coal Face*, helps us to consider long-running debates such as those around modernism and realism, place and travel, broadcasting and conflict. As with my study of Flann O’Brien’s newspaper columns, then, it is perhaps most useful to consider this chapter’s implications as they might impact on several related fields in turn. For studies of modernism and film, the shift of focus to consider non-fiction films specifically as non-fiction, and therefore not only in relation to the culture and politics of the day but as an attempt to intervene in the same society which shapes it, is a significant one. In the case of Britten and Auden’s films specifically, it invites us to consider the intentionality of each production, and the ways in which different formal features are re-appropriated to create an interventionist “parable-art” – a shift in perspective that brings into view the irony and play underpinning the pair’s collaboration.

⁸¹⁰ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Knopf, 1969), pp. 258.

There is doubtless more work that might be undertaken on these films, as well as on the production *God's Chillun* – whose themes render it regrettably outside the area of investigation permitted in a chapter of this length but which is similarly complex in its paternalistic, yet sceptical, treatment of empire. Other Strand Film productions, and indeed twentieth-century documentary films more generally, might benefit from similar scrutiny from modernist scholars. Likewise, studies of radio, television and other audio or audio-visual media could stand to shift focus to consider both the form and content of broadcasts more closely.

In doing so, I would suggest, there is a potential to build on this chapter's reading of radio broadcasts and documentary films as two iterations of a wider "broadcast culture". Formed in collusion with the wishes of the interwar state, the recognition that this culture extended across different media forms, not only in terms of the relationships between key figures in different industries but also in terms of aesthetic and ideological commonalities, brings into focus the ways in which modernists and other avant-garde artists contributed to such institutions while attempting to write back against their strictures (enforced or implied). Bringing together literary, cultural and cinema studies in this way allows us to understand not only the ways that the formal tropes of these emergent media were used to pass comment on the relationship between self and society – and, more specifically, between the local and global, the immediate and the historical, pleasure and conflict, and even the fault line of language itself – but encourages us to re-visit the supposed distinction between "modernism" and "realism". Like Miller's study of *Mass Observation*, this reading of radio programs and documentary films shows how innovative ways of cataloguing and representing the world position themselves between these two poles. For, just as fictional works like *Ulysses*, *The Waste Land* and *To the Lighthouse* adopt their respective innovative stylistics in pursuit of representing the minutiae of the everyday as it runs alongside history, so can non-fictional, instructive works for new media – which exceed the boundaries of pure representation – employ similarly radical techniques to not only describe how people behave within the world, but how they ought to. In doing so, radio works like Woolf's and Bowen's, and films such as Britten and Auden's, force us to reconsider the boundary between documentary realism and high modernism, and, accordingly, adjust our notion of what modernist play looks like in mainstream spaces – especially those that deal with relatively localised, even parochial, subject matter. As the

materialist turn in modernist studies continues to grow alongside, and in relationship with, the geographically- and chronologically-centred New Modernist Studies, our reading of such works, which sit on generic, spatial, and cultural fault lines, only become more necessary.

Conclusion: “Fidgety about form”

In a 1981 “In Conversation” feature in the magazine *Poetry Now Review*, Sylvia Townsend Warner is invited to reflect on her use of form. “I keep to a formal mode”, she explains, adding,

I’m extremely fidgety about form . . . I think there’s something to be said for the formal shape if you’ve learned how to manage it and if you’ve got something to say. Really I believe that the thing that forms the structure of any narrative and folds it together is the importance of the narrative, the interest one has in the narrative.⁸¹¹

But, challenges her interviewer, “[i]sn’t there some incompatibility between political anarchism and formalism in writing?” “I dare say there is”, Warner replies. “I remember a passage in Walt Whitman where someone or other is accusing him of being inconsistent and he says, ‘Am I inconsistent? Well, I *am* inconsistent. Within me I contain millions!’”⁸¹²

It is interesting that, at this point in her life, Warner both viewed herself as a rather strict formalist and saw this aesthetic inclination as contradicting her politics – a contradiction with which she was at ease, perhaps, but a contradiction nevertheless. Yet, as her admission that she is “fidgety” about form – surely the perfect word to describe the performative hand-wringing about genre in *Somerset* – as well as her reference to being able to “manage” formal shape suggest, Warner is not simply a woman who writes one way and thinks another. Rather, formal mastery appears as something which one does not so much aspire to as employ. With this in mind, I would suggest that this thesis has shown Warner’s invocation of Whitman to be unnecessary: true, the formal stringency of Warner’s favoured literary styles may seem at odds with the deliberately disruptive force of her left-wing politics, but – at least, if *Somerset* is anything to go by – the “fidgety” appropriation of those forms is geared towards the same questioning, and undoing, of received structures; whether they be poetic or political.

Yet even as this portion of Warner’s interview brings us back once more to the tension which can exist between form and politics – a central thread of this thesis – it also raises further questions which point towards further avenues of investigation beyond the scope of this project. Most obviously, Warner’s “In Conversation” piece raises the spectre of the interview as a generic category, and how we might characterise the relationship

⁸¹¹ Sylvia Townsend Warner, “In Conversation”, in *Poetry Now Review* 31 (1981), reprinted in *With the Hunted: Selected Writings*, ed. Peter Tolhurst (Norwich: Black Dog Books, 2012), p. 404-5.

⁸¹² Warner, “In Conversation”, p. 405.

between Warner's comments *on* form and the arena in which those comments are conveyed. Unlike the texts I have read in this thesis, which comment on form through form itself, the *Poetry Now* feature discusses the slipperiness of formal play within the strictures of an interview format. This raises the intriguing question of what a modernist interview might look like. Would it be like "Futuristisk danskonst", an article on the art of Futurist dance published in the little magazine *Thailia*, which, as Mats Jansson explains, was "in fact . . . a report of an interview with the Russian dancer Nijinsky" –⁸¹³ concealing its interview form by adopting the mannerisms of the manifesto? Or might it be like Will Self's 2014 promotional video interview for his novel *Shark*, which consists of the author posing questions to himself in a series of cutaway shots—and, like much of Self's work, seems to draw self-consciously from the technological and narratological play of twentieth-century high modernism?⁸¹⁴ (I have not been able to find a direct antecedent to Self's interview, which plays with the back-and-forth of interview questions and answers, in twentieth-century modernist non-fiction, but I suspect that one might, somewhere, exist.)

I said at the start of this thesis that to speak of "non-fiction" invites complication. Here, at its end, we might also note that it invites breadth. Aside from interviews, there is undoubtedly necessary and exciting research to be undertaken on other categories of text which are yet to be read in terms of genre: we might think, for instance, of children's books, including Gertrude Stein's *The World is Round* (1938); sports writing such as the *Revue Olympique*⁸¹⁵ and, of course, F.T. Marinetti's writing on fitness;⁸¹⁶ fashion writing for *Vogue* and similar publications;⁸¹⁷ food writing outwith cookbooks;⁸¹⁸ and even book

⁸¹³ Mats Jansson, "Crossing Borders: Modernism in Sweden and the Swedish-Speaking Part of Finland", *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines, Volume III, Europe 1880-1940, Part I*, ed. Peter Brooker, Sascha Bru, Andrew Thacker and Christian Weikop (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.668.

⁸¹⁴ "Will Self interviews... Will Self - video", *Guardian*, September 3, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/video/2014/sep/03/will-self-interviews-will-self-video>.

⁸¹⁵ See D. Brown, "Modern sport, modernism and the cultural manifesto: de Coubertin's *Revue Olympique*", *International Journal of Historic Sport* 18:2 (2001), pp. 78-109.

⁸¹⁶ See, for instance, the discussion of swimming in Christine Poggi's *Inventing Futurism: The Art and Politics of Artificial Optimism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

⁸¹⁷ Work on modernism's interest in fashion and women's magazines is well underway - see, for instance, Bonnie Kime Scott's writing on *Vogue* and other women's magazines in *Refiguring Modernism, Volume 1: Women of 1928* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996). As Scott notes, writers such as Rebecca West contributed extensively to such magazines in "various genres" (p. 233); few scholars, however, have delved into the question of genre specifically.

⁸¹⁸ Walter Benjamin's autobiographical food writing, including meditations on borscht, figs, café crème and his epilogue to the 1928 Berlin Food Exhibition, is particularly wonderful. See *Walter Benjamin - Selected Writings, 1927-1930, Volume 2, Part 1* ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 135-140 and pp. 358-364.

reviews and essays produced for mainstream – if not exactly populist – venues such as the *Times Literary Supplement*, *New York Times*⁸¹⁹ and the *New Statesman*.⁸²⁰ In the introduction to their 2014 essay collection *Modernism and Autobiography*, Maria Di Battista and Emily O. Wittman discuss autobiography as a porous genre, which “crosses paths with adjacent subgenres, such as the personal essay, travel writing, food writing, literary journalism, criticism, even movie reviewing.”⁸²¹ This is even more true of non-fiction. Indeed, almost any topic one focusses on within modernist studies will have its attendant non-fictional works. One can quite easily feel overwhelmed by the quantity of material to which the investigative methods employed in this thesis may be applied; yet, I hope, this change of perspective might facilitate a productive, lateral move, rather than necessarily prompting an overly-challenging expansion.

Rather than attempt a broad account, therefore, I have instead elected here to provide a reading of four mainstream genres as they were appropriated by modernist writers, or by artists using the techniques of literary modernism, in order to shed light on several related questions, the perusal of each of which might lead us to various further examples. At the beginning of this study, I suggested that reading non-fiction specifically in terms of genre might assist in bringing into focus the ways that modernist writers worked with popular form in order to stage interventions in public life. Building on recent work aimed at broadening the geographical, socio-cultural and chronological definitions of “modernism”, this thesis has sought to clarify the questions posed by scholarship on place, the everyday and the mainstream. By examining the ways that different writers appropriated mainstream generic conventions at particular times and in particular places – situating each within the context of local cultural and political trends, as well as technological and material pathways – I have proposed that modernism, far from restricting itself to citation from the popular, instead actively appropriated popular spaces and forms for its own ends. It is my hope that these readings, which sit at the meeting point between several different strands of scholarship – form, genre, the mainstream,

⁸¹⁹ For one, randomly-selected example, see Karen L. Levenback’s account of Virginia Woolf and Rose Macaulay’s dialogue regarding life in wartime, with Woolf’s “The War from the Street” (1919) published in the *TLS* and Macaulay’s response, “After the War from the Street” in the *New York Times* (1926). In *Virginia Woolf and the Great War* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999), p.83.

⁸²⁰ “[I]n art if nothing else”, writes Adrian Smith, “the *New Statesman* was a beacon of Modernism”. “*New Statesman*”: *Portrait of a Political Weekly, 1913-1931* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 191.

⁸²¹ Maria Di Battista and Emily O. Wittman, “Introduction”, *Modernism and Autobiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. xiv.

conflict, geography, high versus middlebrow modernisms – might encourage scholars to return to each of these strands to pursue new or renewed investigations.

While one key aim of this study was to probe at the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, therefore, it is unsurprising that several of the questions posed in the introduction remain, in some ways, unresolved. Throughout, I have stressed that it is ambivalence – the “flux and disorientation” of modernism –⁸²² which marks modernism’s mainstream, non-fictional iterations, giving rise to complex oscillations between rarefied and popular spaces, local and global, irony and what, for want of better word, we might call “instructiveness”.

Each of these, we have seen, arises in different iterations aimed at intervening in the cultural and political status quo of a specific time and place. In the case of *Somerset* (1949) and *Scottish Scene* (1934), it is reading each as texts which not only play with the form of the travel guide, but specifically use that form to manipulate locally-rooted cultural and political discourses, which allows us to appreciate how Sylvia Townsend Warner, Hugh MacDiarmid and Lewis Grassie Gibbon’s writing operates on the boundaries between romantic and modernist, decisiveness and uncertainty – as well as, significantly, across the scaled geographies of regional, national and global space. It is through this deliberate ambivalence, enacted via their respective appropriations of the guide book form, that the authors extend Andrew Thacker’s formulation “literary texts represent social spaces, but social space shapes literary form” into a dialectic in which social space and literary form are mutually transformative. (In the case of *Somerset* and *Scottish Scene*, we might say mutually disruptive.)

The cookbooks examined in chapter two similarly weaponise ambivalence. Moving into the domestic space, this chapter demonstrated how modernist writers addressed the mediation of local food trends and global pathways as anchored in the movement of material goods. Here, commentary on the conditions of modernity, production, materialism, empire and conflict which is excavatable in *Somerset* and *Scottish Scene* is served up explicitly. Pleasure, too, is brought to the fore, as is the idea of one’s lifestyle as a thing which is linked to wider geopolitical trends. In this way, Alice B. Toklas’ eponymous cookbook (1954) and F.T. Marinetti’s *The Futurist Cookbook* (1932) use their avant-garde

⁸²² Andrew Thacker, *Moving through modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 221.

appropriations of the genre to stage interventions in practices of food and eating as they occur in a specific time and place – posing a challenge to the enduring association of literature proper with experimentation and “food writing” as descriptive via a mode of formal play which forces the reader to second guess their intentions and, subsequently, their relationship with the “real world”. Where *Somerset* and *Scottish Scene* take the uses (and abuses) of myth as a key focus, then, these texts use the cookbook form to manipulate their relationship to reality, returning us to one of modernism’s central concerns: the relationship between art and life.

The third chapter of this thesis, on mass media, goes further still. Where Marinetti’s project seeks to provide a totalising account of the Futurist lifestyle, and Toklas’ account integrates cooking within wartime life – using subtle formal ambiguities to invite us to reflect on the place of food in conflict – Flann O’Brien’s appropriation of the newspaper column, unbounded by subject or theme, is even broader in scope. By reading O’Brien’s *Cruiskeen Lawn* (1940-66) in relation to Ben Highmore and Benedict Anderson’s comments on the press as a tool for organising cultural and social relations, chapter three demonstrated that the formal strictures of newspaper writing also provided the means for subversion. O’Brien’s self-conscious appropriation of these features, I argued, is used to address the fraught socio-political and artistic questions which dogged Irish society after independence, suggesting new routes of investigation into Irish studies, studies of newspapers and modernism and, of course, into the work of Flann O’Brien more generally.

Finally, chapter four of this thesis moved back across the Irish Sea to consider another medium whose contents and distribution are bound up with statehood: broadcasts. Making the case that modernist radio programs and documentary films are most fully understood when read as part of a wider “broadcast culture”, this chapter brought to the fore a question raised in O’Brien’s columns: that of the relationship between the individual and society. Simultaneously, however, the broadcasts by Virginia Woolf, Elizabeth Bowen and – most explicitly – W.H. Auden and Benjamin Britten also returned us to the questions of scalability raised in my first chapter and extended in my second, inviting us again to reflect once again on the tension between the local and global and the position of the individual within a wider network of trade, conflict and technology. I suggested that these works, too, simultaneously deny the usual instructive demands of their respective genres while still clearly framing their contents in terms of how people

ought to behave in the world. In this case, it is the tropes of documentary films, from “voice of God” narration to the inclusion of incidental music, which are re-appropriated, subtly shifting focus in order to prompt queries into the prevailing discourses shaping British society, particularly in relation to war. In this way, their ambiguity – again a key theme – opens up space to consider the relationship of documentary realism and high modernism, as each set of aesthetic trends finds commingled expression in mass media for new technology.

The “Cruiskeen Lawn” of July 21, 1953, like so many of its authors other columns, was centred on a fictional scenario. In it, Myles na gCopaleen recounts a conversation between two friends, one of whom is, unbeknownst to him, a car salesman. After his companion asks about the purchase of a motor, the salesman becomes increasingly confused and irate, eventually calling on an assistant for help:

A CAR? (Motions, presses button, gets Miss Mjargan-Djarcy on this inter-comm). MISS MJARGAN DJARCY, DO WE MAKE CARS. WHAT? WE DO? HOW MANY? A THOUSAND A WEEK? WHY DIDN'T ANYBODY TELL ME ABOUT THIS?⁸²³

“This is the sort of anecdote”, Myles finishes, “so deadly true, that it is impossible to close, neatly and gracefully. So I’ll just shut up, nearly choked with the acuity of observation which has made me a martyr to myself. And maybe to a lot more.” As ever, Myles’ comments refuse to provide a conclusion, finishing on a flourish – and one which, via its winking use of the Anglo-Irish word “deadly”, deliberately draws attention to his column’s precarious status as “truth” – rather than an ending proper.

I place it here, at the close of this work, not only because it is always hard to resist one more Myles quotation but because these lines may serve as a microcosm of the modernist engagement with media which this thesis has explored. If each genre’s “textual codes” were used to organise and shape everyday life during the years of cultural upheaval during the first half of the twentieth century, then one way in which modernism found popular expression in the public sphere was by staging interventions in these configurations specifically through the performance of their inner tensions. Their irony, play, and above all their refusal to be useful in the ways signalled by the specific genres they adapt encourage us to think in new ways about modernism’s non-fictional iterations as actors within the public sphere. In the above example, it is only in reading Myles’

⁸²³ “Cruiskeen Lawn”, *The Irish Times*, Tuesday, July 21, 1953, p.8.

comments against the usual demands of the newspaper columnist, and therefore against the wider function of the press, that we are able to appreciate his words as not only an act of language play but also a commentary on the media's notion of "truth". Without an attentiveness to this thematic tension, it is nigh impossible to untangle the complex, self-conscious subversion of popular discourses in which these authors are engaged; without attentiveness to form, it is impossible to discern this tension. Only when we begin to understand non-fiction as a crucial generic category within the modernist canon, then, can we truly start to appreciate modernism's relationship to the social and political landscape of mainstream culture.

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