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***The 1940s: A Decade of Modern British Fiction***, edited by Philip Tew and Glynn White, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2022, (PDF) x + 347 pp., ISBN ePDF: 978-1-3501-4303-6. £117

*The 1940s: A Decade of Modern British Fiction*, published by Bloomsbury Academic, is the seventh book in the ‘The Decades Series,’ which was inaugurated by *The 1970s: A Decade of Contemporary British Fiction* in 2014. *The 1940s* is edited by Philip Dew and Glynn White, who open it with their “Critical Introduction: Reappraising the 1940s.” The first three parts of this Introduction (“Socio-historical contexts,” “Dunkirk and other propaganda,” “Reappraising the 1940s”) highlight the most characteristic features of the decade from the historical, social as well as literary perspectives, pointing out its uniqueness and watershed character, as well as factors influencing the literary output of this decade, such as the overtly propagandist use of literature, paper rationing and censorship. The next three parts of the Introduction are (perhaps a bit surprisingly) mini critical essays aimed at three groups of novels and novelists. The first of them, “Not the usual suspects,” presents two novels by writers better known as poets: Philip Larkin and Stevie Smith. The second is “Waugh time” (a pun which Evelyn Waugh probably would not have liked, as he did not like *Waugh in Abyssinia*), which focuses on two Waugh’s wartime novels: *Put Out More Flags* (1942) and *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), and concludes with the statement “that Waugh and others [...] were necessarily raised in the pre-war world with all the experiences that entailed” (19). “From the ranks,” the third mini-essay, is a survey of shorter fiction and novels written by Gerald Kersh and Julian Maclaren-Ross.

The ten chapters of *The 1940s* can be roughly divided into two parts. The opening part, consisting of the first three chapters, contains three surveys of the literature of the decade in question (but also, to a considerable extent, of the 1930s), while of the remaining seven chapters/essays, six are more like case studies of narrower groups of texts/writers. The three opening chapters have different focal points and perspectives. The opening chapter of the book, written by Ashley Maher and entitled “The Finest Hour? A Literary History of the 1940s,” examines the decade’s “divisions and continuities from three angles: historically, through the blurring of war and peacetime, self and state; geographically, through migration and the dissolution of empire, amid the changing formation of British identity and literature; and literary historically, through the co-existence of late modernism, realism and incipient postmodernism” (38). Maher’s survey focuses on both the shorter and longer fiction of George Orwell, Christopher

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Isherwood, Virginia Woolf, Elizabeth Bowen, Patrick Hamilton, Roger Mais, and Victoria Reid.

The second chapter of the book, Philip Tew's "British Blitz Fiction of the 1940s: Another Finest Hour Myth or Propaganda?" surveys British civilians' literary responses to and representations of the Blitz in the fiction, diaries and interviews of a wide range of writers: Phyllis Bottome, Elizabeth Bowen, Daphne de Maurier, Henry Green, Graham Greene, Patrick Hamilton, James Hanley, Norah Hoult, Winifred Peck, Jocelyn Playfair, Noel Streatfield, and Virginia Woolf.

The third of the survey chapters, Deborah Philips's "Genteel Bohemia: Capable Women in Women's Fiction of the 1940s", approaches novels which, even though written in the forties, were often set in earlier periods, but, as Philips argues "[n]onetheless, the effects are there to be read: the experience of war necessarily permeates women's writing of the period" (93). Philips analyses such novels as Mary Renault's *The Friendly Young Ladies*, Stella Gibbons's *Ticky*, Nancy Mitford's *The Pursuit of Love*, Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight*, and *The Parasites* by Daphne du Maurier.

Chris Hopkins's "The Ship and the Nation: Royal Navy Novels and the People's War 1939-45" focuses mostly on two popular novels about the experiences of servicemen in the Royal Navy *I Am a Stranger Here Myself* (1943) by Anthony Thorne, and *Very Ordinary Seamen* (1944) by J.P.W. Mallalieu. Hopkins argues convincingly that "popular fiction accounts of naval crews were seen as entirely appropriate foci for discussions and relationship between 'warfare state' and 'welfare state', the character of English society and its potential for post-war reconstruction" (116).

The fifth chapter, written by Karen Schaller and entitled "Feeling Political: Elizabeth Bowen in the 1940s," focuses on Bowen's short stories written during this decade. Ultimately, Schaller claims that "[r]ather than a reality to be represented [...] feelings in Bowen's writing *are* representations, ones that are, in that period to be performed, fine-tuned and recalibrated in order to signal, sign—and counter-sign—one's orientation to Britain, and to each other" (159).

Támas Bényiei's "The Life of Animals: George Orwell's Fiction in the 1940s" is an extremely lucid and well-written essay, which is also a tribute to George Orwell as an essay writer, novelist, and political thinker. The essay starts with a short survey of praise of Orwell as a writer by influential critics and scholars such as Richard Rorty and Raymond Williams, and also by those who are less well known: John Rodden, Issac Deutscher and David Dwan. The profound analysis of Orwell's short piece "Revenge is Sour," published in *Tribune* in November 1945, allows Bényiei to present Orwell's dilemmas and solutions on such key issues as the banality of evil and the futility of revenge, and argues that "Revenge is Sour" "is predicated on contrasting the mental world generated by language [...] or ideas [...] to the empirical world of objective experience, clearly endorsing the primacy of the latter" (165). The second part of Bényiei's essay concerns Orwell's two masterpieces, *Animal Farm* and *1984*, the analysis of which is used to refute Christopher Norris's statement that Orwell's belief that "the truth was just out there to be told in a straightforward, common-sense way [...] now seems not merely naïve but culpably self-deluding" (quoted 167).

Rebecca Dyer's "Masters and Servants, Class and the Colonies in Graham Greene's 1940s Fiction" opens with a discussion on the presence of servants in Graham Greene's

life, non-fiction and fiction to analyse the master-servant relationship as being “in some ways analogous to the power relations between colonial officials and colonized populations” (192). Dyer looks into master-servant relations in the fiction of P.G. Woodhouse, Ivy Compton-Burnett, and Robin Maugham. Afterwards, the focus returns to Graham Greene and shifts between the generically diverse *Journey Without Maps*, *The Heart of the Matter*, “The Basement Room,” and *The Fallen Idol*.

The eighth chapter, Charlotte Charteris’s “Purposes of Love: Rethinking Intimacy in the 1940s”, surveys a considerable range of 1940s texts authored by Mary Renault, Jocelyn Brooke, Francis King, Denton Welch, Nancy Mitford, Barbara Comyns, Monica Dickens, and Henry Green. Therefore, in my opinion, it would be better placed alongside the first three chapters of the book. Charteris borrows the title from Mary Renault’s 1939 debut novel, the analysis of which introduces the key theme of the chapter: the link between intimacy, trauma and rehabilitation, questioning the privileged status of marriage, and the changing role and representation of sexuality in the context of Mass Observation’s 1949 ‘Little Kinsey’ report.

The two final chapters of *The 1940s* move beyond the spectrum of British fiction in this decade and address it in the wider context of writers-refugees from National Socialism, and transatlantic crime film connections. Andrea Hammel’s “No Concession to ‘English Taste’? Refugees from National Socialism Writing in Britain” considers a group of German and Austrian writers, both relatively well-known, such as Stefan Zweig, and those less-known or virtually forgotten, such as Robert Neumann, Hilde Spiel, de Mendelssohn, Hermynia Zur Mühlen, and Anna Gmeyner. Hammel’s paper ends with the conclusion that “[a]lthough the works in this chapter have generally been neglected or marginalized, their publication and readership at the time testify to the existence of wartime cultural imaginary—a heterotopian conception of the possibilities of elsewhere— that was international” (272). Glynn White’s “Un-British: the Transatlantic Crime Film Connection” focuses on the connections “between popular fiction of the crime genre and the British cinema in the 1940s, particularly adaptations made in the second half of the decade of works of Graham Greene, James Hadley Chase and Gerald Kersh, by tracking transatlantic currents in film and literature and mapping their varied critical receptions within the context of 1940s criticism” (275).

Handy timelines of works, and national and international events, as well as short biographies of writers whose works appear in the book are provided at the end of the volume. Overall, *The 1940s: A Decade of Modern British Fiction* is a coherent volume which is potentially useful both to newcomers to the field as well as to more seasoned researchers.

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**Grzegorz Moroz** is Professor of British Literature at the University of Białystok. He has published monographs and many articles on Aldous Huxley, and on Anglophone as well as Polish travel writing, including: *Travellers, Novelists and Gentlemen: Constructing Male Narrative Personae in British Travel Books from the Beginnings to the Second*

*World War* (Peter Lang, 2013) and *A Generic History of Travel Writing in Anglophone and Polish Literature* (Brill/Rodopi, 2020).