"Peace for our Time": a Uchronian Approach to British Fascism in Jo Walton's *Farthing*

"Peace for our Time": una aproximación ucrónica al fascismo británico en *Farthing*, de Jo Walton

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Abstracts

This paper draws on a uchronian framework to analyse Jo Walton's *Farthing* (2006) as a suitable example of a counterfactual Britain in the aftermath of an effective peace agreement with Nazi Germany. The following pages will attempt to intertwine the purely historical comment on the intricacies that underlay the rise of fascism in the country with the allohistorical turns that ignite the plot of the novel and its point of divergence, which brings about the appointment of a fascist militant as Prime Minister and the subsequent outburst of a violent antisemitic wave. The study of this novel will be informed by a wide array of critics and historians like Amy Ramson, Karen Hellekson, Richard Thurlow or Nigel Copsey, among others, whose work contributes to tracing significant parallelisms between the historical outcome and the uchronian alternatives Walton explores in her work.

Key words: Uchronia, Counterfactuals, Fascism, Antisemitism, Peace.

Resumen

Este artículo parte de un marco ucrónico para analizar *Farthing* (2006) de Jo Walton, una obra que se centra en una Gran Bretaña alohistórica en los años posteriores a la firma de un tratado de paz con la Alemania nazi. Este estudio tratará de fusionar el discurso histórico de un periodo que es testigo del surgimiento del fascismo en el país con la propuesta ucrónica que plantea la novela y que trae como consecuencia el nombramiento de un militante fascista como primer ministro y el estallido de una violenta corriente antisemita. El análisis de esta novela parte de las teorías de críticos e historiadores como Amy Ramson, Karen Hellekson, Richard Thurlow o Nigel Copsey, entre otros, cuyos trabajos contribuyen a trazar interesantes paralelismos entre la historia que conocemos y el mundo contrafáctico que recrea Walton en su novela.

Palabras clave: Ucronía, contrafácticos, fascismo, antisemitismo, paz.

Introduction

The course of history and why it has taken certain paths, is still the source of an intense and, quite frequently, unresolved debate. The understanding of our past and the attempts to shed light on the events that have transformed and even challenged the socio-economic, religious and geo-political foundations of humankind have been endless. History as a discipline has traditionally remained an uncontested record of verifiable facts, which have been usually surrounded by an aura of undisputed truthfulness. With the emergence of postmodernism and more revisionist views on historiography, this sense of reliability gave way to theoretical debates that approach history as an entity, which, like literature, can also be exposed to subjective judgements. These conceptualizations have led to the consolidation of narratives like the historical or biographical novel, which seek to explore roads not taken, alternative scenarios that seek to elucidate what might have happened if certain historical episodes had turned out differently.

It is in this context that uchronia finds a space in which a wide array of authors and even traditional historians like Niall Fergusson or Robert Cowley have engaged in debates that gravitate around counterfactualism and its most disquieting question: "What if….?" Usually hidden behind an ambiguous critical and terminological *mélange*, alternate history has been traditionally acknowledged as part of science fiction, although recent studies have granted this literary expression a more independent status. It is our contention throughout the present study to defend the autonomy of uchronia as a subgenre, guided by its own takes on the historical accounts that have come down to us. Human beings have been fascinated by those discussions which revolve around situations that never took place, but which could have turned the course of history upside down. What would have happened if the South had won the American Civil War, what if the Third Reich had prevailed after WWII or what could have changed in Britain had the Spanish Armada occupied the country, are just some of the themes that writers have more frequently tackled in their allohistorical narratives.[1] In this respect, Nazism and the impact of its totalitarian and antisemitic ideology are probably the issues that have found a more recurrent response in the context of uchronian fiction. The list of authors and works that have reimagined a world dominated by Hitler is long and prominent. From global bestsellers like Phillip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* (1962), Len Deighton's *SS-GB* (1978) or Robert Harris' *Fatherland* (1992), to less known theatrical pieces as Noël Coward's *Peace in our Time* (1946), this issue is still the object of a fruitful scholarly debate and very interesting discussions in other less academic circles.

Bearing all this in mind, the present paper draws on a uchronian framework to analyse Jo Walton's *Farthing* (2006) as an example of a counterfactual Britain in the aftermath of an effective peace agreement with Nazi Germany. It is important to note that Walton's novel does not engage in the same debates as Harris' *Fatherland* or Deighton's *SS-GB*, which focus on worlds where the Nazis have won the Second World War, but on

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1 Among the most outstanding uchronias, we could mention the classical *Bring the Jubilee* (1953) by Ward Moore, *Pavane* (1968) by Keith Roberts, Kingsley Amis' *The Alteration* (1976), or the most recent *Lion's Blood* (2002) and *Zulu Heart* (2003) by Steven Barnes, Phillip Roth's *The Plot against America* (2005) and Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* (2016).

the post-war years and on how fascism gradually takes over the British political scene. The following pages will argue that a uchronian reading of this novel and the allohistorical turns that ignite its plot can help ponder over the story's thematic cornerstones, which are key to understand the narrative dimension of Walton's work and the complex reality of the time. The first section will look at the years preceding the outbreak of the Second World War and the diplomatic manoeuvres that ended up, first, with an Anglo-German naval agreement in 1935 and, secondly, with the (in)famous "Peace for our Time" signed by Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and the German *führer* Adolf Hitler in 1938. This general background, which will provide the necessary contextualization to decipher the so-called "Peace with Honour" in *Farthing*, is crucial to reflect upon how antisemitism permeated the entire British society and the ways Walton seems to anticipate the re-emergence of a profoundly extremist and radical discourse in the years that preceded the Brexit referendum in 2016.

The relationship between historiography and uchronia has been marked by a deep academic distrust. The voices that have vehemently rejected the validity of counterfactualism have been numerous. In *The Poverty of Theory and other Essays* (1978), E.P. Thompson argues that everything that escapes the confines of standard history is not worth taking into consideration.[2] Others like E.H. Carr (1961: 126) have also discredited uchronia's potential, arguing that history is "by and large, a record of what people did, not of what they failed to do". In this vein, Karen Hellekson (2000: 249) alludes to Hayden White when he states that: "[…] historians write history not as disinterested outsiders but as interested parties who structure their narratives in order to make a particular point. History can therefore be read tropologically [...] White blurs the boundaries between fiction and history, creative writer and historian".[3] In spite of the aforementioned negative opinions about uchronia and its lack of solid pillars, there are also scholars who defend the research and fictional possibilities that this sub-genre can open, as Robert Cowley (2001: xii), for instance, points out: "Much as we like to think otherwise, outcomes are no more certain in history than they are in our own lives. If nothing else, the diverging tracks in the undergrowth of history celebrate the infinity of human options. The roads not taken belong on the map".

Cowley, as well as Hellekson (2000: 254-255) or Hardesty (2003: 81), question the view that there is just one immutable, linear history. As a matter of fact, our standpoint is that this assumption stimulated the birth and growth of uchronia, which is sustained on the idea that deviations in the course of history could have been possible. On many occasions, these allohistorical contexts lead individuals to think that it would have taken a great deal of complex nuances to become real. However, uchronian narratives demonstrate that the course of history could have diverted very easily if minor, even uneventful details, had taken place. As an example, the Battle of Britain,

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2 As a matter of fact, Thompson (1978: 108) refers to uchronian fiction in more explicit terms: "[…] the counterfactual fictions; the econometric and cleometric groovers –all of these theories hobble along pro-grammed routes from one static category to the next. And all of them are *Geschichtenscheissenschlopff*, unhistorical shit".
3 To this, Cowley (2002: xv) adds: "One of the problems about history is that people take it too seriously […] We are left with the impression that history is inevitable, that what happened could not have happened any other way".

which the allied forces celebrated as an act of heroic resistance against the *Luftwaffe*, should have been the confirmation of the military superiority of the German Air Forces, the subsequent invasion of Britain and, with that, the defeat of the most recognisable stronghold against the Nazi occupation. As Charles Messenger (2002: 80) describes in his more than plausible counterfactual reconstruction of this WWII milestone, only the gross logistic and operational errors of Hermann Göring can explain why the RAF managed to withstand the German attack.

These preliminary disquisitions help not only to conceptualize uchronia but also to identify some of its major themes. Even though it might seem simple to figure out its main traits, the definition of uchronia has been caught in a certain critical disarray, as there are still significant disparities on how this type of speculative fiction should be addressed. From "alternate/alternative history" to "counterfactual, allohistorical" or "uchronian" narratives, the scholarship produced on this field does not seem to agree on a consensual way to systematise a consistent terminological apparatus.[4] What is more commonly accepted is the purpose of uchronia and the goals that literary authors set to achieve in writing these stories. Uchronias revolve around events that trigger a drastic shift in the historical timeline that is known to us. Their central element is the so-called "point of divergence", that is, the moment in which the story swerves into the alternative worlds that could have been and which could have had an impact in our present. As Amy Ransom (2003: 64) suggests: "The principle of all uchronias is the same: it consists of proposing a fictional world which refers neither to the future nor to the past, strictly speaking, but rather to a History that would have taken a different course than that which took in reality".

It is important to note that uchronias are not framed exclusively in the past, although some of the most acclaimed trace curiously back to Medieval and Renaissance times or to the first half of the 20th century. Gavriel Rosenfeld (2002: 94) argues that allohistorical narratives usually look at those incidents that have generated more heated discussions or events that are still controversial, due to political reasons. These narratives attempt to tackle all those uncomfortable questions that history has disregarded because, as Carr stated, the past is already over, therefore, there is nothing that can possibly alter it. Novels like Stephen King's *22/11/63* (2011), in which the protagonist travels back in time to save the life of President Kennedy in Dallas, engage in debates that have been considered inconvenient in more traditional historical contexts. This does not mean that uchronia feeds on conspiracy theories, it rather problematises on discussions that are still alive or simply satisfies the curiosity of readers who need to go beyond the limits of the accepted truth. Sometimes, however, the line that separates pure conjecture and real facts is extremely thin and porous, as we will evince in the analysis of *Farthing's* uchronian undertones.

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4 In one of the leading Internet sources on uchronia (*Uchronia*), Robert Schmunk (2022) ponders over these theoretical difficulties and suggests, that they should not impede to identify what is common to these literary works in thematic, formal or stylistic terms, that is, their point of divergence, the occasional time travels of their protagonists and a more than frequent challenge of unquestioned historical assumptions.

The backdrop of Anglo-German pre-war negotiations

Before delving into the allohistorical dimension of *Farthing,* it is necessary to briefly contextualise the novel. Walton launches the action in 1949, some years after Britain and Germany signed a peace agreement devised by James Thirkie, a member of the so-called "Farthing Set". Suddenly, the foundations of this group of pro-fascist sympathisers and antisemites, who epitomise the most conservative and elitist side of the British society, are shaken when Thirkie, who everyone in this circle sees as the next Prime Minister, is found dead in the country house where they are spending some days: "They managed to murder Sir James Thirkie, architect of the Peace with Honour, perhaps the best man in England, and one of my greatest friends. They killed him in his bed and attached a Jewish star to his chest as a calling card. But they could not subdue the Farthing Set, or frighten us, or keep us from power" (Walton, 2006: 482). From this moment onwards, the police investigation that ensues the crime, led by Inspector Carmichael, turns out to be the point that discloses the turbulent circumstances of an extremely unpredictable period in the history of the country. Walton bases the counterfactual dimension of her novel on various episodes that could have changed the course of the 20th century and reshapes them to dig into their potential consequences. To understand the motivation of her novel, we need to look at how history evolved from the end of WWI and the geopolitical transformation it brought about. At a more local level, Britain went through a period of political uncertainty and a deep economic crisis, marked by a series of strikes in crucial industrial sectors such as coal mining. The impact of the war, the unbearable number of deaths and casualties and the need to hold on to a more hopeful future opened the gate of populism and the emergence of a fascist discourse that endangered the foundations of one of the oldest European democracies. The growth of strongly xenophobic, dictatorial, and nationalist voices disseminated all around the continent, yet it was in Britain that the political class became even more concerned about the outbreak of new hostilities in the coming times.

In the years from 1918 to 1939, the development of totalitarianism certified the fiasco of diplomacy and the realisation that a new world war was impending and almost inevitable. In this context, Britain tried to work out all kinds of alternatives to avoid this scenario, even though that meant to negotiate with Nazi Germany and its *führer*.[5] Among the various attempts to reach an *entente* between the two nations, there are two that are significant, both to understand the difficulties to preserve a stable international power dynamics in the inter-war period and to figure out Walton's intention within *Farthing*'s uchronian framework. Despite the fierce military rivalry, Hitler always looked at Britain as a potential ally, mainly because he believed that both countries shared a common racial ancestry.[6] Britain, on the other hand, believed that a fluent relationship with the Reich meant to comply "with the expansionary fascist powers if she was to preserve

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5 In this vein, Hale Hines III (1978: 480) argues that: "Confronted by Hitler's claims to equality in arms and by evidence that the Reich was already pressing ahead with rearmament, the British government nevertheless could not bring itself to abandon its long quest for disarmament and peace through collective security".

6 Thomas Hoerber (2009: 179) points to the racial closeness that the Nazi regime felt towards Britain, which explains why Hitler initially saw this country more as an ally than an enemy: "Therein lay what Nazi foreign policy had been aiming at, namely the chance for an alliance of the two great Germanic peoples".

her Empire" (Thurlow, 1998: 144). In this context, the first attempts to proceed with an effective pact between the two countries took place in 1935, when Britain sought to secure its maritime power and to reduce German's escalating rearmament after the First World War. The Anglo-German naval agreement was signed in 1935, perhaps grounded on the naïve idea that this would be the first step towards a solid and long-lasting peace.

Only three years later and after witnessing that the consolidation of totalitarian regimes across Europe was no longer the result of simple populist discourses and demagogic humbugs, Britain soon realised that the world order could be, once again, jeopardized. The British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, guided by the same innocent beliefs, assumed that the only way out to protect his country from Hitler's expansionism was to concede the German-speaking region of Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia in exchange of a non-aggression pact, with "the desire of our two peoples never to go to war with one another again" (as cited in Klein, 2020). His return from Munich and the theatrical reading of the terms of the agreement in the runaway where his plane landed filled the English people with jubilation. Chamberlain was acknowledged as the man who brought peace to the nation and, with that, a guaranteed protection against the menace of a Nazi occupation. The reality that ensued crumbled all these optimistic expectations, since Hitler's troops continued with their unstoppable advance over Czechoslovakian soil and eventually crossed into Poland. According to Klein (2020), "[…] on September 1, 1939, the prime minister again spoke to the nation, but this time to solemnly call for a British declaration of war against Germany and the launch of World War II". Chamberlain stepped down as Prime Minister eight months later and was replaced by Winston Churchill.

Our contention in this paper is that these preliminary historical notes turn out to be crucial to delve into the uchronian divergences Walton proposes in *Farthing*. As a matter of fact, the story opens with explicit allusions to the "Peace with Honour" brought to Britain by the abovementioned James Thirkie. Walton explores the possibilities that counterfactuals can bring to her novel, since her story is sustained on the assumptions that Chamberlain's attempts to sign that agreement were pointless and it was Thirkie the one that managed to reach a real peace with Hitler: "By peace was meant not Chamberlain's precarious 'peace in our time' but the lasting 'Peace with Honour' after we'd fought Hitler to a standstill" (Walton, 2006: 22-23). In *Farthing*, the English government goes a step further and signs that treaty, which evinces that "nine years had been enough to test the terms of the Farthing Peace and show that England and the Reich could be good friends" (Walton, 2006: 26). Bearing in mind that the time frame is 1949, this quote reveals that Thirkie finalised the deal with Nazi Germany in 1940, which would more or less coincide with the moment Chamberlain agreed on similar terms with Hitler. As it was argued above, the Nazi advances through central Europe dragged Chamberlain into a political *cul de sac*, which forced him to appear in public and declare war on Germany in September 1939.

If we look again at the novel's historical basis, the bilateral talks that the two statesmen kept along those months are also the source of interesting uchronian parallelisms. Two years after the outbreak of WWII, one of the most obscure and still unresolved episodes took place, an event that could have changed the course of the war. Even though there are details that are the object of rather sceptical opinions, the flight of deputy *führer* Rudolf Hess to Scotland still triggers a great deal of conspiracy

theories and bizarre historical conundrums. It seems that Hess, one of Hitler's closest collaborators, flew from Augsburg to Scotland on a peace mission, which he was not able to accomplish.7 There have been plenty of speculations about this episode that have nurtured a great deal of allohistorical interpretations,8 yet the most common conclusion is that these conversations never actually took place and that Hess was just guided by his completely delusional mind. In fact, he was captured and immediately sent into several British prisons, where he stayed for more than forty years. In the novel, Walton takes advantage of these uncertain interstices of history and hypothesises about the possibility that Hess managed to meet James Thirkie and that both travelled back to Berlin to sign the armistice:

> In this dark time, the Fuhrer extended a tentative offer to us. Hess flew to Britain with an offer of peace, each side to keep what they had. Churchill refused to consider it, but wiser heads prevailed and sent young Sir James Thirkie to negotiate in Berlin […] The country held its collective breath as the bombing stopped. Then Thirkie returned, proclaiming "Peace with Honour" (Walton, 2006: 246).

In allohistorical terms, this excerpt is extremely interesting. First, in her proposal, Walton chooses to historize that the talks that finished with Chamberlain's famous "peace for our time" speech in Heston airfield were directly held by the two leaders, which means that there were no other interlocutors or mediators, as the previous quote might be suggesting. Second, bearing in mind Churchill's determination to surrender the Nazis and to offer nothing but "blood, toil, tears and sweat," our belief is that it is very likely that he might have forcefully aborted any attempt to conduct this sort of meetings in German soil.

The situation Walton portrays in *Farthing* is drastically different. Even though there is no explicit reference in the text, the reader takes for granted that the price Thirkie had to pay in order to reach that "peace with honour" was high. In this case, the author is careful to highlight how the different interpretations to the agreement were grounded on societal and ideological differences. On the one hand, the feeling among the advocates of the Farthing Set, who include aristocrats, conservative politicians and members of the most affluent English gentry, is that there could not have been a better deal for Britain. As Lucy, Lord Eversley's daughter and one of the main protagonists in the story, regretfully states: "All the same, insofar as there was a Farthing Set and they had a coherent policy in the early years of the peace, it was Mummy and Daddy and Sir James and Mark Normanby who were at the core of it, with other people like Uncle Dud and so on hanging on" (Walton, 2006: 104). On the other, the working classes and the most marginalised groups, especially immigrants, feel that Thirkie has sold the country out with his decision to sign a peace treaty with such an abominable dictator. These opposing views, which also hide Walton's criticism towards fascism, are going to clash repeatedly in the novel, mostly

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7 Some analysts like Brian Handwerk (2016) argue that Hess' plan was to meet up with the Duke of Hamilton, who could have led a movement that claimed for this armistice with the Germans, much in the line of what the Farthing Set pursues in Walton's work.
8 One of the most outstanding is Sheila Finch's "Reichs-Peace" (1995), in which the author builds her uchronia upon the idea that Hess' mission was successful and the first step towards a Pan-European federation.

because the social side-effects were unpredictable. As the next section will tackle, the concessions Thirkie grants to the Nazi regime also awaken a deeply antisemitic wave, which reminds us very much of the steady advance of fascism in the country before and during the period in which *Farthing* takes place and also points to the resurgence of radicalized voices in more contemporary political contexts.

The Jewish question: the growth of fascism in post-war Britain

The thematic scope of *Farthing* does not restrict itself to the aftermath of the peace agreement between Nazi Germany and Britain. Through her critique of intolerance and antisemitism, Walton's novel digs into the roots of the fascist movement in a country that has historically been admired for being a bastion of freedom and democracy. In this respect, it would seem hard to digest that Britain also turned out to be a stronghold of an ingrained fascist consciousness, whose liaisons with Hitler's regime and, especially, Mussolini's Italy were embarrassing for some, yet highly profitable for others. The development of fascism in Britain started to be a serious matter in the 1930s and 40s, where the voices of Oswald Mosley, A.K. Chesterton or Arnold Leese, began to move towards a space in the political spectrum that was beyond the right-wing foundations of the conservative party.9 The years that followed the end of the First World War were hugely conditioned by the suffocating economic crisis worldwide, a scenario in which many fascist-oriented parties took advantage of the people's disappointment with the traditional bipartidism that had prevailed in Britain so far. The multiple extreme right branches that emerged at that time drew the attention of many citizens, who trusted the hopeful messages and utopian political programs of such enthralling personalities as Mosley.

Farthing, once again, recreates a uchronian scenario in which Mark Normanby, a pro-fascist member of the Farthing Set, becomes the British Prime Minister without being elected. To understand why he is essential in the sub-plot that underlies Inspector Carmichael's investigation, it can be worth alluding briefly to the historical figures in which this character could have been inspired. It is difficult to affirm that he is a direct replica of Oswald Mosley, Enoch Powell or John Tyndall, because his agenda seems to be based on bits and pieces of all of them. However, whenever British fascism is addressed, the image of Oswald Mosley always comes to mind as one of its main forefathers and ideologues. His career was marked by his own political ambiguities, which took him from being a notorious voice in the conservative party to passionately defend the rights of the working classes from his labour MP stand to finally become the founder of the British Union of Fascists (BUF) in 1932. Some historians like Richard Thurlow (1998: 52) even think that he might have been the British *führer*, due to his radicalism and his more

9 According to Christopher Hilliard (2016: 776), the growing "concerns about domestic fascism in the immediate aftermath of the war led the Attlee government to establish a Cabinet-level committee late in 1945 to monitor the situation. Various members expressed concern about the extent of antisemitic feeling in Britain".

than conspicuous physical resemblance with Hitler. Even though Mosley looked up to the German chancellor as a political model, Thurlow (1998: 61) points out that his main referent was Benito Mussolini and his conception of the *fascio*. Both Mosley and the Italian *duce* believed that the origin of fascism traced back to the Roman Empire and that is the reason why "the 'Italy of the fascio' was in his view not just a 'Britain', but a 'Europe of the fascio', which would be led by Britain because the British Empire was evidently the natural successor to Imperial Rome" (Baldoli, 2004: 152-153).

Mosley assumed that, without international funding, his will to expand fascism around the British Isles could have been worthless. Mussolini believed that Mosley could be the man that might turn the country into a valuable fascist outpost and this explains why, as Thurlow (1998: 75) suggests, money started to flow quite regularly from Rome right into the BUF headquarters. This, together with a relatively high number of new affiliations, enabled Mosley to strengthen his own leadership, to organise political meetings around the country and to reinforce his security guard with the so-called "Blackshirts". Even though the electoral impact of the BUF and other analogous parties was never considerable, Mosley was smart enough to disseminate the basic axioms of Hitler and Mussolini's intolerant discourse. History demonstrates that, in periods of dire straits, immigration is usually blamed for the economic dysfunctions and disturbances that a society might be going through. It goes without saying that the outset of National Socialism was deeply marked by racial hatred, which Hitler tried to transmit among those nations with which his country shared a common Germanic background. He always looked at Britain as a valuable ally in these issues, since he believed that both countries had to subjugate other lesser peoples like the Jews. As Thurlow (2004: 77) argues: "Prime among these assumptions were the alleged superiority of 'Anglo-Saxon' stock over other racial groups, and the threat to the 'racial purity' of 'white' Britain posed by 'black' immigration".

This supremacist position soon propagated among the leaders of all British fascist organisations, who believed that the presence of Jewish people was a menace to the purity of their race. This idea was founded on a very biased and loose interpretation of Spenglerian, Lamarckian, even Darwinian theories, which led extreme right activists around Europe to justify that Jews were a lesser and disposable race. In Britain, most fascist advocates relied on the antisemitic essay *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (1903), which justified the violent actions against the Jewish community and its segregation in all social, professional, economic and religious realms. They were seen as a plague that had to be exterminated, following the dictates of the Nazi "Final Solution" program. British fascists took for granted that the Jewish people had initiated a global conspiracy to take over and dominate the world. This somehow helps to understand why more contemporary militants like John Tyndall employed what Benjamin Bland (2019: 88) defines as "the Holocaust inversion" theory, that is, to portray the Jews in the same terms as the Nazis: "Aside from Sir Oswald Mosley, who supported the idea of Jews being relocated to Palestine as a way of ridding Europe of its remaining Jewish population, British fascists generally portrayed the establishment of Israel as proof of Jewish power". As the next pages will attempt to discuss, Walton's *Farthing* reconstructs –and denounces– this antisemitic atmosphere to present the other point of divergence around which the novel gravitates, that is, Mark Normanby being appointed British Prime Minister.

It was argued above that, even though all fascist organizations, from the New Party and the Imperial Fascist League to Mosley's British Union of Fascists or Tyndall's National Party, aimed to be relevant in the British political map, their results in local and general elections were normally very poor. The country has never been close to be ruled by a fascist or neo-Nazi leader, which validates the general belief that the impact of this movement has been practically non-existent. In *Farthing*, on the other hand, Walton explores a different path, that is, what might have happened had a politician like Normanby (ergo Mosley, Leese, Powell, Tyndall or Farage) become Britain's utmost political authority. In this scenario, the author builds up an allohistorical reality where surveillance, prosecution and segregation against the Jewish community would be the principles around which this new government would gravitate. Normanby's first speech after becoming Prime Minister is very telling and discloses the goals of his racial policy: "Next came Mark's policy on foreign nationals in Britain, who were causing dissent, unemployment, and trouble. Unless they could find three British sponsors, they were to be repatriated to their original homes" (Walton, 2006: 579). Curiously, in the 1970s, the founder of the British National Party, John Tyndall, also spoke in similar terms, at a time when there was a hostile current against multi-culturalism. Tyndall and other fascist activists considered that immigration was the source of the country's maladies and, thus, it had to be eradicated: "As part of this 'conspiracy' to subvert and destroy the British 'race-nation' from within, Tyndall believed that Jews were responsible for multi-racialism and by implication, the mass immigration of non-European 'races' into Britain after the Second World War" (Copsey, 2008: 90).10

From this perspective, we can see that the antisemitic campaigns in Britain have been part of the historical, political and even cultural panorama of the country. The novel confirms this situation through the comments and behaviour of the Farthing Set, in which Normanby is included. The conversations that Walton captures point to the rejection that Jewish people triggered among wide sectors of the British society, whether they were connected with fascism or not. In this case, the relationship between David Khan, a Jewish banker who believes that antisemitism does not exist in the country, and Lucy Eversley, daughter of a prominent family who collaborated with the signing of the peace agreement with Hitler, defies an unwritten law in the fascist creed. Mixed marriages were considered to contaminate the blood of the English people and were, thus, a breach in the aspiration to achieve a complete racial purity. David and Lucy are constantly exposed to veiled or explicit comments that question their decision to be together simply because he is a Jewish man: "'English rose plucked by Jew,' *The Daily Express* had screamed, and even *The Telegraph* had asked more quietly, 'Should the daughters of our aristocracy be permitted to mingle their blood with the trash of European Jewry?'" (Walton, 2006: 80).

These harsh attitudes towards the Jewish get more heated when Kahn is falsely accused of Thirkie's murder. This fact exacerbates racial hatred even further and leads Normanby to issue new measures like identification cards, which in the case of Jewish

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10 Before Tyndall, Mosley had also proposed to send Jewish people back to their country if they could not comply with certain regulations: "Mosley also blatantly restated his movement's commitment to anti-Semitism, as a journalist from the *Catholic Herald* reported in succinct terms: 'He would make all Jews who had not been in the country for three or four generations leave. They wanted Palestine as a National Home and it should be given them'" (LeCras, 2018: 443).

citizens, should contain a yellow star. Without any clear evidence, Kahn becomes not only the prime suspect, but, more importantly, a sort of scapegoat that justifies the xenophobic sentiment that many characters share. The police investigation that Inspector Carmichael leads concludes that Kahn could not have been involved in the crime, yet he is forced to remain silent and keep those findings for himself. Among the law enforcement officers, there is no interest in exculpating him, because a Jewish assassin is what the government needs to make people believe that they must be removed from the country. A conversation between Carmichael and Scotland Yard's Chief Inspector Penn-Barkis unveils that antisemitism pervaded almost all sectors of the British society.[11] All in all, the following words emerge as a perfect corollary to the arguments that have been discussed throughout this paper: "'Kahn did it, and the reason Kahn did it is because Mr. Normanby is our Prime Minister and thinking these things against him almost amounts to treason.' 'Scotland Yard is above politics, and the courts are above politics, and the law'" (Walton, 2006: 756).

Conclusion

At a time in which Europe is trying to come to terms with the consequences of the Brexit referendum, *Farthing* emerges as a uchronian novel that seeks to dig into the past and to tackle issues that still affect the country's current state of affairs. The shocking results of this referendum unearthed the deep contradictions that still haunt the population, which may explain why there were social sectors who were openly in favour of leaving the EU. This was due to the aggressive campaign of Nigel Farage's UKIP, a political party that many analysts saw as the inheritor of the long-standing fascist tradition in Britain that has been discussed in this paper. Even though Walton's novel was published in 2006, seen under this light, it seems to be greatly anticipatory. *Farthing* poses the possibility that a fascist activist can be appointed Prime Minister without being elected and the side-effects of this decision in the short and long term. In this sense, this article has sought to delve into Walton's uchronian approach to key milestones in British recent history, with the intention to show that the reality of this country could have drastically changed, had fascist radicalism become a real political alternative.

These pages have paid particular attention to the failed attempts to sign Anglo-German peace agreements and the growth of fascism from the 1930s, which eventually leads to the ascension of Mark Normanby as leader of the British government. As it has been suggested in this paper, one of the most important features of uchronias is that they can enable us to re-approach, understand, question or, even, envision futures that traditional history has not sufficiently tackled. The paths that allohistorical fiction opens for Walton lead her to ponder not only over the turbulent past that informs her novel, but also the dreadful consequences that a fascist government could have eventually brought

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11 Even though Walton suggests that police officers were supportive of this new fascist regime in Britain, Thurlow (1998: 85) argues that "the police at the highest levels were not biased in favour of fascism […] Sir Philip [Game] argued forcefully that there were much stronger reasons for banning fascists than communists and that political anti-semitism should be outlawed".

about. In this vein, her critical takes on racism and antisemitism underlie the entire novel and seem to reveal that the hostility towards multiculturalism and immigration in contemporary England are deeply rooted in a discourse which traces back to a historical period that Walton's uchronian fiction captures with sheer accuracy.

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