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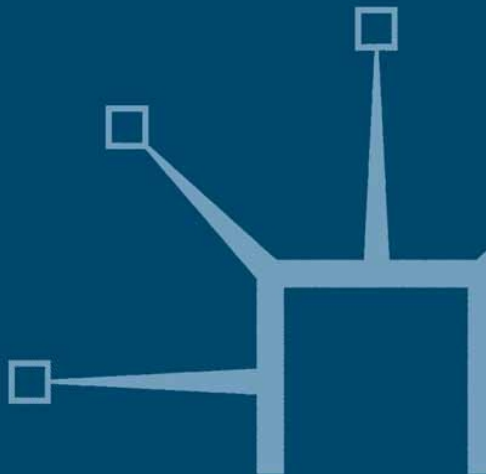
British Fiction After Modernism

The Novel at Mid-Century

Edited by

Marina MacKay and Lyndsey Stonebridge



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In memory of Lorna Sage

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This book is dedicated to the memory of Lorna Sage, whose writing on twentieth-century fiction influenced many of the contributors here and whose sense for the critical and aesthetic awkwardness of the British novel was never less than acute. 'Of course it bloody well is', would have been Lorna's response to the idea that mid-century fiction was a stranger and more challenging literary-historical category than is often recognized. Of course.

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1

Introduction: British Fiction After Modernism

Lyndsey Stonebridge and Marina MacKay

I

One answer to the question raised by this collection – what happened to British fiction after modernism? – might be: not much. The literary gardens of the West, in Cyril Connolly's frequently quoted phrase, closed in the 1940s: ' "Nothing dreadful is ever done with, no bad thing gets better; you can't be too serious".'[1] By 1947 writers had little left to push against, let alone experiment with. 'You don't think', Elizabeth Bowen wondered in an exchange with V.S. Pritchett and Graham Greene, 'you don't think it possible that things these days may be almost too propitious?'[2] In the new post-war consensus there was no room for the social and political isolation that had been so crucial, albeit in different ways, for the modernist novel. For a generation who were about to never have had it so good, the omens for a productive literary tension were never so bad. As their island shrank, mid-century writers became more domestic and domesticated. 'The Novel No Longer Novel, 1945–1960', was the less than flattering title Malcolm Bradbury gave to his chapter on this period in *The Modern British Novel* (1993).[3] The period covered in the next chapter is so dull it cannot even inspire a literary pun: 'The Sixties and After: 1960–1979'. With modernism a distant dream, attention turned from the condition of the novel to the condition of England. Tinkerings with realism propped up a creaking liberalism. By the time England had shrunk to the size of a campus novel, the novel (much like Britain itself) was in dire need of rescue from its own parochialism. Small wonder, perhaps, that until very recently universities tended to offer courses on 'Modernism' and 'Modernist Fiction', and 'Postmodernism' and 'Contemporary Fiction', and left what was in between discreetly to gather dust in the back bedroom of literary scholarship.

This collection aims to restore some significance to a critically awkward phase of twentieth-century writing. Focusing on the years between the late 1930s (just after modernism) and the late 1960s (just before postmodernism), its contributors suggest what it meant for writers to work in the wake

M. MacKay (eds.), *British Fiction After Modernism*

of modernism's achievements. Too often characterized as a conservative literature of retreat, this book argues instead that mid-century fiction has a complex and under-thought relation to its own history – both to its historical and literary legacies and to the history of which it was such an uneasy part. For those writing at mid-century, after two wars and in the middle of an undeclared chilly third, the historical resonances of what had come before loomed as large as (and as part of) the task of imagining the present and the future. Modernism lingered in the literary imagination as, sometimes ironically, sometimes peevishly, mid-century writing reacted to its influence by adapting some of its elements to new political and fictional ends. 'Late modernism' and even 'intermodernism' are terms that have been used in recent scholarship to describe the ways in which the literary energy of the first part of the century segued into the period between the wars.[4] As many of our contributors demonstrate here, late modernism continues to splinter into the gritty concerns of mid-century writing.

It is in an effort to bring some of this complex history into view that this collection has set its historical parameters around the Second World War rather than to one side of it. Thus viewed, we think, the extent to which mid-century fiction is a literature of continuities and transitions between the earlier and later parts of the century starts to become a little clearer. It is also a way of filling a gap in current attempts to rethink twentieth-century literary history. 1950 has emerged recently as the preferred start date for the study of post-war British fiction based on the argument, on the one hand, that it took a long time for the war to unravel after 1945 and, on the other, that most writers published in the late 1940s were already established authors.[5] This seems a proper division to the extent that it rightly acknowledges the palpable sense of the new that inflected the 1950s and that was to flower so powerfully in the 1960s. The literary backdating that marks this collection does not so much depart from these accounts as, we hope, add to them by both recording the transitions that fiction made in this period and tracking the careers of some of those crucially significant writers whose careers spanned the 1930s, the 1940s *and* the 1950s (and often beyond): Graham Greene, Henry Green, Ivy Compton-Burnett, Rebecca West, Patrick Hamilton, Storm Jameson, Howard Spring, Elizabeth Bowen, Olivia Manning and James Hanley, for example, all wrote across the war. Evelyn Waugh, L.P. Hartley, V.S. Pritchett, Rosamond Lehmann, Sybille Bedford, Molly Keane, Rose Macaulay, Malcolm Lowry, P.H. Newby, Anthony Powell, Jean Rhys, Stevie Smith, C.P. Snow, Edward Upward, could all be added to this list.[6] In any case, perhaps, the fact that the term 'post-war' has come to mean so many things suggests that a literary history of breakthroughs and ruptures is never going to work particularly well for this period. Whereas in or about 1947 (the year of Indian Independence) marked the date of irreversible cultural change for some, for others that process, and the insular turn in British fiction that went with

it, came much earlier, in or about 1938. For others, post-war fiction proper started in 1954, the publication date of first novels by Iris Murdoch, Kingsley Amis and William Golding; whereas those wanting to identify the re-emergence of the avant-garde in post-war Britain are more likely to seize on 1957 (Muriel Spark's *The Comforters* and Christine Brooke-Rose's *The Languages of Love*) or 1963 (B.S. Johnson's *Travelling People*, Ann Quin's *Berg* and Spark's *The Girls of Slender Means*). It is only when the post-war sensibility violently sheds its historical and ideological skins in 1968 that we can really say (again) that on or about a certain date something in human character changed.

Thinking about mid-century fiction precisely *as* mid-century fiction is also an attempt to get beyond the formalist distinction between experimental and realist fiction that has dominated accounts of this period and which has also, and not always merely incidentally, stamped many mid-century writers as irretrievably and disastrously minor. 'The progress of the novel has always depended on an oscillation between two parts of its nature', Bradbury argued in *No, Not Bloomsbury* (1987), 'its referential and discursive and its aesthetic function.'[7] This is a difficult proposition not least because the polemical separation of the 'referential' and 'aesthetic' is largely the legacy of modernist manifesto-making itself, and is thus not only of doubtful relevance to earlier novelists, but also potentially damaging for those who followed. The terms on which mid-century fiction has been (and often still is) read were often established by those modernist writers who, in their iconoclastic polemics about the function of fiction, attacked their immediate predecessors for having 'referential and discursive' ambitions of a kind that made the highest artistic achievements impossible; famously, 'realist' became synonymous with crudity and anachronism. Despite the title of Bradbury's book, you cannot, in fact, help thinking of Bloomsbury, and of Woolf's famous attack on the Edwardian novelist, so dogged a materialist that he was 'taking upon his shoulders the work that ought to have been discharged by Government officials'.[8]

Bradbury's commitment to these 'polar distinctions . . . between, on the one hand, the novel's propensity toward realism, social documentation and interrelation with historical events and movements, and on the other with its propensity toward form, fictionality, and reflexive self-examination' is pretty well representative of a whole generation of work on post-war British fiction.[9] Novelists, David Lodge wrote in his famous 1969 essay, stood 'at the crossroads' between 'realism' and 'experiment'.[10] By the time Lodge revised his original thesis twenty years later, the crossroads had become 'crossover fiction': 'an aesthetic supermarket' ('an astonishing variety of styles on offer today') had put both the corner shop of grubby realism and the up-market avant-garde boutique out of business.[11] In an effort to rescue the mid-century novel from its dire reputation, Bradbury would argue that it was often, in fact, incipiently postmodernist; any return to realism was

temporary, he suggested, and 'formal and epistemological questions began to reassert themselves' by the early 1960s.[12] But if proleptic postmodernism is the rationale with which mid-century writing is to be salvaged, many important mid-century writers appear beyond rehabilitation. Certainly, there would be no place for most of the authors discussed here because, even leaving aside the obvious non-starters (Rebecca West or Olivia Manning, say, or William Golding), it doesn't really work to characterize even tricksy writers like Bowen or Spark as postmodernist. Even when Spark described her own work as 'post-modernist' ('They say post-modernist, mostly, whatever that means'), one senses that her idea of postmodernism was not that of Angela Carter or even Spark's one-time mentor, Christine Brooke-Rose, even as Spark was subject to the same *nouveau roman* influences. 'I think it means', Spark said in an interview, 'that there is another dimension which is a bit creepy, supernatural . . . not supernatural but not necessarily consequential. I always think that causality is not chronology. I go on that; one thing doesn't necessarily lead to another inevitable thing, although it does lead to something else in actual fact.'[13] Contingency, indeed, is always part of Spark's fiction; what makes it 'creepy', however, is the sense that although her characters and narrators as well as the author cannot grasp what it is that drives causality, someone or something else does. This is the kind of poetic telos, the sense that there is a pattern to the fiction somewhere despite the free-falling nature of the narrative, that Frank Kermode was quick to note in his readings of Spark's early fiction.[14] It is a poetic that places Spark closer to Golding, and indeed to Iris Murdoch, than might first appear. Notwithstanding their very different innovations, the strange god-shapes in the fiction of all three can be read as late examples of the fight between textuality and authority that had so preoccupied writers in the earlier part of the century.

When we say that we are interested here in what happened to the novel 'after' modernism, then, we do not quite mean 'after' in an innocently chronological sense, but that many of these writers are so indebted to modernism that they have to be read in relation to it. Implicitly they always have been, of course, in so far as mid-century fiction was often dismissed for collapsing in the face of the challenge to literary form that the avant-garde set down in the first thirty years of the century. Modernism exhausted the novel, Bernard Bergonzi argued in 1970; the post-war novelist 'has inherited a form whose principal characteristic is novelty, or stylistic dynamism, and yet nearly everything possible to be achieved has already been done'.[15] The fact that Britain spent most of the post-war period staggering from one economic crisis to another gives this industrial model of fiction-making – whereby modernism has depleted a finite stock of resources – a certain historical pathos. At the same time, it remains an incidental irony of the formalism bequeathed by modernism to mid-century criticism that it should have facilitated a degree of insensibility to all but the most

extravagant textual eccentricities. Laments about the poverty of 1940s' writing, for instance, often make an exception of Malcolm Lowry's Joycean *Under the Volcano* (1947) even as they sideline the late modernist novels of Henry Green and Ivy Compton-Burnett – as rewardingly subtle as Lowry, but otherwise utterly *sui generis*.

Any book that professes recuperative intentions risks making inflated claims about the neglected brilliance of the age – no doubt there were plenty of wretched novels produced in this period (as in any other) that have been deservedly forgotten. However, there needs to be a revision of the conventional wisdom that sees modernist and modernizing energies repudiated wholesale by generations of otherwise unremarkable writers. Rubin Rabinovitz had good reason to identify a 'reaction against experiment in the English novel' in his seminal work of that title which set the terms for readings of the immediate post-war novel for a decade.[16] But Rabinovitz's contemporaries might have done well to counterbalance this extraordinarily influential book by trying to account for the aspirations of novelists outside the John Wain-John Braine-Alan Sillitoe axis. This collection, in part, reserves a corner for those who were modernism's first readers, and whose respect for the modernist enterprise is apparent throughout their complex and sometimes introspective fiction.

The perception that modernism was too self-indulgently inward, and too little concerned with historical, social and political actuality does, of course, have an authentic period flavour; it was the basis on which the 'reaction against experiment', such as it was, took place. William Cooper, the author of the proto-angry-young-man novel *Scenes from Provincial Life* (1950), set out his and C.P. Snow's position vis-à-vis their immediate predecessors in exactly those terms: 'the Experimental Novel was about Man-Alone', he wrote in 1959, 'we meant to write novels about Man-in-Society as well'.[17] The return to realism needs to be qualified in two ways, however. First, new work in modernist studies has done much to erode what Fredric Jameson in the mid-1990s called a 'virtually universal stereotype of the great Western modernists as subjective and quietistic antipolitical figures'.[18] As Geoff Gilbert reminds us in his *Before Modernism Was: Modern History and the Constituency of Writing* (2004), the category we like to call 'modernism' came after the difficult and ill-fitting body of historical and literary writing that eventually bore this name.[19] By now, it can fairly be argued that modernism was always more overtly social and historical in its characteristic obsessions all along, and that the break with nineteenth-century preoccupations, like the critical orthodoxy of the post-war repudiation of modernism, was rather less dramatic and complete than it looked to contemporaries. Second, the turn to some kind of realism was already well advanced by the late 1930s. As a new ethnography turned inwards to observe an evermore precarious-looking Britain, in the form of Mass Observation for example, writers such as Storm Jameson looked for new ways to document

an increasingly gritty reality – ways that often borrowed from modernism (for example, the use of filmic narrative and montage) while pushing against its aestheticism. That ethnographic turn, it has been argued recently, helped establish the basis for the development of Cultural Studies in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s and for the pioneering work of Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams.[20] Similarly, it could be suggested, the realisms that emerge in the post-war period develop a concern with class and region which first flourished between the wars. Writers such as Snow, David Storey, Stan Barstow and Colin MacInnes were, of course, documenting the emergence of a distinctly new Britain, but the sorts of realisms they produced owed as much to the concerns of their immediate predecessors as it did to the nineteenth-century novel. As Bergonzi concludes his essay below: 'Realists, yes. But they do the realism in different voices.'

It is partly because they are trying to make these kinds of generic and historical connections that many of our contributors focus on the Second World War and its aftermath.[21] The war was the major turning point of the century in Britain: a domestic and geopolitical watershed, it remains inescapably present in public culture and popular memory in Britain. ('Do not say "before/after the war" when you mean the second world war', the stylebook of one national newspaper now cautions its journalists.[22]) With respect to domestic conditions, the war changed life in Britain considerably, not least in that it led to the election of a declaredly redistributive Labour government in 1945. Globally, a war that had been deferred because of the virtual impossibility of defending an empire sprawling across three potential fronts (Pacific, Atlantic, Mediterranean) ultimately hastened the end of the empire and the superpower status attendant on it. Financially bust by 1941 and unmistakeably a satellite of American power, Britain was losing the war while winning it. It is no wonder that the Second World War should be used as the century's fault-line, and, what is more, that these global and domestic transformations should have multiple implications for the national literature in the years that saw London's demotion from the magnetic imperial metropolis of the high modernist 1920s to the blitzed and bankrupted conditions of the 1940s.

Contrary to received wisdom, the war was a major literary event in its own right, as some of the writing careers discussed in this collection show. Many writers, such as Bowen and Green, came of literary age during the war. Witness Bowen's furious wartime short story writing, for example, as well as her masterpiece, *The Heat of the Day* (1949). Green, writing possibly even more furiously, wrote no fewer than three novels (*Caught*, 1943; *Loving*, 1945; and *Back*, 1946) in that period. James Hanley and William Sansom produced work which dazzles in its attempt to represent the fractured experience of war. In the same period, 'thirties' writers, such as Graham Greene, Storm Jameson and Patrick Hamilton adapted their literary forms to new critiques of 1940s' fascism. For others still, the war was at the very

least formative: Spark sailed back from South Africa to work in Sefton Delmer's black propaganda unit; Manning voyaged out with her husband to the Egypt and Palestine that were to feature so colourfully in her later fiction; Angus Wilson (who was later to generate his own different version of literary coding and decoding) toiled away at the famous Bletchley Park; while Golding and West, in different ways, discovered the moral imperatives that were to govern their fiction in the second half of the century.

In her 1969 autobiography, Storm Jameson tried to compare the contemporary fear of nuclear war with 'the fear that slowly submerged our minds during the thirties':

> An American reviewer, a woman, complained that 'like so many English writers, Storm Jameson seems unable to outgrow the war.' I retorted that the war we could not outgrow was not the one we had survived but the one we were expecting.[23]

Only now, perhaps, after the end of the Cold War which shaped the imaginations of so many writing at mid-century, do the continuities of twentieth-century British fiction really become apparent. For many, the climate of fear that dominated the post-war period was in fact their third experience of war anxiety. What Jameson is describing in the late 1960s is the fear that, as Andrzej Gasiorek notes here of Graham Greene, the twentieth century would be a time in which there would never be a peace. Spark's hilarious but grim account of the paranoia this induced is captured in *Memento Mori* (1959) where, as Rod Mengham argues in his contribution to this volume, it is 'as if the fires of the Blitz have only been damped down temporarily'. The continuities that span the century are continuities of anxiety; British writers after modernism are haunted by the past, as well as by the present and future. Propitiousness is only half the story: 'Even to objectify futility is something', Bowen remarks in the exchange with Pritchett and Greene with which we opened this introduction.

All the writers discussed in this book reflect insistently on the problematic nature of representing an age of ambiguous victories, and the troubled question of historical and national representation is never far from their concerns. If Britain has averted its own occupation, it is no longer the centre of an empire; it has participated in the defeat of one version of totalitarianism only to feel the apocalyptic threat of another. As we have suggested here, the project of writing that anxiety generates a distinctive aesthetic in which realisms emerge that are written self-consciously 'after' modernism. Indeed, many of the essays in this collection show how mid-century writers were self-consciously rewriting modernism: from Compton-Burnett's perhaps unsurprising debts to modernist theories of laughter, to Howard Spring's edgy appropriations of Lawrentian idioms (the impact of Lawrence

on a later generation of mid-century writers would need another volume – David Storey is an obvious case in point) and Kingsley Amis's embarrassed indebtedness to Joyce. Frequently, mid-century fiction appropriates modernism's dense aesthetic inwardness and puts it to ends that are very self-consciously sociological and historiographic, as in Bowen and Hamilton's transformation of streams of consciousness into frustratingly opaque streams of talk, discussed here by John Mepham. In such ways and others, these anti-heroic, post-imperial fictions could almost be said to radicalize the diffidence for which they are perhaps better known.

These writers knew there was no returning to a time before modernism. Being modern at mid-century entailed an uncompromising engagement with the public and private violence of a modernity that was revealing itself as intractable and never-ending. It was in an attempt to give this violence some kind of genealogy that Rebecca West and Angus Wilson resurrected and re-imagined the densely social genre of the bourgeois family saga. Their autobiographical novels *The Fountain Overflows* (1956) and *No Laughing Matter* (1967), discussed here by Victor Sage and Steven Jacobi, chart the progress of families from Edwardian England through the second half of the century in acts of what Sage calls 'retrospective prophecy' (Sybille Bedford does something similar with her German-Jewish family in *A Legacy*, also published in 1956). Both Wilson and West engage in highly critical ways with nostalgic fantasies of the belle époque that continued to surface in times of post-war crisis as a punishing measure of what the twentieth century cost Britain: 'Never such innocence again', as Philip Larkin famously lamented in his poem about 1914.[24] In contrast with Larkin, West and Wilson render illusory the century's lost innocence, arguing that their homes had always been 'protected' by ruinously irresponsible gamblers. 'I had a glorious father', West indicts the seductions and failures of patriarchy: 'I had no father at all.'[25] Traditionally a condition-of-England form, these mid-century family sagas refuse to whitewash the national past with narratives of private transcendence, but see in private violence the symptomatic foreshadowing of an atrocious century.

Thus the horrors of domestic fascism so urgent a concern to writers of the 1940s like Hamilton, Bowen and Compton-Burnett continue to be represented through the second half of the century. What, in one of her bleak late essays, Virginia Woolf referred to as the 'subconscious Hitlerism in the hearts of men' becomes the force behind all forms of repressive and hierarchical domestic and social organization.[26] And even the most diligent post-war efforts at universality turn out to be pretty historical after all: Kevin McCarron contends that, for all its provocatively ahistorical qualities, 'the issue of historical representation is at the heart of everything Golding wrote'; Gasiorek meanwhile shows how Greene's theological preoccupations are tied to his commitments to political and historical representation. Read together, these writers bring into focus the continuities between the pervasive mid-

century atmosphere of domestic fascism and the anxieties about race, nation, gender and class that dominated the second half of the century. For them, there is no possibility of seeing creative activity as hermetic aesthetic transcendence; on the contrary, mid-century writers were pragmatically self-aware about the relationship between writing and public life.

In a different but possibly related sense, the politics of literary reputation are central to a reading of twentieth-century British fiction because the writers discussed here are, bluntly, not enough read. (One of this book's editors found her first Henry Green novel when she was a guest in a real back bedroom. Next to the Patrick Hamiltons.) Critical and historical awkwardness has always dogged the careers of these writers: indeed, with this in mind, it might be foolish to say we need to recontextualize mid-century writers in order to understand them better – to some extent those contexts never really seemed there for many of the writers discussed. While there were certainly movements within mid-century fiction, there was no one 'Movement', as there was for poetry, by which one could really set up firm cultural and literary markers. And even within these movements, many mid-century writers seem to write, peculiarly, of their time but out of their immediate culture. One thinks, for example, of the experimental writer Ann Quin, who wrote, it is said, without reading (Quin died just before she was to begin her degree in English literature at the University of East Anglia – where she would have quite probably been taught by Angus Wilson). Even the most generous of literary categories, such as women's writing, can seem too tight for many writers discussed here.[27] In this volume, for instance, Jeremy Treglown shows how Olivia Manning was no genteel lady author, but a woman unafraid to write scenes of combat with the rugged tactics for which Norman Mailer would later be credited.

If there is one characteristic that does unite much of the work discussed in this book it is the grim humour of a group of writers who always felt themselves to be writing from the political periphery. 'Ridicule is the only honourable weapon we have left', Spark declared in her 1970 essay, 'The Desegregation of Art'.[28] Perhaps the most paradoxical – but also the most symptomatic – dimension of British culture after modernism is the way that its writers of central significance so relentlessly and wilfully positioned themselves on the outside. Widely considered in his time to be one of the most important twentieth-century British novelists, Angus Wilson was essentially an ironist, an outsider, and a tireless critic of the political and cultural certainties of the post-war English; and yet Steven Jacobi shows here how, at the very height of his reputation, Wilson's humour becomes 'the comedy of displacement and self-displacement'. Similarly, Bowen's worry about writers suddenly finding themselves understood and respected within the post-war consensus was also a worry of not being outside enough ('My writing may be a substitute for something I have been born without'; she adds, '– a so-called normal relation to society'[29]).

It is a mistake to assume that this kind of ironic self-displacement translates unproblematically into a form of reactionary retreat. In 1970 Bergonzi was right to say that '[f]or complex historical and cultural reasons, English literature in the fifties and sixties has been both backward- and inward-looking'; 'It is', he added, 'in the centripetal nature of its preoccupations that English culture can look parochial and irrelevant to outsiders.'[30] This is all true, but not all British fiction was quite as smug as this perhaps implies. As Randall Stevenson points out in the introduction to *The Last of England?* we should not assume that Britain's decline – its sinking and shrinking – was simply reproduced in its literature:

> even if the age were somehow defined as one exclusively of historical decline, there would be little reason to suppose its literature doomed to follow the same direction. Literary developments do not always straightforwardly reflect or run in parallel with the wider history of their time, reproducing its ups and downs. On the contrary, what history refuses, culture provides: changeful, challenging times demand a direct new vision.[31]

In Stevenson's account, the most innovative and creative cultural response to a historical 'world well lost' emerges in the 1980s and, notably, in the work of some of the best critics of that lost world, Salman Rushdie, Timothy Mo, Kazuo Ishiguro and Caryl Phillips. As Jed Esty has shown, in the earlier part of the post-war period writers such as Samuel Selvon, George Lamming and Doris Lessing were already starting to demonstrate how what reads as historical decline in one register, emerges as something a great deal more culturally and politically interesting in another.

In some respects, this collection tells a complementary story to that in Esty's important study *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (2004), which describes 'the inner logic and stylistic contours of a major literary culture caught in the act of becoming minor'.[32] Esty's last chapter describes the emergence of voices from the formerly imperial 'periphery'; the story we tell here describes how the English literary 'centre' ceased to understand itself as central. There is nothing necessarily complacent about the responses that British literary culture made to its mid-century dispersal. Concerns with 'displacement and self-displacement' connect Storm Jameson's early definitions of modern diaspora to Bowen's concern with metropolitan migrancy, while in the novelist Paul Magrs's discussion below of urban renewal in his reading of the working-class Mancunian bestseller Howard Spring, there is a rich sense of the way in which a tearing down also promises a more democratic and inclusive remaking.

British fiction – if by the 1970s it can quite be called that – explored and enacted continuities of modern experience that are only now coming into critical view. Not, perhaps, until the very last decades of the century did

the novel really begin to understand itself once again as a culturally vital and politically critical force. But nor did the critical inventiveness of the writers we are interested in here simply shrink with their island. One last comment from Bowen's response to Pritchett: 'I don't think any of us feel ourselves to be unrelatable to something. We envisage, we are not passive, and we are not contributing to anarchy: that may be the most to be claimed for us.'[33]

II

Without underestimating either the rich heterogeneity of mid-century fiction or the sometimes very striking distinctiveness of individual writers, read together the authors discussed in this book indicate, even as they complicate, the period's characteristic contours. That Britain produced distinguished late modernist stylists should be clear from the cases of Green, Bowen and Compton-Burnett; but that a critical reading of modernism could have other creative outcomes too is evidenced by Jameson and Greene, whose arguments with modernism, unlike the occasionally philistine attacks that would surface in the 1950s, resulted in formally supple and politically regenerative engagements with the work of their predecessors, realist and modernist. Also considered definitive of post-war fiction, the mid-century preoccupation with social class is most obviously covered in this collection through the example of Kingsley Amis, who was perhaps the most enduring of the writers saddled with the journalistic tag of the 'angry young men', but also, and in keeping with the collection's more extended sense of 'mid-century', through those older writers of class mobility and paralysis, Howard Spring and James Hanley. Usually represented by the novel sequences of Anthony Powell and C.P. Snow, the historically and socially panoramic ambitions of mid-century fiction are here represented by Angus Wilson, Olivia Manning and Rebecca West – chroniclers who were perhaps rather less class-constrained in their outlook than Powell, and more global in their fictional priorities than Snow. Historical considerations become ontological conditions in their younger contemporaries, Golding and Spark, major names in their own right, but also writers who may well be considered representative of the profound moral and philosophical seriousness of the period.

Two essays on the immediate aftermath of modernism open this collection. In a prequel to his earlier study of post-war fiction, Andrzej Gasiorek turns to Graham Greene's novels of the 1930s and early 1940s.[34] As stable ideas of nationality began to crumble under the pressure of the global economic crises of the interwar period, and as the individual found himself or herself at the mercy of wholly impersonal forces, Greene, Gasiorek argues, discovered the means to represent these new conditions by returning to the early modernists who aimed, in Joseph Conrad's phrase, to 'render the