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From Nazism to Nationalism: Tracing the Foreign and the Native in Fictional Accounts of the British Far-Right

Britain's Far-Right: Nationalist Organisations, Global Entanglements

The far-right movement in Britain crystalised in the 1930s with the formation of Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists (BUF).[1] Suspected of pro-Nazi sympathies, the group was officially banned by the British government in 1940, and Mosley and his closest associates were imprisoned without trial as potential traitors for much of the war. Since then, a myriad of groups and organisations have peppered the British political landscape, including the Union Movement (1948-1973), the National Front (NF, 1967-), the British Movement – later the British National Socialist Movement (1968-1983) – The British National Party (BNP, 1982-), Combat 18 (1992-), The English Defence League (EDL, 2009-) and National Action (2013-). This is by no means an exhaustive list. The picture is complicated further by the recurrence of the same actors across several groups; to take some of the most obvious examples: Oswald Mosley fronted both the British Union of Fascists and the Union Movement; John Tyndall led the National Front and the relaunched British National Party; Colin Jordan was a member of the British People's Party, the White Defence League and the British National Party, and he fronted the National Socialist Movement and the World Union of National Socialists; Nick Griffin was a member of the National Front, the International Third Position, the British National Party and, having been expelled from the latter after fifteen years, British Unity.

To a greater or lesser extent, these organisations and individuals have remained on the periphery of the British political scene. But while they have never enjoyed the kind of success that their European counterparts have seen, they should not be dismissed out of hand, not least because, as Matthew Goodwin acknowledges, "there exists in British politics a sizeable amount of latent support for the extreme right which is far greater than is apparent at the polls. Put simply, extreme right parties in Britain have consistently failed to realize their potential."[2] In addition to this lack of democratic engagement, the "first past the post" electoral system works to minimise the potential of smaller factions

and goes some way to explaining their lack of political success. So, in spite of the negligible impact of the far-right at the polls, Dan Stone is right in arguing that "the idea of fascism as an aberration on British political life must be called into question."[3] Other leading critics, including John E. Richardson, Julie Gottlieb and Thomas P. Linehan, and Nigel Copsey have all made similar arguments.[4] The ongoing existence of such groups, which despite their obvious heterogeneity have nevertheless continued to give expression to marginal and extreme modes of thought, culture and identity, suggests that they must be taken seriously, if not as a sustained political threat (at least not so far) then as a persistent reminder of the right's potential to generate notoriety, influence the worldview of would-be members, and even shape mainstream political consciousness.[5]

Connections between British fascism and the European movements that influenced it may appear obvious to outsiders, especially when prominent figures sport the Blackshirt uniform (à la Oswald Mosley) or write pamphlets entitled "Hitler Was Right!" (Colin Jordan); and it is certainly true that some groups or individuals eschew political respectability in order to celebrate their "ideological forerunners."[6] Yet there are others who actively seek to distance themselves from fascism's history of violence in order to propagate a more respectable political doctrine. Such an approach is rarely convincing, especially because the ideological underpinnings of the far-right are based on a politics of exclusion and inclusion, emphasising the distinction between those who "belong" and those who do not as a way of advocating for some brand of nationalist sentiment.

Collective memories of the Second World War are likely to be a contributing factor to this since much of the foundation myth of Britain is based on the country's opposition to fascism during the war, hence any organisation that relies on a vindication of Nazism or Italian Fascism risks invalidating itself in the eyes of even the staunchest of nationalists.[7] At least partly because of the overt tension between wartime fascism and British antifascism, the popular perception of fascism in Britain is that it is a fundamentally foreign concern, at odds with the values of the British people and unlikely to take root in a country that extols tolerance and democracy. As Tony Kushner asserts, "the decency factor continues to dominate when explanations are sought for the failure of British fascism."[8] Memories of the war form, for the vast majority of the British population, a vital part of national identity; it is at least partly for this reason

that the British populace has, in general, been unwilling to engage seriously with fascism at home.[9] As Kushner reminded us as early as 1994, "the memory and experience of the Second World War still acts as a barrier to open flirtation with the NF [National Front] or BNP [British National Party]" even if there are still "elements of mainstream British culture that are receptive to parts of the fascist message."[10] The tension between (foreign) fascism or National Socialism and (British) antifascism is especially pronounced when understood in this context.

That said, the connections between different far-right groups, their forebears, and their contemporaries abroad mean that the fringe groups that constitute the Far Right are heavily shaped by what is happening and what has happened elsewhere. This is not a simple process of historical inheritance; rather, as John E. Richardson argues, these groups are dynamic, responding to prevailing social and political conditions, morphing and merging as they go.[11] Ideas of home, nation and belonging thus mix with questions of globalisation, foreignness and the construction of the "other." Patriotism is, in this sense, both an ideological focal point and a cover for more radical views in which those who exist outside of the accepted "in-group" must be permanently exiled (or worse) in order to "protect" the interests of the rest. The Holocaust acts as a stark reminder of the potential denouement of this kind of thinking. Britain's role in defeating Nazism and liberating the concentration camps facilitates a national narrative founded on moral superiority and the sense that Hitler and his followers could never have enacted their murderous regime in the British Isles. So, while there is little consensus on political, racial and economic questions by far-right groups in Britain, popular thought continues to incline itself towards the otherness of their doctrines.

Fictional Representations of the Right: British Space, Foreign Ideology?

Connections between British far-right thinking and interwar European fascism are laid bare in several fictional accounts: Adolf Hitler emerges as a mentor, advisor or inspiration, usually to Oswald Mosley (e.g., Guy Walters' *The Leader*), or Nazism more generally is turned into a symbol and model for others to follow (e.g., Max Schafer's *Children of the Sun*). In alternative histories, it is Nazism (rather than neo-Nazism) that appears as the greatest threat, though the issue of collaboration and the potential for

ideologies of hate to spread are often at the heart of the works. In other works, history itself is obscured, and yet its pervasive influence is detected through uncanny references, as if the Second World War can never be truly erased from popular British memory (e.g., Linda Grant's *A Stranger City*, Ali Smith's *Autumn*, Howard Jacobson's *J*). In all of these fictional accounts, the legacy of interwar fascism is revealed to be an inescapable force that cannot be entirely divorced from the processes of othering and estrangement that often accompany perceptions of the British Far Right.

In this article, I will trace the tension between British national identity and foreignness as it appears in literary fiction that depicts the New and Far Right, focusing on a sample of well-known literature taken from three separate periods: prewar Britain, the 1970s, and the post-Brexit era. Doing so will demonstrate a stark shift in the way that fascism is understood in Britain, first as an anomaly, then as a foreign threat, and finally as a symptom of domestic crisis.

As Judy Suh writes: "Throughout all of its phases, British fascism attempted to synthesise pre-existent local, regional, and national cultural narratives. The ways in which it instrumentalised familiar events and cultural references takes us into the murky region where the presumed otherness of fascism merges with an underlying sense of deja vu."[12] The works of fiction under discussion in the first half of this article function by taking the tension between home and otherness as part of their structural design. Thus do British spaces – including village greens, famous landmarks, and aristocratic mansions – become estranged when they are brought into contact with fascism. In this way, authors are able to reveal the British Far Right as an expression of a particular kind of British thinking while, at the same time, acknowledging the foreignness and peripherality of the creed.

Contrastingly, novels of "Broken Britain", particularly those published after the financial crisis of 2008 and in the wake of the controversial Brexit Referendum (2016), seem to suggest that the New Right – defined in the introduction to this issue as being distinct from other far-right groups on account of "their publicly claimed distance to regimes in which the ideologies they have adopted, and continue to admire, were actually implemented"[13] – is to be viewed as a product of Britain's own decline, often symbolised through the image of decayed British spaces (e.g., Jon Gale's *Albion*, Kenneth Steven's *2020*, Sam Byers, *Perfidious Albion*). Abandonment, alienation and estrangement appear as key themes and motifs

in these cases (e.g., Jon Gale, *Albion*, Jo Bloom, *Ridley Road*, Douglas Board, *Time of Lies*). Fragmented narratives and multi-perspectivity feature heavily, suggesting additional layers of division, segregation and fracture that are depicted at the narratological level. The Far Right emerges here more as a symptom of social decay and class division than a foreign or strange imposition, and Britain itself is shown to be the setting and cause of an emerging fascist dystopia.

It thus appears that there has been a chronological shift in British fiction, whereby the power of the Second World War as a symbol of British moral superiority has begun to wane, transformed instead into a form of nostalgia the relevance of which is challenged in the face of such obvious domestic decline. Memories of Britain as a powerful force on the world stage are simply no longer sufficient to override the realities at home, and so fascism is transformed from a strange, uncanny or foreign presence into an emerging British reality. This is not to say that memories of wartime fascism have become less entrenched in the foundation myth of Britain – indeed, the frequency of references and allusions to the war and the Nazi genocide attest to the fact that this is not the case – rather that, the mythological (re-)construction of the country's wartime success functions more as a nostalgic link to an inaccessible past and marker of contemporary decline than a celebration of Britain's history of fighting fascism.

The Anomaly of the British Far Right: Humour in Pre-War Fiction

The supposed otherness of fascism is discernible in fiction published even before the outbreak of the war. In Nancy Mitford's *Wigs on the Green* (1936) and P.G. Wodehouse's *Code of the Woosters* (1938), this foreignness is conveyed symbolically through humour, where the Far Right is cast as an absurd anomaly rather than an intrinsic part of British society.

Nancy Mitford's *Wigs on the Green*, originally published in 1935, offers a satirical view on the emergence of British Fascism. The author, as one of six Mitford sisters, was part of the aristocratic elite of Britain. Two of her sisters, Diana and Unity, would become staunch fascists; the former would marry Oswald Mosley, while the latter would move to Berlin to study National Socialism, becoming an important part of Hitler's inner circle before attempting suicide when war broke out. Nancy had herself briefly joined Mosley's British Union of Fascists, seemingly more out of loyalty to her sister than as a

result of a strong ideological stance. Speaking about that time in a letter to Evelyn Waugh, she writes: "I remember Prod [Peter, her husband] looked very pretty in a black shirt. But we were young and high spirited then and didn't know about Buchenwald."[14] Attempting to poke fun at the political situation at the time, much to the chagrin of her sisters, Nancy later refused to allow the book to be republished, writing to Waugh that "too much has happened for jokes about Nazis to be regarded as funny or as anything but the worst of taste."[15] Nancy's postwar reticence about the novel stems both from her disapproval of the Holocaust and the difficult family dynamics that had emerged during the war. Indeed, Nancy had herself written to the foreign office, claiming that Diana was to be considered more dangerous than her husband and that she ought to remain in prison, a fact of which Diana was apparently unaware.

The comedic tone of the novella is established from the outset. The first time we meet Eugenia Malmains – a young aristocrat and the local leader of the Union Jack Movement – she is delivering a patriotic speech while stood on an overturned bathtub in the middle of the village green, a blatant satirisation of a quintessentially British space. Eugenia's general appearance, commented on throughout, further marks her as somewhat of an irregularity, even in spite of her inherent beauty and high status: "She was dressed in an ill-fitting grey woollen skirt, no stockings, a pair of threadbare plimsolls, and a jumper made apparently out of a Union Jack. Round her waist was a leather belt to which there was attached a large bright dagger."[16] The various events of the novel reach their climax at the village garden party/pageant/Olde Englyshe Fayre, which is swiftly appropriated by Eugenia as a Social Unionist rally. The affair begins as an attempt by the aging aristocrat Lady Chalford, who wishes to introduce her granddaughter – Eugenia, a child of a scandalous divorce – to suitable members of high society in the hope of securing an appropriate marriage. Lady Chalford then suggests the event be combined with a theatrical pageant, something she has heard is "tremendously popular nowadays." (43) After some discussion and debate, those in charge of organising the event settle on performing a (very) loose history of George III and his wife Queen Charlotte's visit to Chalford house. A minor aspect of British history is thus "modernised" and repackaged to suit the needs of the event's various stakeholders. It isn't until much later that Miss Trant, the organist, suggests including an element of an

"Olde Englyshe Fayre," including Maypole dances and art needlework. The event at Chalford Manor is thereby rendered as a palimpsest of Britishness, weaving facets of high society, history and cultural convention together. It is significant, therefore, that Eugenia opts to subvert the event, adding her own fascist layer. For George III, for example, she writes a speech that works primarily as a means of Unionist propaganda, detailing a "prophetic dream" in which "young and victorious' comrades […] will march […] towards the fulfilment of Glorious Britain." (88) The scene ends with the monarch instructing the audience to sing the Social Unionist Hymn, "Land of Union Jackshirts, Mother of the Flag." That this incursion is meant to be viewed as a disturbance and disruption of Englishness is highlighted through the blatant rewriting of history and the ridiculousness of the scene – the horse and carriage carrying Mr Wilkins and Mrs Lace – playing the roles of the King and Queen, respectively – flies into the pageant quite out of control: "Mrs Lace, screaming loudly, was attempting to throw herself out of the window, and was being forcibly restrained from doing so by Mr Wilkins. Both their wigs had fallen off." (154) Incongruity is also hinted at through the red, white and blue colours of the Union Jackshirt uniform that can be seen poking out of the historical costumes of the pageant (150). Finally, the outbreak of violence between Eugenia's "comrades" and a group of antifascist protesters brings the event to a bloody close, further suggesting the disruptive nature of the creed and its disordered effects on British society.

As one performance among several, fascism is thus presented both as a subversion of and an integral part of the British community. There is hence an ethical and aesthetic ambiguity in the portrayal of fascism. It feeds into village life and it is woven into British cultural tradition, but it remains an outlier, a semi-comedic anomaly in the British space. Indeed, the posters designed by Eugenia to advertise the event and promote the Social Unionist cause are described as making "the countryside for miles round Chalford" hideous. (137) Eugenia herself emerges as an unconventional figure of ridicule; appreciated by "Captain Jack" – a cypher for Oswald Mosley, no doubt – but also someone who exists outside of the mainstream. Nevertheless, the text reveals the murky assiduousness of extreme creeds; far from being "defeated" in the end, Eugenia is lauded by the other characters in the book for her response to the violence at the pageant; for example, in Jaspar Aspect's opinion, she evolves from being "fairly

batty" (5) to "a fine girl" who "if she had been born twenty years sooner […] would have been a suffragette." (129) She is also cast as a modern-day Boadicea by the Duke of Driburgh, who mistakes her part in the violence for part of the performance; she is thus perceived by at least some of the onlookers as a revolutionary British spirit and a potential source of national pride. Lurking beneath the humorous tale is thus a cautionary message about the way that ideology can infiltrate individuals and societies; Eugenia goes from being a bored and mollycoddled member of the British upper classes to a credible voice of the British far-right, even while the logic of her politics of exclusion is routinely called into question. (128) To the reader, she appears naïve and wrongheaded but not entirely unlikeable, and sympathy is created through the extreme conservatism with which she is treated by her grandmother. In the end, then, the novella does not condone fascism, but "interpretative openness" is built into its portrayal through a combination of this ambiguous characterisation and the amalgamation of humour and political controversy.

The third novel in P.G. Wodehouse's well-known 'Jeeves' series, *The Code of the Woosters* is, as with the majority of the series, set within the privileged spaces of the British aristocracy. The novel marks the first of several appearances of Roderick Spode, Wodehouse's cypher for Oswald Mosley and the founder and leader of the Saviours of Britain, a fascist group commonly known as the Black Shorts. We are first introduced to Spode in an antiques store, where an eighteenth-century cow creamer that is to become central to the plot is on sale. Told from the perspective of Bertie Wooster, and much like in the case of Mitford's Eugenia Malmains, Spode is rendered absurd from the beginning: "He was, as I had already been able to perceive, a breath-taking cove. About seven feet in height, and swathed in a plaid ulster which made him look about six feet across, he caught the eye and arrested it. It was as if Nature had intended to make a gorilla, and had changed its mind at the last moment."[17] At the same time, his position as leader of a fascist group is connected to his better-known European counterparts: "I don't know if you have even seen those pictures in the papers of Dictators with tilted chins and blazing eyes, inflaming the populace with fiery words on the occasion of the opening of a new skittle alley, but that was what he reminded me of." (14) Later, as he stands over the narrator with a gun, he is described as looking "like a Dictator on the point of starting a purge." (43) Thus Spode's introduction gives the

impression of a figure that is out of place, conspicuous and, at the same time, reminiscent of European totalitarianism.

Over the course of the story, Spode emerges as a figure of violence, playing the role of would-be enforcer to Sir Watkyn Bassett, the magistrate in whose house the story takes place. At various points, Spode threatens to beat Wooster "to a jelly," (107) "break [Gussie's] neck" (135) and "kick his spine up through his hat." (247) Yet his threats all prove ineffective; indeed, in the one scene in which it looks as if Spode may get his way with Gussie, Wooster's old friend, he is instead hit over the head with an oil painting that subsequently gets trapped round his neck. Wooster then throws a sheet over his head, leaving Spode flailing around the room: "Hearing the rushing sound caused by Gussie's exiting, he made a leap in its general direction and took the inevitable toss. At the moment when Gussie, moving well, passed through the door, he was on the ground, more inextricably tangled than ever." (152) Spode thus moves from a figure of physical violence to a slapstick element of comedy. The danger he represents to Wooster and Gussie is neutralised when, in the final revelation of the novel, we learn that "Mr Spode designs ladies' underclothing. […] He is the founder and proprietor of the emporium in Bond Street known as Eulalie *Soeurs*." (302) As Jeeves and Wooster discuss:

> "Good Lord, Jeeves! No wonder he didn't want a thing like that to come out."
>
> "No, sir. It would unquestionably jeopardise his authority over his followers."
>
> "You can't be a successful Dictator and design women's underclothing." (303)

The ineffectuality and bluster of Spode hints at the ridiculousness of Spode's political and ideological ambitions. The peripherality of his organisation is laid bare by Wooster:

> The trouble with you, Spode, is that just because you have succeeded in inducing a handful of halfwits to disfigure the London scene by going about in black shorts, you think you're someone. You hear them shouting, "Heil, Spode!" and you imagine it is the Voice of the People. That is where you make your bloomer. What the Voice of the People is saying is, "Look at that

> frightful ass Spode swanking about in footer bags! Did you ever in your puff see such a perfect perisher?" (148-149)

Unlike Eugenia Malmains who, in the end of *Wigs on the Green*, appears to have won admirers to the fascist cause, Spode does not see his ambitions through and, when he inherits the title of Earl of Sidcup later in the series, he gives up his association with the Black Shorts. In this way, Wodehouse infers that Spode's association with fascism was merely an alternative route to social status, linked less to ideology than to the pursuit of power and infamy. Spode is thus to be understood as a caricature of Mosley, a man with an inflated sense of self-importance and a desire to wield power among the British elite. Coded as a slapstick figure of humour who is outwitted by other members of the British aristocracy, Spode's position as a potential fascist leader is never brought to fruition; instead, his actions form part of a rich tapestry of petty goings on that mean nothing in the grand scheme of the plot. Fascism, thus, is shown to be part of the aristocratic tradition of England, but one with little impact outside of the country house in which the majority of the story takes place.

The Foreignness of National Socialism: Alternative Histories of the Second World War

The most literal manifestation of the foreignness of fascism in Britain can be found in alternative histories in which Britain loses the Second World War and is occupied by German forces. While such works do not depict the British New or Far Right in a technical sense, they nevertheless engage with the possibility of the emergence of fascism on British soil, and they reveal something about the way that European far-right organisations can influence, through ideology and/or ambivalence as much as through coercion and control, the wider population. These examples tend to suggest that, while collaborator figures could indeed emerge in the case of occupation, they would swiftly be overcome by the powerful majority of the Brits whose staunch defence of British identity and culture almost always results in a victory, suggesting, in the overwhelming majority of cases, that British fascism can never become a fully formed part of the British social and political fabric.

The narrative of invasion is the starkest reminder of the alien nature of fascist ideology: quite literally, a new creed, system of governance, and way of living is imposed on the indigenous population, which

is forced to either passively accept its presence or actively resist. Power imbalances, language differences and resulting miscomprehensions, and ideological, familial and national loyalties all play a role. To reinforce the underlying sense of estrangement, spatial metaphors are frequently employed. Publishing houses, for example, tend to gravitate towards cover images that reveal the incongruity of British spaces and Nazi imposition, for example by foregrounding images of London landmarks destroyed by bombs (e.g., Davies, *Collaborator*), or by showing a Swastika laid atop a map of Britain or a British landmark (Cronin, *Against the Day*; Bowen, *No Retreat*; Stevens, *And all the King's Men*; Walters, *The Leader*; or the recent edition of Deighton's *SS-GB*, published by Grove Atlantic in 2023).[18] As the plots develop, this motif is extended to include the taking over of various British spaces such as aristocratic country houses, road blocks on British streets, and/or swastika flags lining the road to parliament. The British space thus becomes a site of disorientation, and the central characters are universally tasked with navigating the expectations and nuances of the new order. In much the same way that Rod Mengham describes literature of the Blitz as being defined by the "shock of disorientation," so too do alternative histories encode uncanny, strange and disjointed images to reveal the fundamentally foreign nature of Nazi ideology.[19]

Perhaps the most famous example is Len Deighton's *SS-GB.* Published in 1978, amid "the anxieties of Britain's early membership of the European communities," the novel appeared at a time when concerns about national identity and sovereignty were festering in the public psyche.[20] The novel is centrally concerned with the evolution of Douglas Archer, a police detective who speaks German and works closely with the occupying forces, leading to questions about his potential complicity. It is only towards the end of the novel that Douglas finally realigns himself with his English heritage, working with his colleagues in an attempt to save the King and steal him out of the country; though the attempt fails and the King dies, the mission provides the space necessary for American intervention, and the novel ends on a note of hope that all is not yet lost. The trajectory of the story thus reinforces the myth of the British underdog spirit and the steadfastness of the wider British population.

Like in other alternative histories, the landscape of London is of central symbolic importance. Deighton depicts the choking atmosphere of occupation in literal terms, symbolized through an increasingly dense

smog that makes the air itself stifling, mimicking the oppressiveness of occupation. Having been picked up by a member of the SS following a night spent with American journalist Barbara Barga, Douglas travels in a sidecar, exposed to air filled with "green, sooty fog typical of those that London suffered."[21] The fog becomes "much thicker" as the group approaches the river where the detective meets his German superior Oskar Huth busily engaged in conversation with Heinrich Himmler. The air becomes harder to breathe the closer the characters get to the German center of power.

When Douglas and his colleague Harry Woods attempt to break the King out of the Tower of London, the fog once again becomes significant. For Harry, the weather is ideal for their covert mission: "'They picked a good day for it.'" By contrast, the German sentries struggle to acclimatize: "'Damned filthy country,' he said. 'It's not fit for human habitation.'" (329) The conditions that had been used to highlight the oppressive cultural and political climate now appear to be actively taking a side. This doesn't last long. Once the ambulance they are using for the breakout breaks down, Harry and Douglas are forced to push the king in a wheelchair to find help: "The fog was getting into the King's lungs, and now he gave a body-racking cough." (336) The cityscape clearly induces bodily, visceral reactions that mirror the threat and claustrophobia of the socio-political situation; it is the King – the ultimate symbol of Britishness – that suffers most keenly, marking his own inability to acclimatize to the new political situation and the irreconcilable nature of the conditions of occupation.

The sense of estrangement from the city that is denoted by the fog is made manifest when the three men get lost:

> So this is what they were reduced to, thought Douglas. Two policemen and a crippled King, in a land that was no longer their own. They lost their way in the park and turned left until they saw the gas lamps of Constitutional Hill. Beyond that were the ruins of Buckingham Palace. Douglas looked down to see whether there was any sign of recognition from the King but there was none. (344)

The landscape is suddenly oblique and threatening, no longer the safe haven of home, but a place that is both foreign and disorientating. It is Douglas' knowledge of the terrain that allows them to make it

to the relative safety of Barbara's house: "'There will be a checkpoint at the Arch,' said Harry. […] 'We'll detour,' said Douglas. 'We'll take one of the backstreets, and cut up Curzon Street and across Park Lane into Hyde Park.' 'You'll be alright,' said Harry in the King's ear. 'Douglas knows what he's doing.'" (344) Hence, it is precisely Douglas' native knowledge that allows him to best the occupying forces and steal the King away from his captivity; although the monarch does not ultimately survive, this victory over the terrains of London symbolically reiterates Douglas' return to Britishness following a prolonged period where his loyalties were in doubt. The meteoric murkiness thereby hints at the complexities and opacity of the political situation and of Douglas's position in particular. In this way, the novel invokes the aesthetics of ambivalence that Seauve sets out in the introduction to this volume.

The uncanny depiction of the London space is thus employed by Deighton as a symbol of political imposition: the fog literally gets stuck in the throat, unsettling the central characters who must learn to navigate this new, smothering atmosphere in order to save the country from final defeat. The most likely candidate to succumb to allures of Nazism – Douglas himself, described in the early stages of the book as "exactly right for us" (9) by the Nazis, and as "a bloody gestapo bastard" (36) by Sylvia – Douglas's erstwhile lover and member of the resistance – eventually realigns himself with his British identity by pulling a gun on Huth and joining in the rescue effort. The message is clear: Nazism does not belong and cannot thrive on British soil; it is little more than a foreign import that must be swiftly overcome. The topographies and meteorology of London reinforce the binary opposition between foreign and native, Nazi and Briton, that are so central to the novel's thesis.

Broken Britain: the New Right as Symptom

If, in the literature discussed above, the far-right emerges as an uncanny, foreign, or absurd presence, elsewhere – particularly in the post-Brexit, post-Covid, and post-Conservative Party era, where debates about immigration, nationhood and sovereignty have become entwined with frustrations about declining living standards, the cost of living, and the degradation of public services – the New Right emerges not as a product of stale movements of the past, or as an alien force that sits uneasily in the British context, but rather as a manifestation and symptom of these social and political concerns. There thus appears to

be a historical shift in the way that fictional accounts deal with the phenomena of fascism in Britain, one that has been exacerbated in the post-Brexit era, whereby fascism evolves from a foreign threat to a domestic issue that gains particular prominence among the working classes. As Paul Stocker suggests, "Brexit was the product of an increasingly toxic and xenophobic British political atmosphere favourable to the radical right."[22] The uncanniness and absurdity that is evidenced in the examples discussed above therefore bleeds into contemporary literature (including post-Brexit literature), where broken cities, fractured relationships, disintegrating friendships and hidden pasts all create an air of a Britain irrevocably changed; a place that is once familiar and terrifying. But it is not the politics of the Far Right that is rendered foreign and other in these cases; rather Britain itself becomes the dystopian site that enables extremist thinking to develop. It is in this context that the New Right emerges most fully, as an uncanny reminder of the fragility of national cohesion and the ever-present possibility of disintegration. These texts do not straightforwardly condemn such movements as the antagonistic forces of society; they are a threat, certainly, but they feature primarily as indicators of a wider social collapse, of the disconnect between the government and people, and of the discontent of individuals. In this way, the Far Right is presented as a symptom of decay rather than its root cause. In other words, when fascism or the Far Right is no longer perceived as being tinged with foreignness – i.e., when it is depicted as an essential part of Britishness – fractures appear in other places, revealing social splinters and divisions – between left and right, white and non-white, Islam and Christianity, North and South, Westminster and the working classes. In these conditions, the Far Right is no longer perceived as marginal or strange; rather it is a "homegrown" manifestation of much wider discontent.

In Kenneth Steven's *2020*, the far-right White Rose organisation and Eric Semple, the disaffected right-wing MP, do not appear as aberrations on the political landscape of Britain; rather, with growing support from the working classes, particularly in the north of England, they develop as interrelated grassroots movements that give expression to a particular brand of working class Britishness. The Far Right here is seen as an intrinsic component of the tapestry of Britain, interwoven into the narrative as one of many political positions.

The story is told through a variety of mostly unnamed speakers, reporting to an unidentified audience that overlaps to an important degree with the reader. These numerous witness accounts converge around the central plot points: the bombing of a train travelling from Edinburgh to London; the rise of the far-right White Rose organisation, the political success of Eric Semple, a politician of the Far Right who is ideologically aligned with White Rose but seeks to distance himself from it; the kidnap and eventual murder of Semple, and the police interrogation of one of the perpetrators of the train bombing. Not only do the snippet-style observations reveal the complex layering of British voices, but they are also separated distinctly by an asterisk, which emphasises the gulf between accounts and amplifies the breakages across the page. As a result of this structure, gaps inevitably appear: a journalist is forced to stop reporting on a White Rose march following an outbreak of extreme violence; other witnesses hang up the phone, and the final moments of Semple all take place "off-screen." The motivations for the train bombings that spark the rise of populism are never revealed. Thus the reader is confronted with a form of broken witnessing, a palimpsest of passionate voices that encode at the level of narrative the social divisions that have allowed acts of extreme violence and hatred to occur. Such divisions are also represented geographically, as one commentator proposes: "I don't believe the two halves of England are much better glued together […] England's a very broken country."[23] It is significant in this regard that the train that was blown up at the beginning of the text was travelling from Edinburgh to London, from North to South, providing a first indication of the geographical fractures that underpin the novel. The north/south divide is an important trope in the text, operating also as a metaphor for the disconnection between politicians in Westminster and the realities of the working classes on the ground.

It is out of these fractures that Eric Semple and White Rose emerge. Semple stood as "an independent in name only," his "great strength was appealing to the working-class man" and the disaffected youths. (65) Despite being tagged as "a little Hitler" – a designation that "made him very uncomfortable" – Semple rises as a figurehead of the British working classes and a politically legitimate alternative to the perceived thuggishness of the White Rose organisation. (54) Not only this, but straightforward divisions between good and bad, right and wrong, are consistently undermined across the novel: Semple is humanised through his connections with his family, while the police are shown to be a dubious source

of justice when they kidnap and torture a terror suspect who later dies. Shariah Law is defended by one speaker as a necessary intervention to fight the ineffectiveness of the British justice system, though it is also a Shariah Court that condemns Semple to death in the end. Even the Prime Minister is revealed to harbour secrets that lead to his eventual resignation. While the book thus denotes a multicultural, multiracial and multi-political Britain, the far-right actors appear more as indicators of discontent than straightforward objects of condemnation or ostracization. Indeed, in the closing sections, Semple – once a figure of hate – is reconfigured as a tragic hero, a family man whose kidnap and murder threatens the sanctity of both home and democracy. The novel ends on a note of reconciliation, with Trish Semple, Eric's widow, calling for an end to the cycle of violence. With this, Steven reminds us that Britain must rise above division to overcome hatred and bloodshed. In its refusal to advocate for a particular moral or political perspective, and through the transformation of Semple from a far-right agitator to a beloved family man, the novel showcases the aesthetic ambiguity that shapes many narratives of the Far Right.

Like *2020*, *Perfidious Albion* by Sam Byers oscillates around a number of alternative perspectives; using a third person narration but shifting focalisation, the novel engages with a rich tapestry of voices. In an age of digital connection, where the boundaries between online identities and the real world become increasingly blurred, the novel showcases a series of broken relationships and disparate attitudes. The one potential antidote appears to be Trina – a young woman of colour living in a three-way relationship – and her family, whose unwavering love and support appear in contradiction to the dehumanising conditions around them. Nevertheless, by the end, there are signs that even this most devoted family will eventually falter under the pressure of Trina's work at Green – the big tech company finally revealed to be using the town as a "petri dish," testing reactions to controlled social conditions.

The Far Right emerges as one such reaction. Under the conditions set by the big corporations, "England Always" becomes a viable political force in the town of Edmondsbury, led by Hugo Bennington and supported, albeit discreetly, by Ronnie Childs's "Brute Force" association, a street gang of thugs adopting a fascist aesthetic. The grassroots nature of the far-right is manifest throughout the story: Hugo was, "according to his own personal branding, the man on the street";[24] the violence of fascism is described by one of the so-called "tech-dudes" as "just a *symptom*, yeah?" (6) and by "The Record" –

the popular right-wing tabloid – as an alternative to the "self-serving shitshow of London-centric political wheeler-dealing." (24-25) The tension here is thus not between Britishness and un-Britishness, as we have seen in previous examples, but rather between the rich and powerful elite and the rest of the (working class) population.

Support for "England Always" is depicted primarily through Darkin, an aging widower living alone (and refusing to leave) the crumbling Larchwood Estate. Darkin's flat is unkempt, unhygienic, with a series of mounting problems, including a loss of water supply and a broken window. Nevertheless, he resists pressure from the powerful corporation to leave, hinting at the British underdog spirit. For Darkin – an avid reader of "The Record":

> Hugo Bennington, the only politician Darkin had ever admired or believed in, was on his side. Bennington knew him, cared about him. He would, Darkin felt sure, when all this reached whatever boiling point it was moving towards, protect him. That knowledge, that certainty of support and promise of attention, warmed him, and gave him something he had reconciled himself to never having: hope. (212)

The appeal of England Always is thus as a representation of the people, particularly the white, male, working classes that had purportedly been forgotten by the suited politicians of London. The atmosphere of severe decline in which Darkin lives operates as a metaphor for post-Brexit broken Britain, where the big corporations reign without scrutiny while the masses are forced to live in an era of declining standards.

Robert Townsend, a blogger and journalist who begins as a social commentator criticising the goings-on at the Larchwood Estate, eventually gives up his principles having finally attained some level of career success by morphing into a supporter of Bennington and the far-right. As Jess, Robert's now-ex-partner, muses: "For so many others, she thought, for her, hatred was real. For Robert, it was a career opportunity." (382) In much the same way that Jaspar Aspect comes to change his views of Eugenia Malmains in *Wigs on the Green*, Townsend's transition from antiestablishment social warrior to racist bigot suggests the pervasiveness and appeal of right-wing thinking, which provides, for Townsend at

least, a route to validation. In the world of the novel, then, ethical values and ideological commitments become secondary concerns, and individuals are reduced to superficial posturing and digital performances of inauthentic identities. In this context, few genuine relationships survive.

The true face of the Far Right is eventually laid bare: Bennington is revealed as the sender of bizarre intimate photographs, Brute Force – dressed in fascist streetwear – arrive to "protect" Darkin and end up assaulting his only friend and true protector, and it is Bennington that finally betrays Darkin by convincing him to leave the estate for his own political and personal gain. With Bennington eventually replaced as the head of "England Always" following the embarrassment of the scandal of intimate photographs, and because his party is no longer considered suitably efficient for the modern world – stuck as it is in nostalgic ideas of the past – right-wing politics are, in the end, not the "big evil" of the novel; it is, as a minor character notes in the beginning, merely a symptom of a society that has been forced into decay through the actions of the big corporations and the changing nature of the digital world. It is both symptomatic and, perhaps even because of this symptomatic nature, inconsequential in the grand scheme of society's evolution.

Conclusion

The British Far Right has, as noted at the outset, never enjoyed substantial electoral success, but it has continued to exist on the margins of society, tapping into fears and anxieties prevalent at any particular cultural moment. Much of the public discourse that arises from these organisations is based on some form of nationalist sentiment, connecting to what Benedict Anderson famously calls the "imagined community" in order to establish parameters of social belonging.[25] Yet wartime associations with European fascism and National Socialism have contributed to the limited appeal of the Far Right, which is commonly understood as a foreign phenomenon, one that Britain fought to defend against, and one that is fundamentally opposed to the values and character of the country. Contemporary organisations, particularly those of the New Right, often fight hard against the stigma of their forebears, but the superficiality of their disclaimers and their open hostility towards marginalised groups means that they are rarely convincing in these claims.

Consequently, associations with older forms of Fascism and Nazism often colour and shape fictional representations of the British far-right, articulating the complex interconnections between home-grown extremism and the global political and historical economy with which it interacts. By contrast, in more contemporary accounts – particularly in post-Brexit fiction – emphasis is placed on British decline; it is the fractures and decay of Broken Britain that provides the space necessary for right-wing groups to emerge. Even here, though, hints of a longer fascist tradition can be discerned: right-wing characters are accused of similarities to totalitarian leaders, and street gangs are shown to draw on the visualities of other movements, particularly the Blackshirt uniform. If the primary focus of these books is on the domestic concerns that enable far-right thinking to gain traction, they also often contain subtle allusions to history, brief reminders of the potential consequences of extremist thinking.

It is worth noting, here, that social class plays a prominent role, as it does in much of the discourse of the New and Far Right: if, in the early pre-war accounts of Nancy Mitford and P.G. Wodehouse, it is the ennui of the elite classes that facilitates the emergence of fascism – a premise that is taken up in a number of more contemporary novels, including Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989), Jo Walton's *Farthing* (published as part of her "Small Change" trilogy in 2006) and Cressida Connolly's *After the Party* (2018) – in other works it is the lower classes who feel the squeeze of economic and social decline most forcefully, and who therefore turn to street gangs and "straight-talking/working class" politicians as a necessary antidote to the ineffective ivory tower of Westminster. In these cases, the issues return from the international to the national sphere, and at the same time, they move from being understood as the peripheral concerns of an out-of-touch elite to grass-roots movements that reveal the possibility and potential of the New Right in contemporary Britain.

Notes:

[1] Mosley's organisation was in fact not the first party in Britain to label itself as a fascist movement. For example, the British Fascists – originally called the British Fascisti in acknowledgement of Mussolini's influence – was founded in 1923, though it never enjoyed the political success or notoriety associated with the BUF.
[2] Matthew Goodwin, *New British Fascism: Rise of the British National Party* (Routledge, 2011), xii.

[3] Dan Stone, *Responses to Nazism in Britain, 1933-1939: Before War and the Holocaust* (Palgrave, 2003): 165.
[4] John E. Richardson, "British Fascism, Fascist Culture, British Culture," *Patterns of Prejudice* 53 (2019): 236-252, 245; Julie Gottlieb and Thomas P. Linchan, "Introduction: Culture and the British Far Right" in *The Culture of Fascism: Visions of the Far Right in Britain*, edited by Gottlieb and Linchan (I. B. Tauris, 2004), 1-12, 2; Nigel Copsey, "Britain's Far Right and the 2015 General Election: a View from History," *Race and Elections*, edited by Omar Khan and Kjartan Sveinsson (Runnymede, 2015), 11-12, 12.
[5] For a discussion of the latter, see Richard Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain* (I.B. Tauris, 1998), xiii; Mike Cronin, 'Introduction: "'Tomorrow we Live': the Failure of British Fascism?" In *The Failure of British Fascism? The Far Right and the Fight for Political Recognition* (Macmillan, 1996), 1-11, 8; Roger Griffin, "British Fascism: the Ugly Duckling" in the same volume, 141-165, 164. For a more contemporary discussion: Paul Stocker, *English Uprising: Brexit and the Mainstreaming of the Far Right* (Melville House, 2017).
[6] Denis Perie, "Some Social Achievements of the Third Reich," *Spearhead*, August-September, 1964, 1: 5.
[7] For further discussion, see: Nigel Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain* (Macmillan, 2000); Jeremy Tranmer, "The Other as a Home-Grown Foreigner: British Anti-Fascists and the Extreme Right," in *L'autre*, edited by Janine Dove-Rumé, Michel Naumann and Tri Tran (Press Universitaires François-Rabelais, 2017): 361-370; Dan Stone, "Anti-Fascist Europe Comes to Britain: Theorising Fascism as a Contribution to Defeating it," in Stone, *The Holocaust, Fascism and Memory* (Palgrave, 2013): 67-80.
[8] Tony Kushner, "The Fascist as Other? Racism and Neo-Nazism in Contemporary Britain," *Patterns of Prejudice* 28.1 (1994): 27-45, 28.
[9] For further discussion, see: Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz* (Pimlico, 1992 [1991]); Mark Donnelly, *Britain in the Second World War*, (Routledge, 1999); Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson (eds), *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War* (Bloomsbury, 2014); Mark Connelly, *We Can Take It! Britain and the Memory of the Second World War* (Pearson, 2004).
[10] Kushner, "The Fascist as Other?" 44-45.
[11] Richardson, "Ploughing the Same Furrow?" 106.
[12] Judy Suh, *Fascism and Antifascism in 20th Century British Fiction* (Palgrave, 2009), 5.
[13] Lena Seauve, "The Metapolitics of Fiction: New-Right Narratives in Europe and the Americas," 1-21, 4. CITATION INFORMATION TBC.
[14] Cited in Charlotte Mosley, "Introduction" to Nancy Mitford, *Wigs on the Green*, (Penguin, 2010 [1935]), xvi.
[15] Cited in Mosley, "Introduction," xi.
[16] Nancy Mitford, *Wigs on the Green*, (Penguin, 2010 [1935]), 7. Hereafter cited by page number.
[17] P.G. Wodehouse, *Code of the Woosters* (Penguin, 2022 [1938]), 14. Hereafter cited by page number.
[18] Murray Davies, *Collaborator* (Sharpe Books, 2018 [2003]); Cronin, *Against the Day* (Oxford University Press, 1998); John Bowen, *No Retreat* (Mandarin, 1995 [1994]); Stevens, *And All the King's Men* (Pan Books, 1991 [1990]); Walters, *The Leader* (Headline, 2003); Deighton, *SS-GB* (Grove Atlantic, 2023 [1978]).
[19] Rod Mengham, "British Fiction of the war," in *Literature of World War II*, edited by Marina MacKay (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 26-42, 26.
[20] Fintan O'Toole, *Heroic Failure: Brexit and the Politics of Pain* (Head of Zeus, 2018), 29.
[21] Deighton, *SS-GB*, 137. Hereafter cited by page number.
[22] Paul Stocker, *English Uprising*, (Melville House, 2017), Kindle Edition, loc. 123.
[23] Steven, *2020*, 139. Hereafter cited by page number.
[24] Byers, *Perfidious Albion*, 76. Hereafter cited by page number.
[25] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 2006 [1983]).