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GILL PLAIN, ed., *British Literature in Transition, 1940–1960: Postwar*. British Literature in Transition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Pp. 438. $110.00 (cloth).
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Back in the mid-1990s, Patricia Waugh maintained that Britain was living through the "harvest of the sixties." (*Harvest of the Sixties: English Literature and Its Background, 1960–90* [1995], 1). In today's post-recession world of austerity, anti-immigration, imperial nostalgia, welfare reform, and the rise of Celtic nationalisms, it would seem that the harvest of that permissive decade is over, and that, socially and politically, our contemporary moment more closely resembles the immediate postwar years. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that the last decade has seen a growth in critical attention on this previously overlooked period. Gill Plain's collection *British Literature in Transition, 1940–1960* is a welcome and necessary addition to this field. Covering prose, poetry, drama, magazines, and radio broadcasts, as well as a range of genres encompassing crime fiction, travel writing, and children's literature, the essays capture a vibrant and often contradictory moment of possibility, where culture and society is caught between what Rebecca D'Monté identifies as "twin modes of thought": the first being that "the war had provided an opportunity to rethink society," while the second "looked back with a nostalgia to the past and saw the war as a disruption to normalcy" (78).

Positioned as it is between the innovations of modernism and the self-reflexive playfulness of the postmodern, the period between 1940 and 1960 is all too often regarded as an insular interregnum. As the essays in this collection by Alice Ferrebe, Tracy Hargreaves, and Victoria Stewart make clear, however, the period has been burdened by the prevailing logic of two expedient but monolithic binaries: internationalism versus parochialism and experimentation versus conservatism. In such readings, the literary world is seen to reflect British society's state of postwar exhaustion while also responding to the emerging realities of the end of empire by turning inward, replacing the old imperial vistas for the domestic dimensions of the kitchen sink. And yet, this varied and expansive collection shows that the mid-century decades are Janus-faced, being both constrained by and moving away from the forms of the past. Rather than a postwar interregnum, then, the collection makes a strong claim for the examination of a multitude of "transitions."

A conceptual framework that binds these diverse explorations of cultural transition together is provided by Raymond Williams's formulation of dominant, residual, and emergent aspects of culture. As James Procter's contribution attests, given the quickening pace of geopolitical and literary histories, it is necessary to challenge epochal readings of 1940–1960 in favor of a more "staggered" history (117). These two decades, after all, are bookended by increased aerial attacks on British cities and Harold Wilson's declaration that the "winds of change" were blowing through Africa, taking in the Allied victory that ended the Second World War, the arrival of the SS *Empire Windrush*, and the Suez crisis. In the world of literature, the charge of a postwar parochialism cannot do justice to the complexities that arise from the waning of social mores and the emergence of new perspectives on class, race, nationhood, and sexuality. As the essays in this collection remind us, it is, after all, a period that saw the publication of T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* and Philip Larkin's *The Less Deceived*, the first performances of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, and Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey*, the "arrival" both of postcolonial migrant voices and a reimagined imperial heroism, along with prescient glimpses of technological surveillance in George Orwell's *1984* and Muriel Spark's *Momento Mori*. Kate McLoughlin persuasively maintains that if the mid-century is a period of exhaustion it is not in the sense of decline but as a precursor to artistic conventions being subverted or transcended, a process that will become more forcefully realized throughout the 1960s and 1970s. This claim chimes with Mark Rawlinson's assertion that it is unsurprising given the upheavals of the mid-century decades "that

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writers worked in the interstices of ruined and reconstructed systems of meaning, rather than constructing myths of their own" (160).

It is in the imagery of ruination that the collection finds one its most promising interventions. For Hargreaves, "[t]he destructive blank space left by bomb damage" could be figured by postwar writers "as an exploratory blank page" (296), while Allan Hepburn asserts that "[c]atastrophe creates opportunities for imagining alternate forms of statehood, whether feudal, military, socialist or global" (370). At the same time, Plain shows how a damaged masculinity in the aftermath of two world wars gave rise to a "process of remasculinisation" in the figure of James Bond, "albeit one riven with self-doubt and anxiety" (101). Turning to the ruins of empire, Katie Gramich affirms that much of the writing coming out of Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland "was by no means simply a belated reflection of the decline of empire, but rather a celebration of new, distinctive identities and energies" (85). Ruination, then, contains within it the possibility to emerge from the rubble of history and rebuild. This drive prefigures the enduring image of Winnie in Beckett's *Happy Days* (1961) buried to the waist in rubble and ordering herself to "begin." But of course, she never moves and the rubble only keeps rising.

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Chris Washington. *Romantic Revelations: Visions of Post-apocalyptic Life and Hope in the Anthropocene*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019. Pp. 264. $65.00 (cloth).
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Hope feels like a familiar Romantic idea. Even when Alexander Pope is circumscribing our human ambitions with the "God of all" and our "great teacher Death" in his verse epistle *Essay on Man* (1734), we are tempted to read his famous line, "Hope springs eternal in the human breast" as a kind of temporary indulgence in Romantic optimism (Epistle 1, II, l. 19). And when Emily Dickinson names hope as "the thing with feathers" that sings through the gale, we feel familiar relief (l. 1). The central provocation of Chris Washington's *Romantic Revelations: Visions of Post-apocalyptic Life and Hope in the Anthropocene* is that Romanticism's hope is much stranger than these practiced punchlines. Hope is neither Pope's religious promise nor Dickinson's human endurance but rather Percy Shelley's frustratingly paradoxical prophecy at the end of *Prometheus Unbound*: "to hope till Hope creates / From its own wreck the thing it contemplates"(IV, ll. 573–74). In refusing to stake the idealism of hope in Pope's human breast, Shelley imagines a non-anthropocentric hope in a frenetic scene of postapocalyptic life. Washington's reading of Shelley's apocalypse suggests that only after extinction can real hope begin.

Washington's richly suggestive book is a timely and useful polemic for all those working in Romantic studies who value the period as an age of revolution and institutional change. In this view, Mary Shelley's apocalyptic novel *The Last Man* (1826) is not exactly a humanistic meditation on the politics of hope. Instead, Washington suggests, it exposes the "anthropocentric sovereign politics told by idiots" (79). All the opportunistic demagogues and politicians that arise from the threat of the plague are Shelley's incisively satirical answers to an "ideologically delusive, paradisiacal Romanticism" (79) that still holds onto the futile prospect of human reform in the face of extinction. In the powerful conclusion of the novel, when the last man wanders the depopulated world and discovers it nevertheless populated with nonhuman animals, Shelley transitions from the fantasies of anthropocentric politics to a model of "democracy without the 'demos'" (99). The radical reformers of the 1790s, in a sense, had it all wrong.

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