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Introduction

This book considers the ways in which memory was represented in novels during the 1940s. Memory could feature as a structural device, with, for example, the loss of a protagonist's memory causing narrative complications. Its workings were also, on occasion, discussed and analysed within the narrative. In fact, these two aspects of memory – its structural and thematic functions – are not cleanly separable from each other, and their interaction can assist us in understanding how memory was conceptualized during this period. In this introduction, I will describe some of the ideas about memory, and about the condition of the novel, which were current in the interwar years. I will also consider debates about what the role of the novel ought to be that appeared once the conflict had begun. Such debates, which mainly took place in the pages of literary journals, are important and interesting, but I will not be confining my discussion to the 'highbrow' or 'literary' end of the fiction spectrum. Critics including Nicola Humble have recently acknowledged that the divisions we now perceive between literary fiction, usually of a modernist kind, and popular fiction, usually closer to realism, were not as absolute in the interwar years as they might now appear. During the 1920s, for example, 'middlebrow novelists were quick to adopt many of the themes and stylistic developments of the avant-garde, making meaningful distinctions very hard to draw' (Humble 19). John Baxendale and Chris Pawling have similarly argued that, '[c]ategories such as highbrow/middlebrow/lowbrow are not embedded in the texts to which they refer [...]: rather, they function as elements in a socially constructed system of taste' (52). The consideration of memory is one area in which supposedly 'middlebrow' writing, and genre fiction, can be seen to touch on concerns to do with the representation of subjectivity that might more usually be associated with modernism. Modernist conceptions and

depictions of memory are important but by the 1940s these ideas were no longer the sole preserve of writers who would usually be described as modernist.

Another narrative form in which an interest in memory can be discerned at this period is film. A number of the novels that I will be considering here were made into films and differences between novel and adaptation as regards the incorporation of flashbacks or the use of point of view, for example, can prove illuminating. The novel does not necessarily provide a more complex or sophisticated narrative of memory than film, and film has its own range of techniques for evoking the subjective experience of, for example, memory loss or recovery. But cinema is itself used as a reference point in a number of the novels I will be examining. As Keith Williams has argued, discussing the period 1930–45, new media ‘irrevocably altered the consciousness of writers at the most fundamental levels’, and, in particular, ‘[c]inema seemed to rupture the very fabric of the space-time continuum’ (112). Both film and photography are often cited as metaphors for how memory works, comparisons that can shed light on attitudes towards memory itself, the medium with which it is being compared, and the interaction between the two. In some instances, film and photography are depicted as objective, unchanging and straightforwardly interpretable images of a past event; the apparent materiality of these images appears to act as a guarantee of their reliability.¹ This attitude can also be reflected in the way in which film itself depicts memory, but I will also identify examples that appear to challenge this notion of memory as fixed and easily recoverable.

Some critics have downplayed the significance of the literature of the 1940s, suggesting that historical circumstances necessarily circumscribed the viable types of literary production and experiment. Surveying the scene in 1951, P. H. Newby suggested: ‘It is debatable [...] whether so overwhelming and universal a catastrophe as the late war can be reckoned the sort of experience out of which an artist can create’ (13). For Bernard Bergonzi, in 1993, ‘Although reading was so popular in wartime it was not a good period for the novel’ (27), with no significant new novelists emerging. More recently, Maggie Clune, Gary Day and Chris Macguire have claimed that ‘[t]he nature of the experience was such that it proved difficult for authors to write about it. Elizabeth Bowen, indeed, failed to produce anything at all’ (62). Whilst the first part of this statement may be accurate, citing Elizabeth Bowen as an example of a writer who produced ‘nothing at all’ is not, as it ignores both the fact that Bowen was engaged from 1943 onwards in writing *The Heat of the Day* (1949), and

that two volumes of her short stories were published during the war years.² This is not to minimize the impact of wartime conditions on literary production and attitudes towards writing. Joseph McAleer notes that, at least in part because of paper rationing, the number of new works of fiction fell from 2046 in 1936 to 1095 in 1944 (52).³ But new writing was being produced, even if it is not necessarily easy to categorize in literary-historical terms. Since the mid-1990s, critics including Jenny Hartley, Adam Piette, Gill Plain and Mark Rawlinson have done much to challenge the idea that the war years were a literary hiatus; here I will consider the origins of this resilient attitude.

Debates about literature that were underway during the 1930s, as well as the pressure of immediate exigencies, necessarily influenced literary culture in the following decade. In some of the novels I will be examining, the 1930s were themselves remembered and the progress of literary history can itself be seen as a sequence of remembering, mis-remembering and forgetting. As Renate Lachmann suggests, 'there is no erasure in cultural memory; what is forgotten can be culturally reactivated and can take on its own (or a different) semiotic value' (23). I will not be principally concerned with instances of direct influence between one text and another, but it is important to recognize that both genre fiction and more traditionally 'reputable' literary products rely, to some extent, on the reader's ability to remember (or indeed forget) other examples of a similar kind. This process, while it might have been affected by the conditions of wartime, was not completely halted. The new conditions might be seen by some as demanding new methods, but there were still writers who attempted, often with success, to refigure existing methods for the current situation.

Narrative and memory between the wars

Like the 1940s, the 1930s has often been considered 'a fallow decade so far as the novel in England is concerned. The rich harvest of modernism had been gathered in, and had [...] left the ground impoverished.' (Widdowson, 'Between' 133) Writing in the 1970s, Widdowson attempted to correct this view by stressing the variety of types of experiment perceptible in 1930s writing, including not only 'the structural and textual discoveries of modernism' but also 'documentary reportage, fable, allegory, satire and dystopia' (134). Andy Croft has shown how a variety of popular literary forms, including the thriller, were mobilized in the belief that 'literature was no longer just another way of interpreting

the world, but a way of changing it too.' (*Red Letter Days* 187) More recently, though, critics such as Keith Williams and Steven Matthews have found it necessary to counter 'the persistent aftermyth of the thirties as a homogeneous anti-modernist decade' (1), calling for a renewed acknowledgement of the extent to which modernism persisted, and indeed developed and changed, in response to a new political situation. However, the interchanges that could occur between these different types of literary representation are also important. Valentine Cunningham identifies James Hilton's *Lost Horizon* (1933) as the novel that 'incited a great deal in Auden and Isherwood's *The Ascent of F6* [1936] (mountains, a lama, a frontier drama) and presented a myth of attractive longevity for Huxley's *After Many a Summer* [1939] to undo' (*British Writers* 98). For Cunningham, Hilton's work is evidence that it is 'often the minor writers who express most fully the meanings of a time' (124). The reputations of particular writers, or indeed particular types of writing, can also shift over time. This process is reflected in the anxiety Virginia Woolf expressed about how her work would be received in comparison not only with a writer such as Katherine Mansfield, but with others, including Rose Macaulay, who, as Nicola Humble points out, would not usually figure alongside Woolf or Mansfield in considerations of modernism (26–7).⁴

Inevitably, perceptions of what the key literary ideas or influences might be at a particular point in time will shift according to what kind of narrative of the period one wishes to create, and the temporal perspective from which one is writing. To give a further example, in *Lions and Shadows* (1938), Christopher Isherwood describes how, in planning his novel *The Memorial* (1932), he intended to adopt modernism as a structural device whilst retaining the subject matter of a family saga:

I would tell the story of a family; its births and deaths, ups and downs, marriages, feuds and love affairs [...] The worst of all epics, except the very greatest, is that their beginnings are so dull [...] epics, I reasoned, should start in the middle and go backwards, then forwards again [...] which sounds Einstein-ish and brilliantly modern. (182)

This self-deprecatory analysis of his own narrative technique implies that Isherwood perceives an amount of opportunism, or at least naïveté, in his own early attempts at experiment. However, it is notable that it is the 'Einstein-ish' presentation of time that is considered here as marking

the text as 'modern', rather than, for example, the consideration of social problems. What seems striking now about *The Memorial* is not so much the disruption of chronology in its narrative structure – it is divided into four sections that deal with the events of 1928, 1920, 1925 and 1929 in turn – but its use of a quasi-modernist narrative technique in the depiction of the protagonists' perceptions of the legacy of war. Widdowson suggests that 'the influence of Virginia Woolf's fiction is appreciable in *The Memorial*' ('Between' 156) and characterizes this novel as a work in which, both formally and in terms of its content, Isherwood attempted to confront the legacy of the previous generation. From the perspective of 1938, however, what was 'Einstein-ish and brilliantly modern' at the start of the decade seems, to judge from Isherwood's tone, shopworn. According to Janet Montefiore, this tone is characteristic of memoirs produced by men of Isherwood's generation in the late 1930s: 'The writer's autobiographical gaze moves [...] between the years of his growth and the ominous moment of writing [...] [H]is awareness of writing at a "present moment" of political crisis retrospectively illuminates his youthful illusions' (47). The narratives that I am concerned with here also show a concern not with the past in isolation from what has happened since, but with the process by which the past is revisited or recovered.

However, neither an explicit engagement with psychological ideas and terminology, nor a commitment to the detailed representation of consciousness, are prerequisites for a narrative concerning itself with memory. An important source of evidence for identifying the prevalent understandings of memory in the interwar years are novels themselves, but the types of discourse about memory in extra-literary fields that over time fed into and became naturalized by literary representations should also be considered. Stephen Rose has shown how descriptions of memory processes in the emergent science of psychology can be mapped onto contemporary developments in communications technology; comparisons with existing technologies would be used as a way of positing how memory might function. Thus, where Plato records Socrates' comparison between the action of memory and the impress of a signet ring on a wax block (99–100 [191d]), late nineteenth and early twentieth-century experimenters drew on more advanced technologies.⁵ Rose suggests, for example, that the discovery that the nervous system functioned through electrical impulses, led the brain to be considered as 'first a telegraphic signalling system and later, at the start of the [twentieth] century, a telephone exchange' (77). Importantly, however, these and succeeding technologies do not only provide metaphors through which

the functioning of memory can be described: 'photography, film, video and audiotape, and above all the computer [...] restructure consciousness and memory [...] imposing new orders upon our understanding of and actions upon the world' (Rose 95).

What Rose points to here is a complicating factor in the drawing of comparisons between memory and, for example photography. The referent of a photograph can be used as a means of representing linguistically, through metaphor, the manner in which we might perceive events from the past; we might believe that, when reflecting on past events, we conjure up images that are in some way like photographic images. This seems to be the implication of the statement at the start of Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939): 'I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking. [...] Some day, all this will have to be developed, carefully printed, fixed' (13). But an actual photograph represents these past events in an apparently similar fashion and, in acting as a supplement to memory can cause a blurring between the remembered and the perceived. Memory can be said to be like a photograph, but the comparison can also be reversed as it is at the start of Aldous Huxley's *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936) when the narrator observes: 'The snapshots had become almost as dim as memories' (5).⁶ This reversibility allows us, as Michael H. Whitworth has argued

to understand how metaphors can circulate between science, literature, and other areas of culture. Not only can scientists understand new phenomena in terms of familiar material objects and social institutions, but non-scientists can defamiliarize the familiar, reconceiving it in metaphors provided by new scientific theories. (*Einstein's Wake* 12)

However, as Laura Otis warns, 'Metaphor, an assertion of similarity that can be so fruitful in opening up new possibilities of inquiry and expression, can easily evolve into an assertion of identity' (33). Otis is concerned with the slippage between descriptions of social and organic processes in late nineteenth-century scientific writing; in relation to twentieth-century writing, one important (and misleading) identification that can occur is between memory and either photographs or the cinema, because, as I have indicated, this can imply that memory is fixed and easily retrievable.⁷ In terms of Rose's description of the development of analogies alongside the development of technology, cinema is one of the most important points of comparison in the period I am discussing, with implicit and explicit references being made to it in a number of texts under consideration. The relationship here works in both directions,

as Maureen Turim explains in her study of the flashback:

The etymology of the term 'flashback' includes a fascinating migration into our language beyond its original reference to narrative technique. It has now been adopted by psychology to refer to the spontaneous recall of a memory image [...] The phrase even has a more general colloquial use to describe an individual's personal memories [...] This colloquial use of the term indicates how movies as popular culture begin to affect the way people think about their own experience. Cinematic renderings of storytelling and memory processes may have borrowed from literature and sought to reproduce human memory mimetically, but ironically, the cinematic presentation of the flashback affects not only how modern literature is organized [...] but perhaps also how audiences remember and how we describe those memories. (5)

Both Turim and the narratologist Gerard Genette recognize that interchanges have also occurred at the level of film and literary theory. Turim notes Genette's use of the term 'analepsis' to describe, broadly speaking, the narrative equivalent to the flashback and Genette himself looks to the structuralist film theorist Christian Metz in his discussion of the double temporality of narrative (Turim 8–10, Genette 33). Part of my intention is to defamiliarize the kinds of comparison that Turim, Rose and Otis identify and to suggest why particular conceptions of memory might have seemed to be especially suitable at the historical period that is my focus here.⁸

Discourses of memory

This type of cultural tendency towards a particular way of describing memory can be placed alongside the more self-conscious attempts of some writers, like Isherwood by his own account, to engage with current thinking about time and memory. The influence of the ideas of theorists including William James and Henri Bergson on modernist writing has often been noted. In particular, James' use of the image of the '*the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life*' (239) was taken up as a means of expressing a resistance to the exigencies of clocktime, albeit one still expressed in linear terms. Bergson, meanwhile, rejected the spatial aspect of this image, as Stephen Kern explains: 'James saw a sharp distinction between recent memories that are part of the present and distant memories that are recollected as something separate; Bergson

emphasized the constant interconnection of all past experiences with the present regardless of how far back they may have occurred.’ (*Culture* 44) There are similarities here with Virginia Woolf’s description of experience as being not ‘a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged’ but ‘a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope’ (‘Modern Fiction’ 8). As Whitworth notes, ‘Leonard Woolf doubted that [Virginia Woolf] had ever read Bergson [but] [o]ne may reply that Bergsonism was part of the intellectual atmosphere of the years from 1910 to 1912’ (‘Virginia Woolf’ 147). Woolf could therefore have had indirect contact with these ideas, which William Troy, writing in 1932, considers ‘the most popular ideology of her generation’ (85). Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) shows, in its depiction of Clarissa Dalloway, how past and present experiences can become entwined in complex ways, although this does not mean that the distinction between memory and present experiences is ever completely effaced. Nor does Woolf ignore the potential impact of historical events on the subjective life. The inclusion in the narrative of the psychologically damaged war veteran Septimus Smith allows Woolf to explore a different type of memory, one which intrudes with a violence that is counter to the free-flowing associations experienced by Clarissa (although this is not to say that these are without their unpleasant aspects). Smith’s experiences illustrate the paradox identified by John Talbott, that ‘“flashback”, a vehicle employed in cinematic and literary time travel, to evoke a past distinct and different from the present, also applies to an experience that obliterates such distinctions’ (440). This type of traumatic memory – traumatic both in that it is uncomfortable to experience and brings back an event that was itself uncomfortable – is relevant to the discussion of many Second World War texts, especially those I discuss in Chapter 1 which attempt to forge a connection between the aftermath of the previous war and the present conflict.

Woolf’s modernist style simultaneously depicts and enacts a particular understanding of memory and subjectivity. Woolf is known to have read Proust, and his exploration of ‘involuntary memory’, when an external sensory stimulus provokes the vivid reawakening of past sentiments and feelings, also contributes to the manner in which the past re-emerges into the present in modernist works such as *Mrs Dalloway*. At the end of the 1930s, George Orwell uses involuntary memory in a realist context, when, in *Coming up for Air* (1939), George Bowling reflects: ‘The past is a curious thing [...] it’s just a set of facts that you’ve learned [...] [t]hen some chance sight or sound or smell, especially smell, sets you going, and the past doesn’t merely come back to you, you’re actually *in* the past’ (30). Samuel Beckett explains that: ‘involuntary memory is an

unruly magician and will not be importuned. It chooses its own time and place for the performance of its miracle'(33–34). George's own reverie about his youth is provoked by seeing the name of King Zog of Albania on a newspaper hoarding, and by the smell of horse manure. Attempting to encompass new understandings of consciousness within a realist framework, as do many of the novelists under discussion here, may produce less startling results stylistically than modernist experiment, but it can nevertheless attest to the widespread currency of these ideas.

Remembering is an important means by which the protagonists of a number of novels, like both Septimus Smith and George Bowling, attempt to understand the effect on their lives of their involvement in historical events. An understanding of the damage that might be wrought on memory by involvement in war did not necessarily imply an acquaintance with psychoanalytic ideas on this topic. Certainly, many psychoanalytic ideas did filter into public consciousness during the interwar years, but it was Freud's ideas about sexuality and family relations that appear to have been most prevalent rather than his work specifically on memory, although the former ideas do frequently invoke the processes of memory at some level.⁹ Heather Ingman suggests that 'repression, sublimation, dreams, the Oedipus complex [and] childhood trauma' (28) were the key ideas that became widely known and were evident in 'middlebrow' fiction during the late 1920s.¹⁰ Looking back to the interwar years in a lecture delivered in 1944, E. M. Forster identifies the ideas 'connected with the awful name of Freud' especially 'the subconscious, [...] the persistence of the irrational, [...] the importance of dreams and the prevalence of day-dreaming', as having given 'great enrichment to the art of fiction' (268). When authors make explicit references to psychoanalysis, their tone can help to elicit whether they are presuming a familiarity, on the reader's part, with the concepts being cited. Aldous Huxley makes such a presumption in his 1925 novel *Those Barren Leaves*, when Mr Cardan laments the fact that, 'Too much light conversation about the Oedipus complex and anal erotism [sic] is taking the edge off love' (39). However, the appeal to a knowing reader can also be found in texts aimed at a popular audience. In *And Now All This* (1932), their follow-up to the debunking history book *1066 and All That* (1930), W. C. Sellar and R. J. Yeatman include a chapter on 'Psycho-Babycraft' which plays with the notion of polymorphous perversity (redesignated 'polyversive permorphosis' [21]), as well as dream analysis. These sketches were first published in *Punch* and the *Daily Mail*, and therefore support Ingman's claim of a broad familiarity with psychoanalysis in

the 'middlebrow' reader. The work of Freud's rivals also gained currency: Dr Bickleigh, the village general practitioner who is the protagonist of Francis Iles' crime novel *Malice Aforethought* (1931), is able to diagnose himself with an inferiority complex, a term associated with the work of Alfred Adler. Indeed, in his survey of the 1930s, Malcolm Muggeridge contended that during that decade 'Inferiority, Oedipus and other complexes, were made available for all, and even typists knew that they were not fond of apples for nothing' (286). In the case of memory, particularly damaged memory, many authors appear to have felt free to devise aetiologies to suit the circumstances of their characters, as George Orwell does in *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935), but a lack of detailed knowledge of Freud or other theorists does not mean that their conceptions of memory are lacking in complexity.

Whilst psychoanalysis could be seen as focusing on autobiographical memory, and the manner in which earlier life events might persist or reimpose themselves in the present, in interwar psychology and popularisations of it, positivist models were dominant. The desire to establish psychology as a science with an experimental basis led to a focus on types of memory that could be measured easily in an experimental context. As Janice Haaken suggests, a positivist approach to memory tends to minimize the 'interdependence of the observer and observed' (43), and positivist experiments might be based around the remembering and recall of decontextualized lists of words or abstract symbols. Frederic Bartlett's *Remembering* (1932), which used narratives and recognizable images rather than abstract signs or forms as its experimental material, and is still often cited in the literature on memory, was important in challenging this 'storehouse' model of memory. However, the disciplines of educational and industrial psychology, which had become established during the 1920s, were more concerned with memory as an aspect of training, an exploitable and improvable tool rather than a speculative faculty. (Cyril Burt, writing in 1942, notes that these and other branches of psychology had their roots in work undertaken during the 1914–18 war with the intention of improving the efficiency of both combatants and civilians.) Popular memory systems such as Pelmanism, which Robert Graves and Alan Hodge describe as the 'first form in which psychology reached the wider public' (54), promoted self-improvement based on the training of memory. The Pelman technique was based on condensing the information to be remembered through the use of alphabetical and numerical codes, and concentration and observation were considered essential prerequisites for successful registering and recall of material. Over the first half of the twentieth century, the

Pelman Institute's courses placed increasing emphasis on the potential for improving one's financial and social status that these techniques could provide; their course books also show that by the mid-century, mastering willpower has been supplemented by overcoming complexes as a central element of self-improvement. This type of approach conceptualizes memory as an instrument, ignoring involuntary or associative memory, which might arise unbidden in disturbing ways, and the tension between these two aspects of memory is apparent in a number of the texts I will be considering here.¹¹

Psychoanalysis and psychology were not the only available discourses for the understanding of memory at this time. Isherwood's reference to Einstein is one example of how literary writers attempted to absorb the impact of new discoveries across the sciences, but there are other thinkers whose influence has not been so widely acknowledged. Graves and Hodge, writing in 1940, note the prominence in the late 1920s and early 1930s of the ideas, now largely forgotten, of J. W. Dunne. His book *An Experiment with Time* (1927) posited a means of explaining the phenomena of the predictive dream through a rethinking of the process of time that also had an impact on subjectivity. This dual focus on time and subjectivity means that Dunne situates his work in relation to both physics and psychology. Explaining dreams that foretell the future, Dunne suggests that the consciousness, within the dream, that perceives these events, is a kind of sub-personality, an observer of one's experience existing in another temporal dimension, able to encompass both 'past' and 'future'. Dunne's conclusion was that individuals each have a soul 'whose immortality, being in other dimensions of Time, does not clash with the obvious ending of the individual in the physiologist's Time dimension' (*Experiment* 207). Thus Dunne suggests that 'the old distinctions between past, present and future are meaningless, and that their coexistence is a powerful and valid reality' (Evans 55) as well as implying 'an immortality without the necessity of a deity' (Evans 57). One writer who found Dunne's ideas suggestive was H. G. Wells, who initially got to know Dunne through Dunne's work as an aeronautical engineer, and in Wells' 'The Queer Story of Brownlow's Newspaper' (1932) Dunne's theories are a possible explanation for Brownlow's receipt of a newspaper from the future. *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933) develops this conceit further as well as introducing some playful intertextuality. The body of the novel consists of a history book from the year 2106, which, in the prefatory chapter, Raven claims to have transcribed after dreaming about reading it. Wells' earlier story is constructed as a pre-echo Raven's 'actual' experience: 'If I'd known this before, I wouldn't have written *Brownlow's*

Newspaper' (Wells, *Shape* 17), the narrator, 'Wells', comments when his friend reveals what has happened.¹²

Dunne's ideas, and particularly his ideas about memory, were taken up by other writers, including James Hilton, whose novel *Random Harvest* (1941) I will discuss in the next chapter. In the interwar years, however, the most thoroughgoing (and not uncritical) engagement with Dunne's theories came from J. B. Priestley. In particular, *Time and the Conways* (1937) dramatises Dunne's theory that it is sometimes possible for an individual to 'observe' the present from a point in the future.¹³ Whilst such ideas, like those of Bergson, are concerned with perceptions of time rather than memory as such, they do have an impact on how memory is conceived. Disturbing the unidirectional relation between past and present leads to an uncertainty as to what is recall of the past and what projection from the future. However, like P. D. Ouspensky's idea of 'eternal recurrence', which Priestley explored in *I Have Been Here Before* (1937), Dunne's conception of time does not disallow the possibility of change. The individual is not seen as being irrevocably trapped in an ever-repeating cycle, and indeed the possibility of instituting change in one's own life or another's is seen as a motive for self-improvement. Dunne's mathematically expressed explanation for his ideas in the second half of *An Experiment with Time* may well have defeated many of his readers, but their general import did filter through, not least because of their exposition in works such as Priestley's. Agatha Christie also attests to the impact of Dunne's work, claiming that reading *An Experiment with Time* helped her to see things 'more in proportion; myself as less large; as only one facet of a whole, in a vast world with hundreds of interconnections' (qtd. in Morgan 194). Graham Greene refers to the potential for Dunne's work to explain apparent 'previsions' when trying to account for incidents in some of his novels that seem to anticipate things that actually happened later: 'Dunne has written [...] of dreams which draw their symbols from the future as well as the past. Is it possible that a novelist may do the same, since so much of his work comes from the same source as dreams?' (73).¹⁴ The narrator of Frank Baker's *Miss Hargreaves: A Fantasy* (1940), in which a character invented by two friends for a joke takes on all-too-real physical form, comments: 'I'd read Dunne's books on the past, present and future; and though I couldn't follow half of what he said, it did seem to me there was a quality about time which had nothing whatever to do with clocks and calendars' (100).¹⁵ Beginning his study with an examination of experiences with which the reader is likely to be familiar – dreams that appear to predict the future, the experience of *déjà vu* – gives

Dunne's theories roots in the everyday that can provide a semblance of accessibility.¹⁶

Some of the novels I will discuss in this study are concerned not with damaged memory, or with the kinds of new ideas I have outlined, but with 'normal' memory processes. On the one hand, it is when memory does not function properly that an understanding of what constitutes proper functioning can be ascertained; on the other, a lack of apparent problematization, or the naturalization, of memory can also be revealing about a writer's attitude to the past and its relation to the present. A desire for continuity between past and present, or a longing for the return of the values or way of life that appear to be lost can be interpreted as nostalgic and, often, reactionary. It can seem to demand a neutralizing of historical processes through a focus on individual actions and desires and, as Alison Landsberg has suggested in a different context, 'threatens to prevent individuals from acting in the present, from being productive, politically engaged members of society' (144). However, as Alison Light has argued in a discussion of the interwar works of Ivy Compton-Burnett, the family group, often the focal point for apparently nostalgic or escapist narratives, can be seen 'not as the opposite of, or different to, the public stream of history but as the place where its meanings are both learnt and shaped' (44). The relationship between individual memory and public or collective expressions of memory also comes under scrutiny by George Orwell in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), where the latter is seen as crucial in underpinning the former: 'When there were no external records that you could refer to, even the outline of your own life lost its sharpness' (34). Winston Smith experiences disappointment when the old man he meets in the prole quarter remembers only a 'rubbish-heap of details' (96) rather than anything that might either correct the 'official' record or ratify his own recollections. Attempts to forge a shared memory can result in nostalgia; particularly in my third chapter, I will consider why nostalgia, a positive valuation of the past, has come to have almost solely retrogressive and negative connotations. Its escapist aspect might seem irresponsible or disloyal in a time of national crisis but a longing for security could be seen as a not unreasonable reaction to the uncertainties of wartime.

Literature in wartime

The question of what place literature should have in wartime was a manifold one. Not only were there discussions as to how a writer, particularly a novelist, might, at the purely practical level, be able to continue working

amidst the disruptions of war; there was also a debate about whether writers should have a role in the war effort, and what this might comprise. Inevitably, the terms of such debates shifted as the war progressed. For example, in 'The Ivory Shelter', published in October 1939, Cyril Connolly suggests that as writers had failed to prevent the war through their interventions in politics, they should look to the example of the last war when, according to Connolly, 'the escapists carried on a literary renaissance. Joyce wrote *Ulysses* in Trieste and Zurich [...] Moore, Yeats, Gide, Eliot, Forster, and Virginia Woolf are other writers in whom it is vain to search for [...] any reference to the last war whatever' (482). Connolly's disaffection in the face of the apparent impotence of art is transformed into a call to liberate art from having to attempt to serve political ends: 'War is a tin-can tied to the tail of civilisation, it is also an opportunity for the artist to give us nothing but the best, and to stop his ears' (483). However, two years later, Connolly put his signature to 'Why Not War Writers? A Manifesto', which appeared in his journal *Horizon*. This explained why and how many writers on the left had repositioned themselves in view of recent events:

When war broke out, many writers were hesitant. They did not see the issues as clearly as they had seen the Spanish Civil War, for example, or the last European war. [...] With the invasion of Russia [in June 1941], feeling has crystallized. It is no longer possible for anyone to stand back and call the war an imperialist war. For every writer, the war is a war for survival. Without victory our art is doomed. (Calder-Marshall et al. 236)¹⁷

The war, which had been labelled as imperialist by the Soviet Union after the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact could now be refigured as antifascist, and in the manifesto literature was seen as an important means of promoting '*cultural unity*' (238).¹⁸ Writing prior to the invasion, Lord David Cecil also noted that the ideological issues were more complex than in 1914-18, and that younger writers in particular, 'have not, most of them, a stable point of view from which to envisage [the conflict]' (18). Cecil, like Connolly in 'The Ivory Shelter', defended the right of the artist not to engage with the war directly in his or her work, but also suggested that complete detachment was rendered impossible by the nature of the present war: '[Writers] cannot forget about the war, it seeps into every cranny of their consciousness. They must write about it, if they are going to write at all' (18).¹⁹ The signatories of 'Why Not War Writers?' could thus be attempting to make a virtue

out of necessity. Such a determination to contribute had to be balanced against the practical difficulties that any such effort might face, not just in terms of lack of recognition or support (official war writers never became established in the way the manifesto hoped), but also in view of the physical damage to the country's infrastructure that the war wrought. However, in a response to 'Why Not War Writers?' Goronwy Rees, who signed his letter 'A Combatant', was scathing: 'It has been too easy to write in recent years. Genius overcomes privation and inferiority. If these young men *must* write, they will do it the better for suffering some inconveniences. [...] I am afraid that I do not believe for a moment that these young men want to write; they want to be writers' (438). Whilst apparently hard-nosed, this argument does fall back on the notion of genuine creativity or genius, as somehow transcendent of physical circumstances. The accusation that the signatories to 'Why Not War Writers?' want to 'be writers' rather than 'to write' implicitly condemns writing to being a hole-and-corner activity rather than a profession, and it is some form of professional status that the signatories wished for.

John Lehmann's series of articles, 'The Armoured Writer', published in *New Writing and Daylight* between the summer of 1942 and the winter of 1943–44 is an attempt to assess how the war has affected writers, and what kind of literary legacy will be left after the end of the conflict. In his first article, Lehmann laments that while there have been 'interesting fragments' of different kinds, there has as yet been no literary representation of the war that has 'depth and power' ('Armoured Writer – I' 153). He lays the blame for this, in part, on the circumstances in which many writers are working: 'one should restrain one's impatience, remembering how difficult it is to write against the bombs, and the rasping of radio-sets in barracks, and the ever-ringing telephones and never-concluded conferences in innumerable offices' (153–4). However, he also acknowledges the difficulty of writing a prose narrative about an experience, or series of experiences, that is ongoing, an argument that is echoed by Alan Munton:

Fiction written during the war was end-stopped by history. [...] Some writers felt this constraint very heavily and abandoned the attempt to develop an unfolding narrative in favour of fragmentary structures that proceed without direction [...] 'Wartime' was a special kind of time; begun at a specific moment, it had – as everyone knew – to end, but the moment of its ending moved ahead of all anticipation, requiring a constant adjustment to the psychological space that still lay ahead. (Munton 21)

Robert Hewison similarly comments that, 'There was an inhibiting awareness that this was a "period" with a beginning and expected end, cut off from past and future alike' (*Under Siege* 87). I will be suggesting that this inhibition was not as widespread as Hewison might imply, and that the foregrounding of memory within a narrative is one way in which the 'adjustment' identified by Munton could be managed. Whilst Lehmann might suggest, as Munton and Hewison do, that only with historical perspective will a complete vision of the war be realized, memory can be a way of providing a new perspective on events that are still ongoing. In Chapter 1, I will suggest that this could be one reason why writers turned to comparisons with earlier conflicts, particularly in the first years of the war. A reconsideration of existing genres is another way of providing such perspective; Lehmann notes that detective and spy stories have taken on a new importance, suggesting that this is because the paranoid and violent world of the modern thriller presents 'the truest picture of our home, our inescapable environment' (159). It is also appropriate, as I will show in Chapter 2, to the exploration of damaged memory, especially amnesia.

Lehmann's discussion of the thriller is also a reminder that Munton's and Hewison's comments apply more to the literary than the popular end of the market. Tom Harrison's article 'War Books', published in *Horizon* in December 1941, shows that many popular writers simply attempted to adapt their habitual technique and style to wartime conditions, although the results of this adaptation were rarely to Harrison's liking. He implies that, if anything, there needed to be a slowing down of literary production: 'Not nearly enough thinking is being done in this war. You don't have to stop firing to think' (436). Although I will chiefly be concerned here with novels that do attempt to address the events of the war, it should also be noted that beyond the pages of journals like *New Writing and Daylight* or *Horizon*, sentiments that might appear to be less honourable were being expressed. Many readers, and indeed cinemagoers, wanted an escape from the exigencies of war rather than to have to engage, at the end of the day, with representations of the kinds of problems that they had themselves been confronting. One reader told *Mass-Observation* in 1943: 'There's enough tragedy in real life not to want to read about it, and that's one of the reasons I *never* read a war book' (qtd. in Chibnall 135). In 1947, a librarian explained the continuing popularity of romances by commenting that 'it's the times – they don't want anything deep' (qtd. in McAleer 80). James Chapman acknowledges that 'the majority of the cinema-going audience [...] preferred the escapist fantasies offered to them by both American and British feature films'

(33–4) to more realistic offerings, citing *Gone With the Wind* (1940) and the Gainsborough costume drama *The Man in Grey* (1943) as two of the most popular films of the war years (61). As one female wartime cinemagoer, quoted by Antonia Lant, remarked: ‘Carry me into the past with Laurence Olivier, Nelson Eddy, Greta Garbo and the others and I’m happy’ (23). Even escapism or apparent escapism does of course express a particular attitude towards the war, even if this is a negative one. In relation to my argument here, a memory plot can provide an element of escape tempered by a return to the present; indeed, although *The Man in Grey* does not use memory as a structuring device, its Regency plot is bookended by a wartime romance.

The fourth article in Lehmann’s ‘Armoured Writer’ series, which appeared in late 1943, sees Lehmann echoing his earlier views on the difficulty of producing a substantial piece of writing about the war whilst the conflict is still ongoing: ‘It is by now becoming increasingly clear that, with rare exceptions, the real novels about this war are not going to be written until the war is over’ (‘Armoured Writer – IV’ 162). Lehmann expresses particular concern about the apparent lack of new young novelists: ‘the under-thirties [...] have temporarily at least abandoned the novel, as too heavy luggage for active service, in favour of the poem and sketch’ (162).²⁰ Lehmann therefore focuses on how novelists who were already active during the 1930s appeared to be developing new approaches to deal with the new situation. Like Harrison, Lehmann found much to praise in Rex Warner’s *The Aerodrome* (1941); in ‘The Armoured Writer – I’ Lehmann discusses it alongside Virginia Woolf’s *Between the Acts* (1941), citing both as examples of novels which, ‘though not directly concerned with the war, have been written or finished under its influence’ (158).²¹ In his later article, Lehmann again mentions *The Aerodrome*, and in particular the ‘search for new technical methods’ it appears to exemplify (‘Armoured Writer – IV’ 163). What Lehmann identifies, and what appears to unite novels as apparently diverse as *The Aerodrome*, Henry Green’s *Caught* (1943) and Graham Greene’s *The Ministry of Fear* (1943) is that they ‘supplement their basic realism with other techniques [including] dreams, symbolism, poetic asides [and] internal monologues’ (163–164). The action of Warner’s novel takes place in a twisted or even surreal version of the English countryside, and in this respect is a step further away from Green and Greene’s novels which do maintain a surface realism in their settings. It is also striking that Lehmann does not try to align *Caught* and *The Ministry of Fear* with earlier, modernist works. All these novels, including *Between the Acts*, are seen to be reacting, stylistically, to the current

situation, rather than positioning themselves in relation to an earlier school or movement. Notably, Lehmann also allows himself to blur the boundary between the pre-war and wartime when he considers Woolf's and Warner's novels, a manoeuvre that is relevant in the context of Hewison and Munton's assertion that the war should be considered as a self-contained period. Works begun, or even completed, before the war can be considered as war books, as Sebastian Knowles indicates when he includes in his taxonomy of Second World War writing the category 'Literature of Anticipation', encompassing works written between May 1937 and May 1940 (1). Similarly, many works written while the war was ongoing did not appear until after it had ended, and were therefore received by an audience with a different perspective on the events being described.²² I will be arguing that writers' perceptions of 'wartime' inevitably shifted as the war itself progressed; as Johanna Alberti suggests, in a discussion of women writers, 'War's impact was not constant, it could suffocate, but it could also liberate' (162).

In the *Times Literary Supplement* Leader for 4 August 1945, R. D. Charques expressed sentiments that chime with Lehmann's: 'The literature of this war [...] is still to come. Is it not possible that its quality as literature will depend in some degree, even in large degree, on when it comes?' (Anon [R. D. Charques], 'The Urge' 367) Charques, whose reflections are prompted in part by a collection of writings by servicemen and women, continues that for those in the services, writing has often been 'an escape or respite from the extinguishing anonymity of his conditions of existence' (367). A comparison with writing of the previous war suggests that it might be necessary to wait for the best books about the conflict; Edmund Blunden's *Undertones of War* (1928) and Frederick Manning's *Her Privates We* (1930) are cited as examples here.²³ By the 'literature of this war', Charques evidently implies the *combatant* literature; underpinning his discussion is a belief that it is servicemen and women who will provide the most authentic accounts of war experience. However, I will argue that the division between 'combatant' and 'non-combatant' writing is not necessarily clear-cut, not least because of the many different kinds of war service that the existence of the so-called 'Home Front' produced. Thus for example, Henry Green and William Sansom both drew on their experiences as members of the Auxilliary Fire Service; they were not, strictly speaking, 'combatants' but certainly had an experience of the war that in some respects was closer to that of the combatant than to that of the civilian. Even Vera Brittain, whose pacifist views are well known, saw her writing as a kind of active service, as I will show. Therefore, whilst it is necessary and important to

acknowledge the varieties of war work that different individuals undertook, I will be considering 'combatant' and 'non-combatant' writers alongside each other, and exposing both the consonances and the divergences between their representations of the war. As I have shown, P. H. Newby was still waiting for 'the literature of this war' to appear in 1951. I will suggest that, taken in historical perspective, it becomes clear that such a literature did exist but that because it did not take the form that Newby, Lehmann, or Charques expected, they did not recognize it as such.

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