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Abstract

With reference to British feature films about the Second World War, the received wisdom among film historians has been that in the immediate aftermath of the conflict, film-makers and audiences no longer had an appetite for the subject of war. The perceived dearth of war-related films in the first five or so years of the peace is seen as representing a gap in the production of war films between those made during the war itself, and the boom in war film production that got under way from the early fifties. This thesis establishes that such an assumption is mistaken, and that a considerable body of war and aftermath films were made, screened, and enjoyed by audiences. The argument, then, is that far from ignoring the war in the late forties, as has been assumed, the film industry was actively involved in the cultural process of re-interpretting the experience and its consequences. The second theme of the thesis is an analysis of these films, and an exploration of how they projected the war and its aftermath to contemporary audiences, and why particular perspectives, subject interests, underlying values and preoccupations, emerged. A multi-faceted body of films, they are shown to engage with the shifting concerns and preoccupations of a population emerging from war, and to be a distinctive phase in the cinematic history of the conflict.
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Introduction

This thesis is an exploration of the representation of the Second World War and its aftermath in popular British feature films in one particular historical period, the five years that followed after victory. It is research into unmapped territory: while film historians have comprehensively studied wartime war films and the war films of the fifties and early sixties are well known if not extensively covered, films about the war made in the immediate post-war years have largely been overlooked. The long-held assumption has been the simplistic notion that film-makers and audiences, sick and tired of war, turned their backs on the subject once hostilities had ceased until there was a revival of interest at the beginning of the fifties. This thesis counters that assumption, and demonstrates that far from the war and its aftermath being absent from cinema screens it was a characteristic element of films and cinema entertainment of those years.

In the methodological tradition that Jeffrey Richards and Tony Aldgate once speculatively termed 'contextual cinematic history', this thesis is primarily an empirically based examination of films within the contemporary social, political, and economic context of their production and consumption. The films are approached not as art but as social practice, the underlying premise being that films, like literature or architecture, are imbued with historical meaning about the society from which they originated. The textual reading of the films is less concerned with visual and compositional elements than with narrative and plot, characterisation and ideology. Contextual film history can open up new insights into an age or subject; it is as much about digging into unknown areas of film history as entering into a debate with the findings and arguments of other historians.

It was not until the middle of the 1970s that British historians began to study feature films as a subject of serious historical enquiry, but thanks to the ground-breaking work of writers such as Aldgate, Richards, and Charles Barr, it is now a well established practice. This is witnessed, for example, by the series of books edited by Richards under the general heading of 'Cinema and

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In his editor's preface to the series, Richards draws attention to the historical evidence to be found in films: 'the cinema', he writes, 'has much to tell to us about people and their beliefs, their assumptions and their attitudes, their hopes and fears and dreams.\(^5\)

As commercial products dependent on the mass audience for profits, films had to engage with, and respond to, audiences' ever-changing experiences and desires. Films were the products of artistic impulse, and so were stamped with the contemporary values, ideas, and outlook of the creative talents that made them. Part-commerce, part-art, film production involved a complicated network of institutions, individuals and processes. The demands of markets and marketing, production companies, censorship codes, distributors, consumers, and exhibitors were all real world forces that shaped the nature of films. The idea of films as intrinsically bound up with the time and place of their production has also been outlined by John O'Connor and Martin Jackson in their examination of American film and American society. They write that 'film is the carrier of deep if enigmatic truth ... The production process, an unstable merger of commerce and art, dependent on collective effort and collective response, is intimately interwoven with the mentalité of the society.\(^6\)

By investigating the cinematic portrayal of the war, this thesis investigates wider, and evolving, attitudes towards the experience in its immediate aftermath. It looks, for instance, at the desire to document and celebrate aspects of the military battle; how there were subtle shifts in the underlying class and narrative concerns of the films; how seedier aspects of the war briefly surfaced in the late forties. The concern underlying these themes is how the war was being re-written and re-interpreted in those years, which was of relevance both to the period itself and as a phase within the longer-term cultural history of the war. The presentation of the war's aftermath raises slightly different issues in the sense that films were dealing with a current and urgent topic, rather than recycling an increasingly historical event. The aftermath films touch on, for instance, the rivalry and hostility between civilians and returning servicemen; the widespread sense of despair and anxiety at the prospect of a third world war; the psychological and social damage caused by the experience; and at the difficult and frustrating readjustment back to peaceful conditions of 'normality'. An investigation into this kind of social history is relatively unusual, at least compared to the numerous


\(^5\) See, for example, the editor's preface in Robertson, *The Hidden Cinema*.

economic and political histories of the period.\textsuperscript{7}

The manner in which films engaged with the society that created them is far from straightforward. At the simplest level they can be seen to hold up a mirror and reflect back on to audiences and filmmakers their own preoccupations and assumptions, but while this is partly true, films were also part of a popular cultural process that digested and reworked the real world. As John Hill suggests, films 'actively explain and interpret the way in which the world is to be perceived and understood.\textsuperscript{8}

Moreover, as Hill argues, it does not necessarily follow that films will project a view that is in keeping with 'those of society as a whole'.\textsuperscript{9} For example, the views and perceptions of educated middle-class filmmakers might have been at odds with the predominantly working-class audience. This happened with Brief Encounter (David Lean, 1946): middle-class critics fêted the film for its sober realism, yet some working class audiences found it laughably prim and restrained.\textsuperscript{10} It also follows that a film did not necessarily have a monolithic meaning, but might mean different things to different audiences, subjectivity being involved in the creation of meaning.

To contextualise a film within the historical circumstances of its time requires assessing it in conjunction with the host of contemporary determinants which influenced its production and consumption. In this thesis, like most research of this kind, the bulk of primary source material available for study comes from published sources: the cinema trade press; popular film annuals and periodicals, specialist film journals and books, mainstream newspapers; press and marketing material. Through their film reviews, articles and studies, polls and viewer surveys, film publicity and advertising, they recall, and provide a vital link with, the character of the unfolding dialogue between the films and the audience they addressed, and do so with an immediacy that catches the spirit of the moment. Indeed, at a time when there was a heightened sense that cinema entertainment was 'inextricably mixed up with everyday existence';\textsuperscript{11} film journalism was particularly attuned to the topicality and social relevance of films. Where films have been adapted from novels and plays, the original sources have been examined, as the process of adaptation offers insights into the thinking behind the film.


\textsuperscript{9} Hill, Sex, Class and Realism: 2.


\textsuperscript{11} Buchanan, Andrew, Film and the Future (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1945): 3.
The box-office performance of films is considered throughout this thesis as it provides evidence of, and raises questions about, the evolving tastes and interests of popular audiences. Compared to the ample records left by professional film writers, there are comparatively few records about the thoughts of the mass of ordinary cinemagoers, so the box-office is a valuable measure in assessing the collective taste of the cinemagoing masses. Identifying the box-office success of a film also helps re-establish the contemporary status of films that have been lost to conventional film histories.

To fully understand the published primary sources it is necessary to explain the constituencies they served and therefore their angle of approach. The trade press (Daily Film Renter, Kinematograph Weekly, Today's Cinema, Variety) was primarily interested in the cinema as a commercial business, a film's worth being judged primarily in terms of its box-office potential rather than artistic merit. Maurice Speed's Film Review was a popular, mass circulation annual for film enthusiasts, offering a round-up of the year's film trends, reviews and articles about films, studios, stars and film-makers, and a complete listing, with dates, of all feature films released that year. Other annual publications aimed at a general readership also appeared, notably The British Film Year Book (ed. Peter Noble). Film periodicals like the Monthly Film Bulletin, Sight and Sound, Sequence, and the (irregularly published) Penguin Film Review were specialist publications for the critically-minded (but not necessarily like-minded). The Monthly Film Bulletin, the mouthpiece of the British Film Institute (BFI), catalogued the release and credits of all films (not just feature films) for the previous month. Most films were reviewed, the Institute's member reviewers reflecting its culturally conservative outlook. Sight and Sound, also published by the BFI but editorially independent, was from 1945 'a quarterly magazine of serious film criticism', a platform for informed debate about cinema. Sequence, co-founded by Lindsay Anderson at the end of 1946 and aimed at the intellectual film theorist, was an iconoclastic journal intended to shake up critical ideas about film.

Beyond their own individual likes and dislikes, regular newspaper critics tended to echo the editorial values of the papers they wrote for in the sense that they were journalists writing for a given readership. The middle-class critics of the quality papers tended to share the critical orthodoxy that privileged films grounded in social realism and literary style, and which had some

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12 Determining a film's box-office success is problematic because of the absence of any comprehensive commercial statistics. There is one regular annual survey of film trends that is used by film historians; the Josh Billings survey in Kinematograph Weekly was regarded at the time as the most authoritative guide to the popularity of films and trends in audience taste. Intended as a dispassionate guide for the exhibitor and renter, the guide was compiled from 'renters sales departments, circuit chiefs, prominent independent bookers, and from our own observations and check-ups. We've not only seen every film mentioned here, but whenever possible, traced its fate from the West End to the suburbs and sticks.' Kinematograph Weekly, 18 December 1947.

social significance and moral uplift – opinions that were frequently at odds with the tastes of the popular audience. Leaders in this field were critics like C.A. Lejeune of the Observer, Richard Winnington of the News Chronicle, and Dilys Powell of The Sunday Times (who together with writers like Denis Forman, Peter Noble, Paul Rotha, Roger Manvell helped define the dominant, and influential, critical framework). At the other end of the spectrum were papers like The Star and the News of the World, whose critics discussed films from the point of view of their own mass readership (and by extension the mass cinema audience), and that point of view was not to seek the kind of educative experience desired by the serious critics, but to assess a film on its ability to entertain and amuse, to ‘offer a temporary escape from the world of realities.’ Somewhere in the middle of the critical spectrum were mid-market papers like the Daily Express and Daily Herald.

The underlying analytical objectives of this thesis are broad: it seeks to establish the prevalence of the war as a cinematic topic; to examine the concerns of individual films and locate them within their historical background; and to consider any underlying characteristics, trends and patterns in the film body as a whole. The thematic structure is dictated by the subject focus of the films themselves (rather, say, than picking a topic and then seeing how films portrayed it). The first stage of the research was to survey the entire output of films in order to identify those with war-related interests, and then to categorise them by topic, a categorisation from which the structure flowed. It is not possible to scrutinise every film in detail as there are too many, and the strategy has been to select a limited number of films for sustained commentary (around 24 films out of a total of 57), supported by extended references to a similar number. A question that immediately arises with this methodology is the danger that the argument will be crudely determined by the films chosen for discussion: selectivity, though, is a fact of life for all historians, and all historical evidence has built-in bias and the potential for mis-interpretation. The fundamental issue is about the quality of historical analysis and scholarship, or the reasonableness of conclusions drawn from evidence consulted, rather than any methodological shortcomings. It might be said, therefore, that the basic determinant in the choice of films is that they are congruent with the analytical objectives of the thesis.

The specific criteria for choosing certain films as case studies at the expense of others is varied. Some films are investigated because they have not previously received much attention like The Years Between (Compton Bennett, 1946), while others such as The Third Man (Carol Reed, 1949), are already well known and well researched but demand re-interpretation within the context of the thesis. By contrast, other well-documented films, like Passport to Pimlico (Henry Cornelius, 1949).

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14 Wilson, A.E., Movie Review (London: Dewynters, 1949): 15. Wilson was the film critic of the Daily Star, and saw himself as seeing films through the eyes and minds of ordinary filmgoers. (Wilson: 15.)
are not examined in detail because existing research is in tune with the argument put forward here, and there is nothing to be gained from repeating the exercise. Films might typify a film type or trend, say *They Made Me a Fugitive* (Cavalcanti, 1947) as an example of the ex-serviceman-as-gangster cycle of films. Alternatively, a film may be a topical one-off, like *Frieda* (Basil Dearden, 1947) with its unique look at the problem of how to deal with the defeated enemy. A film’s box-office and critical success is irrelevant in the choice of films, except for the tiny handful that made no impact with critics or audiences; these have largely been ignored as they were invariably slight films of poor quality. Taken collectively, the films selected for discussion are a representative cross-section of the eclectic body of war and aftermath narratives found in those years.

Chapter One is an overview of the film industry and its place in post-war Britain, intended to help position war and aftermath films in the wider film culture of the time. Chapter Two sets out the proposition that there was a profusion of films which projected the war and its consequences to audiences in the immediate years after victory. The remaining chapters are the sustained contextual discussions of individual films: Chapter Three examines films which focus on the armed forces and the military fight against the enemy; and Chapter Four looks at films which are rooted in the experience of the war on the home-front. Whereas these chapters consider films that actually revisited the war years, the next two chapters explore films that dealt with the aftermath of war as a current issue and preoccupation: Chapter Five takes films which touched on the international ramifications of the conflict; and Chapter Six assesses films which dealt with the war’s aftermath at home.

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PART ONE
SETTING THE SCREEN
Chapter One
An Overview of the British Cinema in the Immediate Post-war Years

The importance of the cinema: a national institution

In the aftermath of war the cinema was still without doubt the most popular entertainment medium; it remained, as A.J.P. Taylor famously wrote of cinemagoing in the 1930s, the 'essential social habit of the age'. Admission figures indicate the sheer scale of the cinemagoing phenomenon: by 1939 there were estimated to be around 19 million admissions per week, which rose during the war to over 30 million by 1945, and peaked in 1946 at 31.4 million. From 1946 attendance figures began gradually to decline (26 million in 1951, 25 million in 1954) although it remained a massively popular pastime until the early 1960s, after which it lost out to the growth of other leisure activities, most notably television.

The experience of cinemagoing in 1940s Britain was not substantially different from the pattern established during the 1930s. As Jeffrey Richards outlines, in the interwar decade people went to the cinema not just to see a film, but to enjoy a ritual confection of treats. There was a mixed programme to enjoy, which might consist of a first and second feature film, a newsreel or cartoon, an information or documentary short, and perhaps live entertainment. A fashionable and shared pleasure, the cinema was a topic of conversation, a venue to meet friends and consume food and refreshment. Admission was cheap, and it was this that underscored the cinema's success, making it a pastime affordable to all. As a consequence, the neighbourhood cinema came to assume a place in the life of the community analogous to those other prime foci of leisure time activities, the church and the pub. Such was the significance of the cinemagoing habit that in 1948 an MP, speaking in a House of Commons debate on the impending embargo of Hollywood films and the

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4 Manvell, The Film and the Public: 217.
5 The number of cinemas had decreased, though, due to enemy bombing. Out of a pre-war total of some 5000 cinemas, 230 were closed, and due to the shortages of building materials no new cinemas were built in the immediate post-war years. Also, until 1949, cinemas lacked their pre-war sparkle and glamour, as electricity rationing forbade the unnecessary use of lighting. Eyles, Allen, 'Rank and Film', in Lloyd, Ann (ed.), Movies of the Forties (London: Orbis, 1984): 101.
impending risk of widespread cinema closures (see page 28), was prompted to warn: 'I wonder if Members realise what would be the reaction of factory workers to the closing down of cinemas ... I think it would be as serious, if not more serious, than if all the tobacconists' shops were closed, or even the pubs. If there is a breakdown involving the closure of our cinemas, there will be some very serious social consequences.\textsuperscript{8}

The basic profile of the audience and their habit of attendance had changed little from the 1930s, despite the considerable growth of admissions during the war years. Broadly, as the Political and Economic Planning (P.E.P.) survey showed in 1952, one third of the population went to the cinema at least once a week, and was predominantly comprised of younger people from the lower economic groups, and slightly more men than women.\textsuperscript{9}

The notable wartime rise in cinema admissions was largely attributable to the economic constraints wrought by war, as P.E.P. outlined: 'the cinema benefited from the curtailment of other forms of amusement and from the general shortage of things on which people could spend their money. For an increasing number of people it conveniently provided a necessary relaxation from long hours of work and danger.'\textsuperscript{10} With shortages and rationing continuing in the early years of peace, so cinema maintained its attraction as a cheap and entertaining diversion. As Paul Addison has written, 'the conditions of everyday life were shabby and constricting' and the 'longed-for rewards' of victory were slow to arrive, and therefore leisure pursuits 'had to compensate for many other things.'\textsuperscript{11} Consequently cinemas, together with other recreational industries such as holiday camps, flourished in the wake of the war.

British films had emerged from the war enjoying unprecedented popular and critical acclaim as a result of films such as \textit{In Which We Serve} (Noel Coward, 1942), and \textit{Millions Like Us} (Frank Launder and Sidney Gilliat, 1943). It was a remarkable transformation in the reputation of British films from the interwar years when they were associated with mediocrity and cheapness.\textsuperscript{12} Praise for British film-makers, and optimism over the future of the industry, came enthusiastically from almost all quarters and interests.\textsuperscript{13} Exhibitors, who wanted entertaining films that would attract the

\textsuperscript{8} Osborne, Michael (Labour), \textit{Parliamentary Debates}, vol. 446, col. 282, 21 January 1948.
\textsuperscript{10} P.E.P., \textit{The British Film Industry}: 82-83.
\textsuperscript{11} Addison, Paul, \textit{Now the War is Over} (London: BBC/Jonathan Cape, 1985): 114.
\textsuperscript{13} Among the lone voices that did not share the optimism was intellectual film theorist Lindsay Anderson, who believed 'the truth is, that though British films have improved, not many of them have had enough imagination or integrity to achieve anything approaching artistic success. It is important that we should not try to delude ourselves or each other as to their real value; complacency is no friend to progress, and at the moment we are much too complacent about
mass audience into their cinemas, were delighted at the new popularity of British films: the *Daily Film Renter* declared 'staggering! That's not an exaggerated term to use on the grosses of British films today. Every British picture is doing terrific business - grosses are way up and we are now witnessing the biggest boom in British films ever known.'

Critics and film writers shared the excitement because a number of popular films were in the realist, social commentary style that they held in high esteem, and they regarded the appearance of these films as the much awaited birth of a national cinema. There were endless commentaries articulating their optimism: Roger Manvell hailed 'the great quality of contemporary British cinema' and spoke of it as 'our cinema's renaissance'; and C.A. Lejeune observed that 'never has the prestige of British films stood as high as it does today.' For such commentators, there was also a rewarding feeling that the tastes of the mass audience were at last improving; Dilys Powell, for example, approvingly noted how 'the British no longer demand pure fantasy in their films; they can be receptive also to the imaginative interpretation of everyday life. There was a buoyant sense too, that British films were capable of seriously rivalling Hollywood, both at home and abroad. As one commentator argued, 'our technical standards have so improved that today British films are as good as Hollywood's best, and, in certain instances, infinitely better.'

The glowing reputation of British films was attributable to the war for a variety of reasons, and not least because of the new-found enthusiasm for film in government circles. Although initially slow to recognise the value of cinema in wartime, the government soon came to realise the valuable role that cinema could play in boosting morale, and in disseminating propaganda and information. Consequently the government, in contrast to the pre-war years, was keenly anxious to support film-makers. As Michael Balcon noted in 1946, 'the government's negative attitude became more positive, and the film production industry was even helped and encouraged to survive the war.'

The unique atmosphere of war, and the peculiar ideological project of wartime films to emphasise and define the national values and virtues for which the country was fighting, galvanised the production industry into making a new generation of films. As Robert Murphy writes, 'the upsurge

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14 *Daily Film Renter*, 30 August 1945.


of patriotism and of interest in Britain's heritage meant that audiences wanted to see British films about British subjects. And there is no doubt that British film-makers did grasp the opportunities, both in terms of exciting subject matter and as a common frame of reference, offered by the war...

The war provided opportunities for film-makers to explore new subjects and to use new techniques. As numerous film writers have recounted, feature film-makers adopted to an unprecedented extent the techniques and style of the documentarists. While respected as artists in the 1930s, documentary film-makers were peripheral to the mass commercial cinema as documentaries did not sit comfortably with the entertainment ethic of mainstream commercial cinema. Wartime demands, though, brought about a shift in attitudes as the Daily Mail Film Award Annual noted, the 'documentary boys' who had 'spent years making small, real-life films showing fishermen at work, or animals at play' came into their own during the war when 'films demanded by the Dunkirk spirit were films which revealed the drama, the heroism and the comedy of everyday life.' These demands, continued the writer, were well suited to the abilities of the documentarists, and as a result 'the documentary influence in wartime was probably the greatest single factor in our films' success.'

The documentary influence on the commercial feature film led to those films focusing, to an unparalleled extent, on aspects of national life in what was understood and credited to be a considered and realistic manner. This new 'realist' style, with its sober presentation of real people and real situations, appeared to appeal both to the critical establishment which placed a high value on the realist aesthetic, and to the mass cinema audience, who for the first time were able to see themselves on screen portrayed with seriousness and respect. This type of film caught the wartime mood; In Which We Serve has already been mentioned, but another example (from the same filmmaking team) is This Happy Breed (David Lean, 1944). A tribute to the lives of ordinary British people, it was the hit of 1944. The critic C.A. Lejeune not only complimented the film for its touching evocation of suburban life, but also referred to the enthusiasm felt for it by audiences. She wrote that 'no film in my memory has brought in more letters of appreciation' and quotes a Flying Officer who felt he and his fellow viewers 'were seeing England, the real England, for the first

20 Murphy, 'The British Film Industry' in Taylor, Britain and the Second World War: 41.
23 There was no definition as to exactly what constituted a 'realist' film. For a discussion of its elusive nature, see Ellis, John, 'Art, Culture, and Quality: Terms for a Cinema in the Forties and Seventies', Screen, Autumn, 1978: 9-49. The imprecise nature of the term is necessarily echoed in this thesis: words and phrases such as semi-documentary, social comment film, social/cultural/educative/national cinema, and social realism are all to some large extent interchangeable.
The semi-documentary style of film-making was not to develop into the expression of social comment that cultural critics desired, but its visual style was highly influential in shaping the post-war film body. Many post-war films of the period, such as *The Blue Lamp* (Basil Dearden, 1949), have a documentary flavour in the sense that they have a surface verisimilitude, thus framing their fictional narratives within a recognisable contemporary reality. It was a style that became particularly associated with war films. In the fifties when the war film was at its peak of popularity, film-makers invariably adopted it in order to reproduce the familiar feel of wartime films (thus also eschewing the use of colour and the new wide-screen format). As John Ramsden has written, "the traditional look was consciously adopted so as to make post-war films look like films made during the war years, deliberately obscuring the passage of time, and continuing the visual merging of documentary and fictional traditions that was a notable feature of 1939-45 film-making."

The success of British films in the forties was not confined to the kind of realist films that middle-class critics like Lejeune lauded. Distinctly non-realistic films, such as the Gainsborough costume dramas, also underwent a transformation in quality and reputation, and attracted huge popular audiences (much to the chagrin of the educated critics who thought such films 'undeserving of the popular success they have won', being regarded as inferior 'films on trivial conventional themes trivially handled'). Murphy, for instance, notes how the improved quality of British films ranged from realist films to 'escapist melodramas such as *The Man in Grey* (Leslie Atiess, 1943) and *Madonna of the Seven Moons* (Arthur Crabtree, 1944) which rivalled the top Hollywood pictures in popularity with British audiences.

Cinema's wartime success generated a considerable amount of interest and activity. As one commentator noted in 1946, 'the film has been the subject of much hectic discussion in this country in recent months. A profusion of new publications about film appeared, such as the serious-minded *Penguin Film Review*, which saw itself as satisfying the 'desire for the existence of a progressive review which recognises the importance of the cinema in modern society.' For

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29 The series ran from 1946-49, and was then superseded by the annual Pelican Review. The quote is from the first edition, page 7.
general reader there was an abundance of books about various aspects of cinema.\textsuperscript{30} Publications for film fans proliferated, and by the late 1940s there were at least twenty-seven on sale, many of which attracted a large readership,\textsuperscript{31} such as \textit{Picturegoer} which had a readership of 500,000 per week in 1951.\textsuperscript{32} Other signs of the new status of British films included the \textit{Daily Mail}'s creation of a National Film Award which was intended to 'acknowledge the new prestige of British films, won in the worst days of the war',\textsuperscript{33} the establishment of a government grant to the British Film Institute,\textsuperscript{34} the setting up in 1947 of the British Film Academy to help promote British film; and the inauguration in 1946 of the Royal Command Performance for a film. (The first film given this privileged showing, \textit{A Matter of Life and Death}, Powell and Pressburger, 1946, was rooted in the war experience, the central character being a psychologically damaged RAF pilot.)

Film production also acquired a 'new status as an industry essential to the country's balance of payments. In the past [film] had been culturally essential; now it had also become an economic necessity.'\textsuperscript{35} It was seen as a means of helping the export drive, as well as reducing the dependency on Hollywood films and so lessening the huge outflow of dollars, an especially urgent factor at a time when 'the balance of payments problem was poised like an axe over Britain's economic recovery.'\textsuperscript{36} Consequently, the encouragement of film production became a major concern of the Board of Trade,\textsuperscript{37} and the subject of inquiry by several government-sponsored committees, such as the 1948 Film Studio Committee, which looked into the desirability of state intervention in film studios, and the 1949 Working Party on Film Production Costs.

Throughout the aftermath years the cinema was high profile, headline news. There was considerable concern about the influence of films on cinemagoers, especially younger ones, which generated a spate of social surveys and official reports.\textsuperscript{38} Cinema was frequently mentioned in

\textsuperscript{30} Examples include, Wood, \textit{The Miracle of the Movies}, and Buchanan, \textit{Film and the Future}.


\textsuperscript{32} Baker, B., 'Picturegoer', \textit{Sight and Sound}, vol. 53, no. 3, 1985, quoted in Swann, \textit{The Hollywood Feature Film in Post-war Britain}: 8

\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Daily Mail Film Award Annual}: 20.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Daily Herald}, 9 November 1948.

\textsuperscript{35} P.E.P., \textit{The British Film Industry}: 102.

\textsuperscript{36} Addison, \textit{Now the War is Over}: 179.

\textsuperscript{37} The government had had a limited involvement in the affairs of the film industry from 1927, when it introduced the first Quota Act. (This was a measure designed to protect the British film production industry against American competition by guaranteeing that a certain percentage of films shown on British screens were British. It ended in 1982.) For an account of the Quota Acts, see, for example, Robertson, James, C., \textit{The British Board of Film Censors: Film Censorship in Britain, 1896-1950} (London: Croom Helm, 1985): 179.

\textsuperscript{38} Examples include: Mayer, J. P., \textit{Sociology of Film} (London: Faber and Faber, first edition 1945, second edition
parliament; there were a series of major debates about the film industry, such as the American Films (Importation) debate in November 1945, and the Adjournment Debate on the British Film Industry in November 1948. There were bills dealing with the legislative framework within which the cinema industry operated, most crucially the 1948 Cinematograph Films Bill. As well as debating the structure of the industry, points and questions were raised about controversial films, such as the American war film Rommel, Desert Fox (Henry Hathaway, 1951, US), which was accused of glorifying Rommel and causing 'incidents likely to cause a breach of the peace', and on at least two occasions controversial films were discussed in cabinet.

Politicians sought to be publicly associated with cinema and attended festivals and premieres. Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin visited the British/Czech film festival in 1946, and in a speech declared that films 'will help to explain the British people to their friends in other lands.' There are countless references to political celebrities attending film premieres, such as the premiere of Mark of Cain (Brian Desmond Hurst, 1947) where members of the Cabinet, including Attlee, Morrison, A.V. Alexander, Bevin will be guests of honour.

Many politicians had professional connections with the film world, such as Labour MP Eric Fletcher who was a director of Associated British Picture Company (ABPC), and Tom O'Brien, another Labour MP, who was National Secretary of the National Association of Theatre and Kinematograph Employees (NATKE). Duff Cooper, ex-ambassador to Paris and past government minister, joined Alexander Korda's payroll at the beginning of 1948 to facilitating selling films on the continent, a job he did until December 1951. Walter Citrine was 'said to be advising the Circuits Management Association,' and Stafford Cripps was on friendly terms with the flamboyant

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1948, and its 'sequel' British Cinemas and Their Audiences (London: Dennis Dobson, 1948); and the 1948 report of the Wheare Committee on Children and the Cinema.


The films are Chance of a Lifetime (Bernard Miles, 1950), and Immer Berefit (1951, GDR). Records of the cabinet discussions are filed at the Public Record Office: Chance of a Lifetime (PRO: BT/64/4466); and Immer Berefit (PRO: PREM 8/1411).


* Daily Film Renter, 31 December 1947.


* Daily Film Renter, 17 January 1945.

* Daily Film Renter, 5 November 1945.
Italian producer Felippo Del Guidice.\textsuperscript{46}

Films were seen as vital ambassadors for Britain and the Empire. On one level they paved the way for exports by publicising British goods and lifestyle to foreign audiences. Gaitskell acknowledged this in his comment that films were 'a first-class opportunity for advertising our other [apart from the films themselves] commercial products' and that it cannot be 'denied that "trade follows the film"'.\textsuperscript{47} On another level there was 'a growing belief in film as a medium of communication, particularly vital in the all-important field of international relations.'\textsuperscript{48} Films, as Ellen Wilkinson, Education Minister, put it, could be 'bearers of friendly messages from one great democracy to another ... film is the nearest approach to an international language and should be used as such.'\textsuperscript{49}

The idea of film as a cultural and political messenger acquired fresh impetus as the cold war took hold, and there were calls for the use of film to project Western values. As Labour MP Raymond Blackburn argued, 'good films can be an excellent export, and can help, without being direct propaganda, to show foreign countries the priceless blessings of freedom as against the horrors of the police state.'\textsuperscript{50} In a later debate, Blackburn continued, 'if we exclude our defence forces, I can imagine nothing more important for this country than that we should have the best, and most prosperous British film industry and the most exportable British films.\textsuperscript{51} In similar vein it was also said that films should be used to promote the Empire to home audiences, educate the 'natives' in the colonies, and counter anti-Empire propaganda. In 1948, for example, Conservative MP Brigadier Sir Ralph Raynor suggested that the government could subsidise feature films. He believed that 'we could produce the most wonderful films which would have excellent educational value not only in our own Empire but in America, and which would also offset all the communist anti-Empire propaganda.'\textsuperscript{52}

Films were seen as crucial in the cultural process of explaining and defining what the war stood

\textsuperscript{46} Allegedly, Cripps was 'not austere when it came to the financing of films. More accurately, Stafford was a soft touch when his wife Isobel came on to the set. She was a warm-hearted lady, a devoted supporter of many good causes. Amongst these was encouragement in season and out for an immigrant producer named Del Guidice. Cripps, who was counting every penny for the welfare state ... was ready to raid the tills for Del.' Wilson, Harold, Memoirs, 1916-1964: The Making of a Prime Minister (London: Weidenfeld and Michael Joseph, 1986): 104, quoted in Macnab, Geoffrey, J. Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry (London: Routledge, 1993): 87.

\textsuperscript{47} Daily Film Renter, 1 January 1946.

\textsuperscript{48} Road, 'The Influence of the Film' in Penguin Film Review: 57.

\textsuperscript{49} Reported in Sight and Sound, vol. 15, no. 60, 1946: 146.


\textsuperscript{51} Parliamentary Debates, vol. 458, col. 2278, 2 December 1948.

\textsuperscript{52} Parliamentary Debates, vol. 454, col. 636, 22 July 1948.
for, and how Britain fought it, to both domestic and foreign audiences. This was recognised in government circles with films often attracting official patronage and the co-operation of the services in making the films. In 1950, for instance, the release of Odette (Herbert Wilcox, 1950), a film about the Second World War heroine Odette, was virtually accorded the status of a national event. Attending the British premiere were the king and queen, and prominent politicians, and it was similarly honoured by British ambassadors and local dignitaries when it was released in European capitals.

It was also important for national self-respect to be able to furnish domestic screens with British films on British subjects. As Conservative front-bencher Oliver Lyttelton argued, 'a national film industry is, if not as important, at any rate of comparable importance to a national press or national literature.' Moreover, without British films domestic cinema screens would be host to foreign films and the foreign cultural influences that this implied. And for all the euphoria over the success of British films, Hollywood films (including war films) remained highly popular and occupied about 80% of screen-time in British cinemas. In some quarters there was simmering resentment over the showing of so many Hollywood films: Labour MP Richard Adams, for example, felt that 'we are in danger in this country of coming far too much under the influence of American civilisation. When we consider that the cinema is indirectly a form of propaganda, we must appreciate how it is that, every week, millions of the public go and sit for several hours in a cinema and come under the influence of American opinion and the American way of life.'

On occasion Hollywood's portrayal of the war was a source of consternation and wounded pride on the grounds that it presented the war as a rather too American affair. One example was Objective Burma (Raoul Walsh, 1945, US); described as a 'yarn about the American paratrooper invasion of Burma,' it caused an outcry because of its 'Americanisation' of the war. In his annual review of films, Maurice Speed recorded how the film had created an 'uproar' because 'as usual with the majority of American movies, it pictured the Burma campaign as being run almost entirely by the Americans, whereas practically the reverse was the truth. The fuss was enough to

53 See, for instance, Ramsden, 'Refocusing the People's War': 51.
54 Daily Film Renter, 7 June 1950.
55 Daily Film Renter, 16 November 1950.
59 Variety, 31 January 1945.
cause the film to be withdrawn from cinemas in October 1945,\textsuperscript{61} and also precipitated the postponement of the British release of Hollywood's film about the Salerno landings, \textit{A Walk in the Sun} (Lewis Milestone, 1945, US) until 1951. The \textit{News Chronicle}, for instance, noted how the British market for \textit{A Walk in the Sun} 'was spoiled by \textit{Objective Burma}. It has never been shown here, presumably because it also depicted an all-American war.\textsuperscript{62} Another example was a film about the wartime development of the atom bomb, \textit{The House on 92nd Street} (Henry Hathaway, 1945, US), which attracted 'a complaint that Britain had been slighted over her share in the invention.\textsuperscript{63}

Resentment was also expressed at Hollywood's treatment of British life and heritage; for instance, Labour MP John Wilmot was upset at how a British literary classic had been 'completely ruined by the American treatment'.\textsuperscript{64} Hollywood was also blamed for 'Americanising' British film culture; gangster films, for instance, were often seen as the undesirable products of Hollywood influence. For example, Labour MP Raymond Blackburn complained of the crime film \textit{Noose} (Edmond T. Greville, 1948) that it 'tries to make out that London is like Chicago. The whole purpose of this film is to make out that we have gangsters here and to represent this country as being like America.\textsuperscript{65}

\textbf{Censorship, morality and politics}

As in the 1930s the assumption underscoring the imposition of censorship was that the mass working-class audience was vulnerable to the (malign) influence of films. It was a position Arthur Watkins, the Secretary of the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC), stated in 1948: 'there would be no need of a censor if film audiences were made up exclusively of mature and responsible adults. Censorship is necessary in view of the heterogeneous nature of film audiences; the youthful and unstable element inevitably to be found in these audiences must be protected from the harmful influences which would undoubtedly appear if there was no censorship at all.\textsuperscript{66}

Standards of censorship had begun to loosen during the war, and old taboos were increasingly broken in the post-war years. In 1936 the BBFC deemed \textit{Love on the Dole}, Walter Greenwood's novel and play about the impact of the depression on working-class lives, unsuitable for a film, yet

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{Daily Film Renter}, 1 October 1945.
\item \textit{Daily Herald}, 29 December 1945.
\item \textit{Kinematograph Weekly}, 9 December 1948.
\end{itemize}
found it acceptable four years later. The reason the BBFC changed its mind was that the political and social climate had shifted with the outbreak of war. As Jeffrey Richards argues, by 1940 *Love on the Dole*'s portrayal of poverty and unemployment was in tune with 'those wartime features and documentaries which argued for a "brave new postwar world" in which the conditions of the thirties "must never happen again"'. *Love on the Dole*, with its portrayal of a woman selling herself to alleviate the poverty of her family, also breached the BBFC's strict sexual and moral conventions. These were to come under increasing pressure towards the end of the war: films like *The Wicked Lady* (Leslie Arliss, 1945), albeit in historical guise, revelled in a new level of sexuality; and more soberly *Brief Encounter* (David Lean, 1945) became the first film to deal 'with middle-aged love outside the confines of marriage' (even if the ending still reinforced marriage over sexual desire). The post-war years heralded in a cycle of unprecedentedly violent and sexual films, one of the first being *Brighton Rock* (John Boulting, 1947) which reversed all previous BBFC policy in allowing the depiction of British organised crime, and in the process opened the way to more supposedly "realistic" British films of various genres, but more especially crime films. Characteristic of the late 1940s, these brooding films symbolised an undercurrent of post-war pessimism and the perception of growing lawlessness and disorder.

The continuing easing of censorship conventions in the late 1940s which allowed the screening of these films was not the result of a concerted, or consistent, liberalising strategy on the part of the BBFC, but a considered recognition and accommodation of the prevailing social climate. In doing so, the BBFC tried to balance the competing demands of film-makers who sought to go beyond the permissible, cinemagoers who wanted adult themes, the protection of the mass audience from 'harmful influences', and moralisers who feared the damaging effects of films. In trying to juggle these demands, the BBFC's decisions were not always consistent, and were occasionally out of step with mainstream opinion-formers. The biggest furore surrounding the BBFC at this time was its certification of *No Orchids for Miss Blandish* (St John L Clowes, 1948). Regarded as a particularly sadistic and brutal gangster film, it attracted widespread moral outrage which forced the BBFC to issue an apology.

Censorship was mostly confined to questions of sex, violence and morals. Political censorship was

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68 Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace*: 120.

69 Robertson, *The British Board of Film Censors*: 160.

70 Robertson, *The British Board of Film Censors*: 169.

71 This theme is developed in Chapter Six, especially pages 178-194.

not the issue it had been in the 1930s when the government was seen as conspiring with the BBFC to keep politically sensitive subjects, such as industrial strife, out of cinemas. The situation with political censorship in the aftermath years was relatively straightforward and uncontroversial. In theory the BBFC had the power to censor a film for virulent and provocative opinions, but in practice it was never much of an issue as the chilly attitude of previous Boards to films of a controversial nature is discouraged by a Secretary who believes that people should be made to think in the cinema as well entertained. Film-makers showed little inclination to want to produce politically critical films, and the election of the Attlee government had rendered pre-war radical politics on film less controversial. The BBFC wanted to be seen as non-political, and cited its non-intervention in the controversy surrounding Sword in the Desert (George Sherman, 1949, US) as proof of the BBFC's impartiality. A story set in Palestine, the film sparked off a whirlwind of anger and riots and was boycotted by cinemas on account of its alleged anti-British sentiments.

But as far as the BBFC was concerned, there was no valid ground for intervention on their part and left the verdict to the "discretion and common sense of the cinema public". (One writer later complained that the disappearance of the film from the nation's screens was an instance of indirect censorship by a minority group of fanatics.)

Another reason that few films with overt political themes were made, was because the cinema was perceived as a place of 'entertainment' rather than as a venue for social and political education. Films were expected to avoid 'politics', as socialist script-writer and producer Muriel Box recalled: 'we were not under contract to Rank to make films with overt statements on social problems or those with propaganda themes. We were expected to produce a programme of films that would interest the general public and encourage people to go to the cinema more frequently and enjoy well-made and amusing comedies. We were not engaged to indulge our own political or socialist views.' There were exceptions, including films about the war and its aftermath, such as The Years

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74 Hinxman, Margaret, The British Board of Film Censors, Film in 1951: A Special Publication on British Films and Film-Makers for the Festival of Britain (published by Sight and Sound for the British Film Institute, 1951): 57.

75 Robertson, The British Board of Film Censors: 160.

76 Hinxman, Margaret, The British Board of Film Censors: 57.

77 See Phelps, Guy, Film Censorship (London: Victor Gollancz, 1975): 149. Contemporary journals also record that the film was boycotted by 4,700 cinemas, Daily Film Renter, 26 January 1950: 30, and that riots caused the closure of a cinema where it was shown. Daily Express, 4 February 1950.

78 Phelps, Film Censorship: 149.

79 Hinxman, The British Board of Film Censors: 57.

80 Interview with Lady Gardiner (formerly Muriel Box), in Aspinall, Sue and Murphy, Robert (eds), Gainsborough Melodrama (London: BFI, 1983): 65.
Between (Compton Bennett, 1946). Scripted by Box (a rare example of a film expressing her political thoughts) it self-consciously put forward some progressive messages about the post-war role of women. Another example is Frieda (Basil Dearden, 1947) which made a plea for a more tolerant view of Germans at a time of fervent anti-German hostility.

While the BBFC did not get embroiled in controversy with regard to the political content of films, there were nevertheless allegations, from both sides of the political spectrum, about political bias on screen. The complaints of those on the right were mainly directed at government sponsored Central Office of Information (COI) films, which they often argued amounted to socialist propaganda. Allegations of political bias from those on the left was focused mainly on newsreels, which they believed tended to be hostile to the Labour government. Many on the left also felt that the structure of the film industry stifled the production of progressive films. Their disaffection stemmed from their conviction that a capitalist monopoly controlled a vital and influential medium of communication, which was particularly objectionable in the communitarian atmosphere of the immediate post-war years. The most powerful player in the industry was J. Arthur Rank who controlled much of the industry's three arms: film production, distribution and exhibition. The remaining business not controlled by Rank was largely controlled by Associated British Picture Corporation (ABPC), under the chairmanship of Sir Philip Warter. (Technically it was duopoly rather than a monopoly.) It was the government commissioned report The Tendencies to Monopoly in the Cinematograph Industry (published in 1944, and also known as the Palache Report) which for the first time publicly exposed the monopolistic structure of the industry, and so endorsed the premise on which it was constituted, namely that unjustifiable monopoly existed and was 'a threat to the future prospects of an independent and unfettered British film industry.'

Imprecisely defined as being free 'from foreign domination and freedom from dominating British control,' the independent producer was seen as necessary 'for a healthy competition of influences, methods and ideas.' And so for the left, Rank was a big business monopoly freezing out

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81 For a full discussion of The Years Between see pages 112-119.
82 For a full discussion of Frieda see pages 130-140.
83 See, for example, Dickinson, Margaret and Street, Sarah, Cinema and State: The Film Industry and the British Government 1927-84 (London: BFI, 1985): 169.
84 Kinematograph Weekly, 11 August 1949, for instance, ran a story about a recent Tribune 'diatribe against newsreels' on the grounds of 'their alleged anti-government attitude.'
86 Palache Report, quoted in Macnab, J. Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry: 45.
imaginative, politically progressive 'independent' film-making, and denying audiences the opportunity of seeing such films. The Kinematograph Weekly outlined the left's case: 'as an industry we are accused [by the left] of not taking risks, of having no vision, of playing for safety, and of taking a negative and obstructive line to anything which is progressive or reformist.

In the reformist atmosphere of the post-war years cinema attracted the attentions of a plethora of reformers from outside the industry - moralists, sociologists, critics, politicians, trade unionists - who all wanted to shape the industry to their own model. For traditionalists within the industry there was a sense they were under siege. As one trade paper complained, 'Our Industry or Theirs? Everybody, we are told, has two businesses - his own and the picture business ... The social aspects of the cinema are on everybody's mind.' For reformers state intervention was the way forward, although the degree of intervention was open to question with some radicals calling for the 'creation of a State-owned Fourth Circuit administered as a public corporation' consisting of 300-400 key cinemas. Most reformers, though, did not seek public control of the cinema, but fell into what P.E.P. called the 'middle road', such as the authors of the Plant Report, who recommended limited structural alterations.

The relationship between the cinema and reformists was complex; such were the multiform, criss-crossing interests involved both within and outside of the industry, that it was no simple matter of reformists versus the trade. The industry itself was far from united with its three tiers of interest often being at odds; exhibitors, for instance, had little to gain by supporting British filmmakers when Hollywood imports were, for them, highly profitable. There were stark differences in outlook between professional groups within the industry; the militant left-wing ACT was worlds apart from the conservative, fiercely entrepreneurial Cinema Exhibitors Association (CEA). Potential reformers also had a variety of objectives; some reformers saw intervention as way of raising the cultural profile of cinema, while others were more concerned about re-organising the industry on the commercial grounds of making it a more efficient, competitive business. The

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88 For more discussion on this theme see Macnab, J. Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry: 43-50.

89 Kinematograph Weekly, 22 August 1946. The cause of Tribune's accusations was the reluctance of exhibitors to show two semi-documentary films with leftish leanings, The Way We Live (Jill Craigie, 1946) and Land of Promise (Paul Rotha, 1945).

90 Daily Film Renter, 18 November 1946.


92 P.E.P., The British Film Industry: 156. The Plant Report was otherwise known as the Committee on the Distribution and Exhibition of Cinematograph Films, and with an eye to improving efficiency investigated the workings of the exhibition and distribution arms of the industry. It was published in 1949.
diversity of approaches and objectives was also echoed across party political lines as views on the film industry were not framed by party allegiance. As Dickinson and Street have written, there was no unified Labour position on the film industry. The Conservatives were also not of one mind. Some regarded all controls as anathema, while others outdid their Labour colleagues in demanding restrictions on American film imports. The content of film debates in both Houses tended to reflect constituency pressures and personal interests rather than party allegiances. 03

Calls for state intervention in the industry on cultural grounds were part of the wider movement towards state involvement in the arts which had gathered momentum in the war, and resulted in the creation of such institutions as the Arts Council, and the Third Programme on BBC radio. For the educated classes the cinema was ripe for reform: regarding it for the most part as a source of crude, superficial entertainment, middle-class arbiters of public taste sought to re-mould the cinema into a medium with which to raise cultural standards and social awareness. A strident and elitist advocate of this was sociologist J.P. Mayer, who argued that ‘films must become a deliberate concern of cultural leadership’, and called for state intervention in film distribution as a way improving the quality of films available to cinemagoers. 04 The problem for such standard-bearers was that unlike radio and television, cinema had grown into a powerful business before they had had a chance to interfere. It was a conundrum outlined by Labour MP Stephen Taylor: 'I like to speculate on what would have happened if the cinematograph industry had suddenly been discovered de novo, fully fledged like the radio. I can imagine in, say, 1923 or 1924, a Royal Commission reporting and the Conservative government of those days considering as a result, that this great industry, with its vast potentialities for education and human welfare, could not possibly be left in private hands. I can imagine them very reluctantly setting up a British Cinematograph Corporation as a sort of visual brother to the BBC. 05

The other driving force for reform was to improve the economic efficiency of the film industry, in the same way as any other manufacturing industry. This was the justification for the Palache Report, and the reason film came under the auspices of the Board of Trade. It was Harold Wilson’s 06 ‘decision "to achieve maximum output on a sound economic basis" [that] opened the flood-gates of Government intervention in the affairs of the industry. 07 To this end, government intervention concentrated on aiding film production by such strategies as setting up the National Film Finance Corporation (NFFC) and the Eady Fund, both intended to provide funds for film

93 Dickinson, and Street, Cinema and State: 152.
94 Mayer, British Cinemas and Their Audiences: 246.
96 Wilson was President of the Board of Trade from September 1947 until April 1951.
production. Overall, it was hoped that with government help the production industry could be nurtured into a major post-war, export-led industry.

For film industry traditionalists the reformist zeal was unwelcome as they wanted to continue running their business on their own terms. Some state intervention was accepted (though it was hardly new - the state been involved since the 1927 Quota Act) so long as it was limited to the role of referee rather than player. For the traditionalists, cinema was a branch of showbusiness, a medium of entertainment: it was not the place of realism, information and education that so many reformers desired. 'Filmdom', as Kinematograph Weekly argued, 'is concerned only with purveying entertainment in exchange for cash. It is not the duty of the commercial industry to educate the public. Instead, it is its job to amuse it, and if it does this satisfactorily and respectably - as it does - it has fulfilled its function.' Filmdom need not have worried about the possibility of excessive state intervention, as ministers never envisaged far-reaching legislation. Dickinson and Street, for instance, have written that the reluctance shown by Cripps and Wilson to reorganise the industry by compulsory means was in keeping with their approach to the private sector as a whole. The emphasis was on promoting co-operation and encouraging industry to reorganise itself.

Film production

For all the hopes surrounding the future of the British film at the end of the war, the production industry was soon in dire financial crisis; by September 1949 the continuance of film-making in this country had already become dependent on loans from public funds. Losses faced by film-makers were colossal: in 1948 Rank 'announced that the organisation's bank loans and overdrafts had reached £13.5 million (they rose to £16 million in 1949) and Korda had production losses of almost £2.25 million. As a result of its debts, the industry contracted as James Park describes: 'in early 1949, 17 studios were idle, over a third of the film technicians' union's members were unemployed and British film-making, as a writer in the New Statesman put it, was "facing disaster". Rank 'ordered savage cut-backs. No film was to cost over £150,000 - a far cry from the half million spent on the Olivier/Shakespeare films. Rank stopped making cartoons, terminated This Modern Age, closed the studios at Highbury (and the "charm school"), Islington and Shepherds Bush and cut back on production activity at Denham.

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98 Kinematograph Weekly, 22 August 1946.
99 Dickinson and Street, Cinema and State: 199.
103 Eyles, 'Rank and Film', in Lloyd, Movies of the Forties: 103.
It is not necessary to expand on the causes of the crash which were complex and contentious, so suffice here to draw attention to two inter-related factors that precipitated, if not actually caused, the crisis. First, was the costly 'Food or Films' debacle;104 and second, was the doomed attempt to break into the lucrative American market which led to huge financial losses.105

From the early 1940s until 1948 when 'the overblown bubble of British feature production burst',106 was a time of relative prosperity for British film-makers in the sense that their films were financially underwritten by Rank's fortune (Billings wryly noted how 'two out of every three films were sponsored by the Rank Organisation107), and so many film-makers were able to make expensive films which more often than not lost money.108 It is a theme chronicled by Macnab who

104 This arose from the government's attempt to stem the $70 million cost of importing Hollywood films by suddenly imposing a 75% customs duty (P.E.P., The British Film Industry: 98-99). Hollywood retaliated by boycotting Britain, an action which prompted Rank to embark on an ambitious production programme to make up the shortfall of films, a crash programme that 'cost over £9 million' (Eyles, 'Rank and Film', in Lloyd, Movies in the Forties: 103). When it was well under way, it was rendered redundant when the government abruptly reached an agreement with the Americans, with the dire consequence, as Eyles has written, that Hollywood 'unleashed a backlog of 265 pictures and the new British films were swamped under the competition'(Eyles: 103), and consequently did 'considerable damage to British producers' (Dickinson and Street, Cinema and State: 191). It was an infamous affair which generated bitter arguments over who was to blame for the fiasco, and the extent to which it was responsible for nearly killing off the industry. For varying opinions on the disaster, see Dickinson and Street, Eyles, and Macnab, J. Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry.

105 Rank sought to penetrate the US market by producing expensive 'prestige' films which could compete with the production values of Hollywood. Regarded as "highly speculative luxury products" (P.E.P., The British Film Industry: 68, source of quote not credited), they were high risk investments as they depended entirely for their financial success on uncertain export earnings. If films failed to make substantial inroads into the difficult American market they were commercially doomed, as the British market alone was not big enough to cover production costs, let alone make a surplus (P.E.P: 70). Despite some significant successes, as a 'short-term commercial strategy the prestige experiment was a costly failure' (P.E.P: 97) for it did not succeed in capturing the mass American market fast enough. For a discussion of the topic see, for instance, Murphy, Robert, Rank's Attempt for the American Market, in Curran, James, and Porter, Vincent, British Cinema History (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983): 166.


108 The industry attracted a certain notoriety for extravagance and wastefulness with the costs of many films, especially the prestige ones, spiralling out of control (See, for example, P.E.P., The British Film Industry: 265-266). Examples of particular excess included London Town (Wesley Ruggles, 1946) which came in at £800,000 (Cross, Robin, The Big Book of British Films, Devon: Charles Herridge, 1984: 56), and Caesar and Cleopatra (Gabriel Pascal, 1945) at an astonishing £1,278,000 (Cross: 56). While these were exceptionally expensive, the average cost of prestige films was still relatively high at an average of £300,000 (Macnab, J. Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry: 92). As a popular film could only expect to make a maximum of £200,000 in the domestic market (Macnab: 107), if it failed to sell well abroad it lost a lot of money. By comparison the average estimated cost of an 'A' feature film designed for home audiences was £100,830 (Kinematograph Weekly, 17 March 1949), and so had a reasonable chance to pay its way. And occasionally very successful films were made for considerably less; the big hit The Seventh Veil (Compton Bennett, 1945) was made for a mere £67,000 (Cross: 56). B pictures, for the record, averaged a little under £20,000 (Kinematograph Weekly, 17 March 1949).
argues that Rank's most respected film-makers, who operated under his prestige Independent Producers banner, such as David Lean (Cineguild), Powell and Pressburger (The Archers), Launder and Gilliat (Individual), and Jack Lee and Ian Dalrymple (Wessex) were in the privileged position of being 'recognised as "artists" and allowed to experiment' on big budgets. The significance of this was that such film-makers could, and did, follow their artistic impulses and pay little heed to the demands of the box-office. Among the films so generously funded were two war films; Launder and Gilliat could afford to make *I See a Dark Stranger* (1946), a comedy-drama set in the wartime home-front, on location in Ireland, and Powell and Pressburger could indulge in artistic experimentation on a grand scale with *A Matter of Life and Death* (1947).

As a commercial strategy it was a disaster, as many of the films failed to attract the mass audience and therefore lost a great deal of money. The type of film that most consistently turned in profits (and helped subsidise the prestige pictures) were the lower budgeted films that were specifically designed to appeal to the popular domestic market. These modest, often insular, 'bread and butter' films, were, as Maurice Ostrer (one time head of production at Gainsborough) said, the 'backbone of the British studio', a number of war films being in this category, such as *No Room at the Inn* (Dan Birt, 1948).

The most commercially successful producer was Herbert Wilcox who achieved a remarkable string of box-office hits from the silent period through to the mid-fifties, when he lost his midas touch. During those years, as David Quinlan notes, 'his pictures probably made more money on average than those of any other director.' Wilcox was a showman: he was not concerned with stylistic virtuosity but with making films that would please the ordinary cinemagoer, and this meant not stark realism but Hollywood-style 'escape entertainment of pleasant people in pleasant surroundings doing pleasant things or highly coloured musical romance.' Three of the most successful war films were made by Wilcox: *Piccadilly Incident* (1946); *The Courtneys of Curzon Street* (1947); and *Odette*. Wilcox also made a film about the aftermath of the war, *Elizabeth of Ladymead* (1949), which was unsuccessful and a rare example of him producing a box-office failure.

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110 Macnab, *J. Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry*: 95.
111 *Kinematograph Weekly*, 19 April 1945.
114 See pages 177-180.
Wilcox survived the production crisis intact, but for many film-makers it ushered in a new climate of strict cost controls and a greater emphasis on films' marketability than artistry. Rank, smarting from his losses and exasperated by such a troublesome industry, retreated from films and handed over the running of the company to the hard-headed accountant John Davis. Without Rank's generous patronage, the production industry lost its primary source of funding and its very existence as a volume producer of films was threatened. It became increasingly clear, as Ernest Betts wrote, 'that the Treasury was the only purse which could be opened to keep production flowing' - a point of view supported by the three government inquiries set up to investigate the film industry.\(^{115}\) Wilson, in tune with the interventionist ethos of the period, stepped into the breach by creating the NFFC in the autumn of 1948 with a fund of £5 million (raised to £6 million in 1950) to loan to producers who 'proposed safe-looking projects for films' (rather than risky experimental or art for art's sake films).\(^{116}\) With the injection of NFFC aid, film production continued in its chaotic way, but, for all the retrenchment, it remained fundamentally uneconomic. Korda, for instance, could only repay one third of the NFFC loan when it was recalled in 1954,\(^{117}\) and P.E.P. reckoned that 'until the end of 1951 there had been an annual deficit on film-making in this country.'\(^{118}\) Without government assistance several war and aftermath films, such as *Morning Departure* (Roy Baker, 1950), and *The Third Man* (Carol Reed, 1949), would not have been made.

The debt-laden production industry still managed to produce 316 full length features in the five years from 1946 to 1950\(^{119}\) (including some American films made in Britain, or Anglo-American co-productions, which were registered as 'British' films). Of variable quality, the films are strikingly diverse in subject matter, style and treatment, especially when compared with the film culture of the previous decade. Apart from the numerous comedies, thrillers, and melodramas made about the war and its aftermath that will be examined later, the films range from polished middlebrow literary adaptations, such as David Lean's Dickens adaptations *Great Expectations* (1946) and *Oliver Twist* (1948), to violent gangster films like the infamous *No Orchids For Miss Blandish*. There are the riotous and sexually charged gothic romps made by Gainsborough, the best-selling example being *The Wicked Lady*; and in contrast to these are homely self-portraits of Britain, like *Holiday Camp* (Ken Annakin, 1947) and its three Huggett family spin-offs. The

\(^{115}\) Betts, *The Film Business*: 218.


\(^{118}\) P.E.P.: 285.

\(^{119}\) Board of Trade figures for British feature films over 72 minutes in length, quoted in Dickinson, and Street, *Cinema and State*: 192.
fantasies of Powell and Pressburger, such as *The Red Shoes* (1948), were worlds apart from depressing down-to-earth, realist-style social problem films, such as the prison drama *Now Barabbas Was A Robber* (Gordon Parry, 1949). The comedy canon included Ealing's idiosyncratic snapshots of contemporary life, such as *Hue and Cry* (Charles Crichton, 1947); polished upper-class romantic comedies, such as *Maytime in Mayfair* (Herbert Wilcox, 1949); and the occasional film centred around a music-hall comedian, such as Sid Field who starred in *The Cardboard Cavalier* (Walter Forde, 1948). Dramas and melodramas abounded in a host of guises, including historical ones like *Uncle Silas* (Charles Frank, 1947), and brooding, disorientating, 'psychological' thrillers set in contemporary Britain, such as *The October Man* (Roy Baker, 1947). Musicals survived despite the huge losses incurred over *London Town*, one example being *Happy Go Lovely* (Bruce Humberstone, 1950). Historical epics and biopics were made, for instance *Scott of the Antarctic* (Charles Frend, 1948). There was the occasional horror film, and a handful of realist films which attempted, wartime-style, to comment seriously on everyday life, one example being *Seven Days to Noon* (John Boulting, 1950) with its topical subject of the nuclear bomb.

A reason for the eclecticism of the films was that, after years of pandering to the demands of wartime propaganda in the semi-documentary aesthetic, film-makers wanted to pursue their own film-making interests which led to a blossoming of film types and styles. It was a development boosted by the extra freedom allowed by the censor, and the atmosphere of optimism and confidence surrounding the industry. At Ealing, for example, Michael Balcon 'was uncertain as to what style to adopt ... and the years 1945-46 showed Ealing experimenting with a variety of styles. ¹²⁰ At Rank, the prestige film-makers set about a range of non-realist projects (the whole concept of prestige films, with their emphasis on spectacle and international appeal, was removed from the ideals of British social realism). Powell and Pressburger, for instance, were able to further indulge in 'rich flights of fancy, dabbling in mysticism and employing sheer technical virtuosity to play tricks with time and space.'¹²¹

Likewise, commercial film-makers, such as Wilcox, who had made limited gestures towards realism in tune with the wartime trend, increasingly shed them once the war was over. For example, whereas Wilcox's 1946 wartime romance, *Piccadilly Incident*, is immersed in the heavy atmosphere of war and carried a topical message about the stigmatisation of illegitimate wartime babies (see pages 100–103), subsequent films like *Springtime in Park Lane* (1948) and *Maytime in Mayfair* are devoid of any deliberate social messages.

The diversity of films went hand in hand with the diversity of audience taste, as a brief survey of some box-office winners reveals. The 1945 box-office hit, *The Seventh Veil*, was a psychological

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melodrama set in contemporary Britain; the hits of 1946 were a mixed bag which included *The Wicked Lady*, the wartime romantic melodrama *Piccadilly Incident*, and Hollywood's *The Bells of St Mary's* (Leo McCarey, 1945), a sentimental comedy set in an American city. The smash hit of 1947 was Wilcox's war-themed inter-generational saga *The Courtneys of Curzon Street*, and other quite popular films of 1947 included *Great Expectations*, and Carol Reed's film about an Irish terrorist, *Odd Man Out* (1946). In 1948 cinemagoers made Hollywood's film about the homecoming of three ex-servicemen, *The Best Years of Our Lives* (William Wyler, 1946, US), the smash hit of the year, followed a close second by yet another Wilcox offering, *Spring in Park Lane*. In 1949 *The Third Man*, Reed's stylish thriller set in the aftermath of war in Vienna, was a runaway best-seller, and in 1950 *The Blue Lamp*, a picture about London's police, was top of the bill.

It is notable how trade commentaries on box-office trends frequently commented on the varied and unpredictable nature of audience choice (a significant factor, as will be seen, in the ensuing argument that there was a popular market in the late forties for war and aftermath topics). In summing up the findings of a 1950 Mass Observation survey of cinemagoers, the *Daily Film Renter* reckoned that the 'diversity of film taste is so wide that it is only the occasional *The Third Man* which contrives to please almost everybody'. Of the films released in 1947, Josh Billings commented that the catalogue of winners is so varied that the only conclusion that can be drawn from it is that the masses come for practically anything provided it has star quality and title values.

One common factor in audience taste was the desire for well-made and entertaining films; Billings, for instance, argued in 1950 that while 'all types of stories were screened and the fans showed no real preference', they did 'demand quality and only the best attracted money'. For trade commentators like Billings, discussions about box-office appeal were conducted around qualitative terms rather than in terms of topic, suggesting any old subject would do as long as it was 'good' or 'quality' entertainment. Of course, defining what was meant by 'entertainment' is problematic, but at the time it was the idea of indulging in fantasy as a break from the everyday trials of life. As a 28 year old regular cinemagoer explained, she wanted 'to see lovemaking and adventure such as I will never know, acting, dancing and singing *par excellence* – clothes and decor beyond my means of attainment – I go to be entertained [author's italics] not to be preached at, edified, elevated or inspired to nobler things'. The corollary to this was that the mass audience was resistant to films

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122 *Daily Film Renter*, 10 July 1950.

123 Kinematograph Weekly, 18 December 1947.


that lacked these entertainment characteristics, and all too often realist-style films — with their focus on social and political interpretation rather than comedy, romance, and glamour — were less successful at the box-office. *Fame is the Spur* (Roy Boulting, 1947), for instance, with its topical story about a flawed political idealist, performed poorly, and *Chance of a Lifetime*, which raised 'the serious problem of the new relationship between factory management and workers', similarly made little impact on the mass audience.

It was not that audiences wanted to avoid films of contemporary comment altogether, but that they found many of these films tedious, all too often because they were badly made. *Fame is the Spur* is a worthy but lengthy and lumbering film, and *Chance of a Lifetime*, with its factory setting, grumbling workers, and not even the hint of a romance, was hardly an enticing scenario. The few social comment films that did do good business did so precisely because they dressed up their commentary within an entertaining story; the aftermath film *Frieda*, for instance, was successful because its urgent question about the post-war treatment of Germans was presented as part of a powerful family and romantic melodrama. Indeed, a reason why war films made in the semi-documentary form, such as *They Were Not Divided* (Terence Young, 1950), were popular was because war itself provided ready-made excitement. Without that intrinsic excitement the entertainment value of the semi-documentary was handicapped.

Eclectic in terms of subject, treatment, and style, an underlying pattern in the film body can nevertheless be discerned, which has a relevance in the consideration of war and aftermath films. Historians argue that the mid- to late forties witnessed a distinctive vitality and energy in filmmaking, which had waned by the end of the decade as films became more conservative and unadventurous. Macnab, for example, argues that at Rank the late forties was an 'extraordinarily rich period, both in the range of subjects broached ... and in the depth of talent in every department'. According to Geoff Brown, it was a similar story at Ealing studios as he has written how those years were 'unquestionably Ealing's richest period'; and Armes observes how British directors like David Lean, Anthony Asquith, and Carol Reed came to real prominence in the 1940s, which is the period of their greatest achievement. As will be argued later, many of the war and aftermath films made during this period are products of this energetic phase of production, and such films often scratched below the surface of the comfortable assumptions about national life, and exposed its less palatable aspects. Park writes, for instance, that some Ealing and Rank

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126 Daily Herald, 28 April 1950.

127 For an extensive discussion of the film see pages 130-140.


productions 'explored the breakup of wartime solidarity, the liberation of former restraints on individual selfishness and the irruption of dark, subversive and irrational forces to tear down the cozy myths so assiduously cultivated during wartime. [For instance] Behind the facade of normal family existence in an East End street, in *It Always Rains on Sunday* [Robert Hamer, 1947], lurk strong, violent desires.'

Such questioning values had largely disappeared by the end of the decade with the emergence of a new puritanism. Park, for instance, suggests how the desire for sexual adventure which was expressed as pleasure in *The Wicked Lady* became equated a couple of years later with delinquency in *Good Time Girl* (David Macdonald, 1948); and Marcia Landy proposes that historical films, such as *The Lady with the Lamp* (Herbert Wilcox, 1951), were 'indicative of certain conservative ideological tendencies at work in the postwar films, tendencies that tend to produce films of willed social cohesiveness through the evocation of past national heroes.' War films were no exception, and later chapters will show how the projection of the war became increasingly conservative, the key year being 1950 when *Odette, They Were Not Divided*, and *The Wooden Horse* (Jack Lee, 1950) were released.

Indicative of the growing conservatism was the declining interest in making films of contemporary social and political comment, thus reversing the progressive wartime trend towards the socially interpretative cinema that had so excited the educated classes. In a survey of the 'outstanding' films of 1950, the *Sight and Sound* could only include two British films out of a total of fourteen, choosing them on the grounds that 'part of their appeal undoubtedly lies in their awareness of contemporary issues, rarely enough reflected in British films.' For Armes, what happened to British film production at the end of the forties was that it 'reverted to the patterns and procedures of the 1930s.'

The waning of the social, political and creative vitality of films in the late forties was symptomatic of the wider drift away from the radicalism of the war years towards a more traditional outlook, a

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133 Lindsay Anderson, for instance, acidly observed how in 1945, it is often said, we had our revolution ... [but] according to the British cinema ... nothing happened at all. The nationalisation of the coalfields, the Health Service, nationalised railways, compulsory education - events like these which cry out to be interpreted in human terms - have produced no films.' Anderson, Lindsay, 'Get Out and Push!' in Maschler, Tom (ed.), *Declaration* (1957), quoted in Murphy, Robert, *Realism and Tinsel: Cinema and Society in Britain, 1939-1948* (London: Routledge, 1989): 95.

134 *Sight and Sound*, vol. 19, no. 9, January 1951: 348. The films referred to are *Chance of a Lifetime* and *Seven Days to Noon*.

drift symbolised by the Conservatives' election victory of 1951. Of the change in the national mood, Aldgate and Richards have written that in 1945 there was a desire for change. Labour duly met this desire through the introduction of much needed reforms, but rationing, shortages and restrictions persisted. The generation which had won the war wanted the welfare state, but it also wanted fun and spending money. The Conservatives stayed in office for thirteen years by maintaining the welfare state but dismantling restrictions, ending rationing and promoting affluence. So having veered leftwards and sanctioned major social changes, the country veered rightwards, settling down to enjoy the fruits of peace and turning its back on further change.136

There was a sense that audiences were veering away from films that dwelled on the darker underside of life, and were finding colourful and reassuring fare, especially comedies, more appealing. Wilcox, for example, was quoted as making Spring in Park Lane 'in response to the clamour for brighter films'.137 The desire for this type of film was an indication of the growing conservatism of filmgoers, for while on an elementary level these films could be seen (as they were at the time) as simply offering an 'escapist' tonic for hard-pressed austerity audiences, on a deeper level 'escapism' equated with the avoidance of troubling and unsettling issues, and thus by implication the reassuring notion that the world was fine in its present state. Spring in Park Lane is the embodiment of this: lacking the slightest hint of social realism, life is innocent and fun, and its lovable aristocratic characters, doting servants, and palatial settings were familiar cultural landmarks harking back to the traditional stereotypes and situations of the pre-war years. Evidence of filmgoers hankering for more traditional values is also found in the shifting popularity of star types. Gainsborough stars James Mason and Margaret Lockwood, for instance, who represented sexually charged and 'bad' characters, lost out to the 'more refined and genteel Anna Neagle and, it might be added, heart-of-gold Michael Wilding over 'wicked' James Mason.

The loss of creative energy in film-making was also linked to the more circumspect climate that enveloped the production industry in the wake of the production crisis. With film companies pressured to take less risks with projects, this meant concentrating on tried and tested formulas. The stricter financial and artistic regime imposed by Davis at Rank certainly ensured a production policy dictated by the demands of the market-place rather than artistic considerations. According to


137 Daily Film Renter, 6 November 1947.

138 A film fan's letter to the Daily Herald offers some personal evidence of this. The writer declared that at 'the present stage in our economic recovery we are surrounded by an environment of austerity which is reflected in the spirit of the nation. Therefore entertainment of an escapist type is required. The nation needs laughter. Funny, gay, enchanting pictures should be the criterion of present day picture production.' Daily Herald, 3 January 1949.

139 Aldgate and Richards, Britain Can Take It: 164-165.
the head of production at Rank, Earl St John, the company's policy was to make 'inexpensive films without artistic pretensions, films that had no other object than to provide good family entertainment and show a profit.' The resurgence of the power and influence of accountants and managers at the end of the decade represented a fundamental change in the balance of power within the industry. The advances which artistic and cultural progressives had made into the film industry during the war and shortly afterwards, went into reverse. By the start of the 1950s traditional cinema interests - the 'showmen' - who had always seen cinema as 'showbusiness' and not as a cultural medium, regained the upper-hand. Whereas during the war and its immediate aftermath, the apparent success of British films and the optimism over its future obliged established film interests to accept the new cultural bias, when the industry collapsed into financial crisis the tables turned. Without the ability to make films of mass appeal it was inevitable that makers of more creative, innovative films, and/or films of social realism, would become peripheral in a business dependent on profit.

Conclusion

The habit of cinemagoing in the late forties had changed little from the 1930s, and remained the nation's most popular leisure pursuit; in terms of attendances, these were the cinema's peak years. Beyond their role as a form of entertainment, films had a national significance as they were seen as a vital channel of national expression, both for domestic consumption and as cultural ambassadors to foreign countries. Film production also had an important economic role, being regarded as a national industry in the same way as any other manufacturing industry. At the end of the war, there was considerable optimism surrounding the future of British production; having made some popular wartime films the industry enjoyed unprecedented acclaim and it was hoped that, with Rank's financial muscle, the British film industry could at long last conquer the world. The national importance of the cinema, together with the interventionist ethos of the time, ensured that the industry was the subject of intense attention from opinion-forming individuals and pressure groups - politicians, cultural and economic reformists, trade unions, moralists, the government - all of whom sought to shape filmdom according to their own agendas.

It was a turbulent time for the industry, especially when in the space of a couple years the production industry sank from being poised on the verge of commercial success to becoming, once Rank had retreated from the industry, a crippled industry dependent on public funds. Despite all the problems though, the ailing industry nevertheless made a substantial volume of films, including many that were about the Second World War and its aftermath. Many of the films produced have become classics of British cinema, such as *The Red Shoes*, *The Third Man*, and *Passport to Pimlico* (Henry Cornelius, 1948), lending the mid- to late forties a reputation as a

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golden period for British films. This creative period faded at the end of the decade as films returned to more established lines of light and undemanding 'escapist' entertainment, a trend which pointed towards the apathetic film culture that so distinguished the fifties.
Chapter Two
War and Aftermath themes in British films, 1946-1950

Introduction
The subject of the cultural impact of the Second World War has received little critical attention, despite its enduring presence in British popular culture for well over fifty years. With reference to films, Nicholas Pronay raised this point in 1988 in an exploratory survey of the post-war war film:

The reader of the standard histories of the British cinema might well conclude that the Second World War, presentations of or reflections on it, was not a major theme in post-war British films. "Comparatively few films were made in the immediate post-war years about a war most people wanted to forget, at least on the sphere of entertainment", remarked Roger Manvell in the first major treatment of the war in the cinema; of the 18 chapters of the most recent major publication, British Cinema History none is devoted to this theme in the post-war period.²

Today the topic remains largely untouched, although more interest has been shown: Marcia Landy's book on British genres includes a few pages on the post-war Second World War film;³ in an edited volume of essays on British film there is an article addressing the issue of class in the war films of the fifties;⁴ John Ramsden has written a paper on the significance of the 1950s war film cycle;⁵ and most recently an article by James Chapman "offers some thoughts on the genre and its place in British film culture".⁶ While the extensive cycle of fifties war films is well known by film historians but largely ignored by them, the existence of a considerable body of war-themed films made in the immediate post-war years is seldom even recognised, let alone discussed. Even writers who have ventured into the realm of the war film give the impression that in the late 1940s films about the

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¹ An exception is Morgan, Kenneth, 'The Second World War and British Culture', in Brivati, Brian, and Jones, Harriet (eds), From Reconstruction to Integration: Britain and Europe Since 1945 (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1993).


war were few and far between. Recent examples include Chapman, who states that in the immediate post-war period 'the war narrative virtually disappeared'; 7 and Rattigan who states that 'immediately following the end of hostilities, with less than a handful of exceptions, the war as a topic [his italics] did disappear from the British screens'.

The received wisdom has been, as the earlier Manvell quotation suggests, that cinemagoers and film-makers alike simply turned their backs on the conflict, and cinema screens were devoid of war-related subjects. The intention of this chapter is to challenge that assumption and set out the argument that in the late forties there were distinctly more than a 'handful' of films about the war 'as a topic', and substantially more with significant war and aftermath narratives. The issue of what the term 'war film' means will be dealt with shortly.

For the purposes of this study, the 'immediate post-war years' are taken to be the five years from the start of 1946 until the end of 1950. As historical periods do not conveniently stop and start at precise moments, the dates are to an extent arbitrary as nothing in particular happened at the beginning of 1946 or at the end of 1950. It is clearly the case that the post-war years began with the German defeat in May 1945, and the ending of the Pacific war in August 1945. The reason for leaving a gap of some months between those dates and the designated start of the 'post-war years' is to compensate for the time-lag between a film's genesis and its completion and release, for films released in the last months of 1945 were wartime productions made before the fighting has stopped. By leaving a breathing space of a few months, the films to be considered have had some time to be influenced by the new conditions of peace. The starting date, 1st January 1946, is simply one of clarity and convenience, and likewise, Pronay's survey of 'post-bellum' cinema begins in 1946.

The five years from 1946 to 1950 is, though, a historical period with distinct characteristics. As the many histories of the period outline, 11 those years witnessed the country recovering from the

7 Chapman, 'Our Finest Hour Revisited': 66.
8 Rattigan, 'The Last Gasp of the Middle Classes': 145.
9 There is no universally adopted definition of a British feature film in terms of its length. The definition used here is Dickinson and Street's classification of a full-length feature film as having a running time of over 72 minutes. They argue that it 'can be assumed that most of the films over 72 minutes would be intended for first-feature release.' Dickinson, Margaret, and Street, Sarah, Cinema and State: The Film Industry and the British Government 1927-84 (London: BFI, 1985): 191. Similarly there is no universally adopted measure for dating films: here they are dated according to the year of their release (rather than the year of their completion).
ravages of war.\textsuperscript{12} By the start of 1951 the rationing and shortages that had so marked the forties were receding problems as ‘the private sector and consumer society were reviving’, and that sense of economic and social regeneration was officially celebrated by the Festival of Britain in 1951.\textsuperscript{13} Those years saw the radicalism generated by the war transformed into actions by the Labour government, and they also witnessed the fading of that radicalism, symbolised by the return of the Conservative Party to power in 1951. It was also a time when the war was still very fresh in people’s memories, and its consequences still a current issue. People had to deal with a host of war-related problems, most notably the dire shortage of food and goods, the massive process of demobilisation from the forces and factories, and the concomitant difficulties of readjusting back to prewar circumstances. As the ensuing chapters will demonstrate, many of the films are peculiar to the late forties on account of their dealing with this kind of aftermath concern.

Two historians have been the exception in observing that a profusion of war-themed films were made in the first few years of peace. One is Landy who notes, but does not develop, the idea that ‘during the remainder of the decade [the forties] ... war films or films set during the war were very much in evidence.’\textsuperscript{14} The other is Pronay, the only historian to attempt to actually identify and quantify all the war films made from 1946, and he argues that during the fifteen years after the war ‘the fact is that the war was seldom absent for more than two or three months from British screens’.\textsuperscript{15} Nevertheless, seeing the next decade as the crucial one in terms of relating the experience of the war,\textsuperscript{16} he skims over the films of the immediate post-war years, and in the process considerably underestimates, as will be demonstrated, the volume of films that were made. The objective of this chapter is to highlight the presence, popularity, and nature of these war and aftermath films. Furthermore, while the concern is with British war films, the argument is also supported by reference to Hollywood war films, wartime reissues, and popular literature, all sources not alluded to by Pronay.

Quite why historians have ignored post-war war films is debatable, but a possible reason is that it is a reaction against the image of the war created by the films of the 1950s. As Andy Medhurst has pointed out, it is hardly surprising that films like The Dam Busters (Michael Anderson, 1954) and The Cruel Sea (Charles Frend, 1953) have been ignored. Medhurst argued that

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} See Addison, \textit{Now the War is Over}: 2.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Addison, \textit{Now the War is Over}: 197-198.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Landy, \textit{British Genres}: 171.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Pronay, \textit{The British Post-bellum Cinema}: 39.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Based on his interpretation of the period after the First World War, he reckons that ‘after a decade there comes a re-surfacing of the worst of those memories in a way which allows people to face them again through the re-creative power of art and then they seem to gradually fade over the next few years.’ Pronay, \textit{The British Post-bellum Cinema}: 40. (However, as will be explained shortly, recent research rejects this idea.)
\end{itemize}
in the dominant, commonsense history of British cinema such films are seen as at best worthily dull, at worst the absolute epitome of the cinema of tight-lipped middle-class repression soon to be rightly swept away by the social realist impetus of the late 1950s. A further criticism is that the 50s war film has served as one of the prime implements of distortion with regard to the history of World War Two, one of the crucial tools in the construction of a myth of the war which has secured it for reactionary discourses. In short, the 1950s war film has been consigned to the realms of the formally conservative and the ideologically irredeemable. 17

The overlooking of the war-related films of the immediate post-war period has been partly because of the overwhelming presence of the 1950s films, and partly because writers have tended to see the war film as a 1950s-style epic action and combat film, a film type not so common in the late forties. It is as if the 1950s war films shaped the consciousness of subsequent generations about the character of the war film, and films which do not fit into that mould, such as those of the aftermath years, became sidelined.

Defining and quantifying war and aftermath films, 1946-1950

Exactly what constitutes a 'war' film is not, of course, without question, and clearly the criteria used will affect the films chosen for inclusion and thus the ensuing argument. The definition of a war film used here is any film in which the Second World War is the focus of attention, or where it used as a backdrop, including films that are chronologically set in the post-war years but which have stories that look back to, and therefore re-interpret and re-image, the war itself. This definition of the war film is well established; Pronay, for example, considers war films as those films 'whose stories took place during the war years and in which the war itself played a role in the unfolding story ... [and films] which, although outside the war-years, had directly reflected on it.' 18

There is one problem with this classification: it excludes films which comment on the experience of the Second World War by historical parallel with earlier modern wars. The idea, that via historical parallel films could relate the war experience for audiences in the late forties, is not alluded to by film historians. 19 But if it can be argued that, say, Sixty Glorious Years (Herbert Wilcox, 1938), a historical film about the reign of Queen Victoria, 'perfectly captured the mood of

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19 Pronay and Landy, for instance, make little or no reference to historical films in this context. Pronay, though, does list The Angel with the Trumpet (Anthony Bushell, 1949) which is a Viennese family cavalcade beginning in the last century and running up to the present, but only devotes around ten minutes to the war itself. If Pronay is to be consistent, he should also have included the far more important The Courmeys of Curzon Street.
the hour' at the end of the thirties, then it is just as true of historical films in the aftermath years. In fact there is only one historical film, also by populist film-maker Wilcox, of interest here, *The Courtneys of Curzon Street* (1947), but it is of disproportionate importance as it was the box-office hit of 1947. It is relevant to note briefly at this stage how the film used the past to create a contemporary frame of reference for post-war audiences. Reminiscent of *Cavalcade* (Frank Lloyd, 1933, US), Hollywood’s adaptation of Noel Coward’s play of the same name, *The Courtneys of Curzon Street* is an inter-generational story of a family, the Courtneys, whose fortunes are determined by their involvement in the Boer war, conflict in India, and both world wars. The film is imbued with the familiar images and iconography of World War Two: the arrival of a telegram announcing the death of a soldier; concerts for the troops; long goodbyes when the husband goes off to fight. The connection of past wars with the present is clearly drawn as the film ends on an evocative scene of a Luftwaffe bombing raid on a factory.

Appendix One lists 34 films identified as war films that were released in the years 1946-1950. (See Table One, page 45, for summary of film totals) It is a substantial number and notably more than Pronay’s total of 19, and if taken as a proportion of the total output of 316 British full-length films, then nearly one film in nine related the war years to audiences.

In keeping with the eclectic nature of the body of film as a whole, these war films are diverse in terms of treatment and approach. Apart from *The Courtneys of Curzon Street*, and a couple of films whose narratives include post-war settings, such as *The Years Between* (Compton Bennett, 1946), the overwhelming majority are set in the actual war years. They range for example, from semi-documentary accounts of combat, such as *Their is the Glory* (Brian Desmond Hurst, 1946), to Powell and Pressburger’s glorious fantasy about a pilot suffering psychological problems after a


22 Pronay further underestimates the quantity: as Appendix One shows, he includes two low-budget shorts (*Eyes that Kill*, Richard M. Grey, 1947, and *Castle Sinister*, Oscar Barn, 1947) which are ignored in this survey as it covers only full-length features. Pronay’s list also includes films which surely do not count as war films within the sense outlined above. He lists *Conspirator* (Victor Saville, 1949), but this is about the cold war rather than the Second World War. If it is argued that this film is a comment on the Second World War, then other films with cold war themes should also be included, such as *High Treason* (Roy Boulting, 1951). Two further problematical entries are *The Lost People* (Bernard Knowles, 1949) and *It’s Hard to be Good* (Jeffrey Dell, 1949); both films are about the post-war aftermath, the former in Europe, the latter in Britain. If consistency is to maintained then other films about the aftermath need to be included, such as *The Third Man* (Carol Reed, 1949), and *Frieda* (Basil Dearden, 1947).

This quibble over films listed by Pronay serves to raise two points. First, it reduces his inclusions to 14 and so highlights the underestimation of full-length war films - 14 films compared with 34. Second, Pronay’s inclusion of ‘war’ films that do not fit comfortably into the chronological/thematic criteria implicitly opens up the field to more entries, as is argued below.

23 Board of Trade figures, quoted in Dickinson and Street, *Cinema and State*: 192.
parachuteless drop from his damaged bomber, *A Matter of Life and Death* (1947), to slapstick comedies about service life, *What a Carry On!* (John E. Blakeley, 1949) being one example. Other films focus on the home-front; some are quietly reflective, nostalgic even, as in *The Weaker Sex* (Roy Baker, 1948), and others irreverent and satirical, such as *This Man is Mine* (Marcel Varnel, 1946).

Only films about the war years have so far been considered, but what about films which related the impact and consequences of the war? Pronay concludes his article by suggesting that British war films did, in their own muddling fashion, allow 'people in the audience to re-live vicariously their experiences, the fears, guilt and dilemmas of their own particular war; and to cathartise psychological sores still festering ... [and so films] ... helped to lay the ghosts of war.' If this proposition is accepted, then the question arises as to whether only films set in, or directly about, the fighting years themselves could 'lay the ghosts of war'. Surely films about the post-war consequences of war - films that are referred to here as 'aftermath' films - were involved in the same restorative process? One film historian, Edward Dolan, considers the aftermath film an intrinsic part of the post-war war film canon. Dolan identifies four groups of post-war war films: depictions of combat; dramatizations of actual events; war comedies; and the aftermath film. This last group, he explains, dealt with 'the experiences and personal problems of living in the immediate post-war period. It was a theme bound to be of widespread interest for only the five years or so that the period lasted, but in that time, it [the subject] was put to varied use, serving as a backdrop in some films and as a central idea in others.'

Aftermath films offer interpretations of the impact of war which are special to the late forties: war films of the 1950s are less inclined to touch on these topics, as Dolan suggests. So in furtherance of the argument that there was a profusion of British films from 1946-1950 which 'related the Second World War to the audience for whom it still formed a part of their own life-experience', aftermath films should be included in the total.

The aftermath film is not as straightforward to define and quantify as the war film, as it is a disparate group straddling a variety of subjects and genres. Broadly, aftermath films portray the effects of the war as an explicit narrative subject, in which aftermath issues have a strong visual and/or narrative presence. Films which take the aftermath of war as a topic include *Frieda*, which

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27 It is a notion that Pronay's inconsistent inclusion of films about post-war topics, such as *The Lost People* and *It's Hard to be Good*, implicitly recognises.
deals with the trenchant problem of how to treat the former enemy, and *I'll Turn to You*, a film about the problems facing a family readjusting back to peacetime. Films in which the consequences of the conflict figure strongly in the narrative range from *Mine Own Executioner* (Anthony Kimmins, 1947), a poignant commentary on a war-damaged RAF pilot, to gangster films such as *They Made Me a Fugitive* (Cavalcanti, 1947), which expressed contemporary anxiety about restless ex-servicemen drawn to crime. A few films covered the aftermath of war in Europe, such as *The Lost People*, which evoked the dislocations of post-war Europe.

As Appendix One shows, 23 British aftermath films have been identified.²⁸ If this is added to the 34 British post-war war films, the total of war-related films made by British producers in the five years from 1946-1950 is 57. As a proportion of total output, this works out at one in every five and half films made, a figure which obviously contradicts the notion that the British film-making industry turned its back on the war and its aftermath.

**Reissues and Hollywood war and aftermath films**

To emphasise the dominant presence of the war as a subject for films, it is useful to draw attention to other types of film that relayed the war to cinema audiences. As Table One (overleaf) shows, there were 40 wartime war films²⁹ (as opposed to wartime films not about the war itself) reissued between 1946 and 1950, together with the reissue of three post-war war films.³⁰ As well as reissues of British wartime war films, 10 Hollywood wartime war films were also reissued.³¹ To the tally can also be added 25 Hollywood post-war war films, and at least 46 Hollywood aftermath films were also released in Britain. (For full list of titles see the Appendices).

If all the full-length feature films with war-related themes (British and American post-war war films, aftermath films, and wartime reissues) that were offered to British audiences in the years 1946-1950 are added up, it comes to a grand total of 172 films, or 34.4 films per year. The exact figures for feature films quoted in this argument do not claim to be absolute (the content of a film To put a precise figure on the number of aftermath films raises a conceptual problem as theoretically all post-war films are aftermath films in the sense that, deliberately or otherwise, they were shaped by the preceding years of war. Had there not been a war, the character of the film body might have been different; for example, there might not have been the 'morbid' cycle of brooding, introspective melodramas which can be interpreted as an expression of post-war depression and pessimism. (See, for example, Murphy, Robert, *Realism and Tinsel: Cinema and Society in Britain 1939-48* London: Routledge, 1989: Chapter 9.) However, for the purposes of quantifying war-related films, the inclusion of all films that could be deemed as expressive of the war's aftermath is analytically unmanageable.

²⁸ Appendix Two lists 50, but to compensate for the increase in the number of reissues that occurred as a result of the Hollywood boycott, the 1947 and 1948 figures have been averaged with the bordering years 1946 and 1949. Therefore, for the purposes of the argument, the number of reissues has been reduced to 40.

²⁹ See Appendix One.

³¹ Like British film reissues, the number of Hollywood reissues has been similarly readjusted (one each for 1947 and 1948).
is debatable and not all the films have been available for viewing) but they do provide incontestable evidence that British cinema, far from forgetting the conflict in the immediate post-war years as has hitherto been assumed, was actively re-imaging it.

<table>
<thead>
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**Volume of British and Hollywood war and aftermath films released in Britain 1946-50**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1946</th>
<th>1947</th>
<th>1948</th>
<th>1949</th>
<th>1950</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>British post-war war films</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hollywood post-war war films</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British aftermath films</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hollywood aftermath films</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British wartime war film reissues</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10*</td>
<td>10*</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hollywood wartime war film reissues</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1*</td>
<td>1*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>48</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Figures are the average taken from the bordering years 1946 and 1949. This is to compensate for the expansion in numbers as a consequence of the Hollywood boycott 1947-1948. Actual figures were: British reissues, 14 in 1947 and 16 in 1948; Hollywood reissues, 4 each for 1947 and 1948.

It is also pertinent to observe that a number of documentaries about the war were made, such as *The Undefeated* (Paul Dickson, 1950), a film about 'the plight of legless British war veterans', as well as considerable coverage in newsreels. Peter Hennessy has written how 'the war still dominated the newsreel editor's psyche. There were the protracted trials of German and Japanese war criminals ... There were a good deal, understandably, of lest-we-forget shots of prominent Nazis in the dock at Nuremberg, which would be intercut with footage of mass funerals in Coventry in 1941 or concentration camp victims piled high in 1945'.

**Other forms of popular culture**

As cinema is closely linked to literature and theatre it is instructive to see if these popular cultural forms similarly dealt with wartime themes. There is a dearth of research about popular literary images of the war in general, and even less about the immediate post-war years in particular. Of the few writers who have commented, Andrew Sinclair argues that there was a cultural reaction from the war [which] began in the first weeks of the peace, a wish for oblivion, a denial of the past as soon as possible, a search for whatever pleasure and laughter could still be found in a society in

32 *Sight and Sound*, vol. 19, no. 9, January 1951: 383.


which even bread was soon to be rationed for the first time. While this may have been true of intellectual culture (which after all is Sinclair's primary interest) it was not the case with popular literature. A massive volume of books were published and sold on the subject, often in cheap editions aimed at the mass market such as those from the Reprint Society, in the years from 1946-1950. To give an impression of the volume and range of books Appendix Four (pages 202-203) lists 56 titles that surfaced during the research, but a dedicated study would clearly reveal many more. All types of books have been added to the list - serious novels, popular fiction adventure tales, documentary histories - as they all attracted a popular readership. Harry Hopkins, for instance, pointed out that it was no longer possible ... to draw any firm line between the "serious" and the "popular". From the documentary war novel or fictionalised fragment of war the reader might pass, for instance, to Winston Churchill's majestic history of the war, launched in 1948.

Not only is the volume of books testimony to the high level of cultural interest in the war, but many of the books were best-sellers, a self-evident comment on the popularity of war-related topics. This is a point supported by Robert Hewison; in his study of the cultural history of post-war Britain he describes how after the war publishers tended to reserve rationed paper stocks for established authors, but that the 'exception as far as new authorship was concerned was the steady stream of war memoirs and documentaries' and the 'inevitable war novels'. Likewise Hopkins writes there was an interest in war stories, and that it intensified from 1949 in the wake of Eric Williams' phenomenally successful *The Wooden Horse*. From then on, from 'every section of every Service, from every front and every "back-room", the "war books" came tumbling to fill the void of peace.

Another indication of the fashionability of war books and plays, is the fact that numerous war films are based on contemporary literary and theatrical works. British film-makers had always drawn heavily on literary sources for ideas: for example, in the 'four years 1947-50, 115 of the 314 feature films released were derived from novels; that is, over a third. When 56 adaptations from plays are added, it will be seen that well over one-half of the total output derives from (more or less) literary sources. Significantly, the average is about the same for films with war and

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38 Williams, Eric, *The Wooden Horse* (Collins, seventeen impressions by 1951).
aftermath themes, for out of the 57 films 28 derive from literary sources.\footnote{See Filmography.} Although not all the 28 novels and plays were ever published or produced at the time, the figure still suggests a substantial amount of literary interest on the subject of the war. Moreover, as film-makers' use of literary sources was founded in the continual search not only for new script material but also for marketable subjects, it can be assumed that most of those 28 sources were perceived as topical.

On a anecdotal note it is of interest to record a somewhat macabre example of the popular fascination with the war. At the end of the war a bizarre waxworks exhibition was created in London's Oxford Street which showed in still detail "All the Horrors of the Concentration Camp".\footnote{Sinclair, War Like a Wasp: 191.}

Sinclair, then, may have been right about high culture, but from the evidence presented here - cinema's dependence on literary sources, the number of books mustered in Appendix Four, and the secondary interpretations of Hewison and Hopkins - it is safe to conclude that there was an abundance of war-related popular culture through the years 1946-1950. In terms of historiography, there is a parallel here with the aftermath of the First World War: by narrowing their attention to high culture, writers and historians had assumed until now that society wanted to forget the experience in its immediate wake, and that several years passed before it became the subject of literary expression. Recent research into the literary culture of the First World War, however, has found that no sooner had the fighting stopped than there was a massive demand for popular books about it.\footnote{See, for instance, Bracco, Rosa Maria, Merchants of Hope: British Middlebrow Writers and the First World War, 1919-1939 (Oxford: Berg, 1993).}

\section*{Box-office trends}

The next question to address is just how popular war-related films were at the box-office. The fact that so many war films were made is of itself an indication of their popularity, but additionally nearly half of them, as Appendix One shows, did noticeably well at the box-office. The ongoing presence of wartime war film reissues is further indication of the public's appetite for war topics. This is also supported by the fact that \textit{In Which We Serve} (Noel Coward, 1942) was re-released twice, and \textit{I'll Walk Beside You} (Maclean Rogers, 1943) three times. Furthermore, three post-war films \textit{The Years Between}, \textit{The Captive Heart} (Basil Dearden, 1946), and \textit{I See a Dark Stranger} (Frank Launder, 1946) were all reissued (in 1949). It is also significant that reissues dry up in 1950, the very same year that a new generation of British wars film appear,\footnote{See Table One and Appendix One.} the suggestion being that
wartime reissues became redundant when a new supply of war films came on tap to satisfy the residual demand for war topics.

A trend that requires explanation is the dip in the output of British (and American) post-war war films in 1948. What is striking here are parallel trends: as Table One (page 45) shows, there was a corresponding rise in the number of British (and American) aftermath films, with 1948 and 1949 registering more aftermath than war films. The argument here is that although the production of films about the wartime years certainly declined in 1948, war narratives did not so much disappear as re-focus on the aftermath of the conflict. Indeed, the most successful film of 1948, was the aftermath film par excellence, The Best Years of Our Lives (William Wyler, 1946, US).\(^{45}\) As Appendix One shows, British aftermath films did not do so well at the box-office in 1948, although this probably had more to do with the lacklustre quality of the films than a resistance to the topic itself. This is evidenced by the success of The Best Years of Our Lives, and the fact that in the following year, 1949, three British films did well, including The Third Man which was the hit of the year.

At the time there was a body of opinion that thought war films were not good business, at least until 1949-50; Piccadilly Incident, for instance, a film firmly located in the wartime experience, was advertised as not being a war film.\(^{46}\) The critic C. A. Lejeune wrote in 1947 that there was a 'general loathing of war subjects which will inevitably keep the milling thousands out of any British cinema',\(^{47}\) and a trade review of Powell and Pressburger's The Small Back Room (1949) defensively reckoned that the film's 'war background ... does not in any way detract from [the] intense appeal of the story'.\(^{48}\)

The apparent contradiction between these opinions and the evidence that war and aftermath films were popular needs explaining. Beyond the personal prejudices of the commentators, it is to some extent explained by contemporary notions of what was meant by a 'war film': although the definition was never spelt out, it implied a serious wartime-style semi-documentary on some aspect of the fighting. An indication that this kind of film was perceived as a 'war film' is found in the heralding of the 1950 combat film They Were Not Divided (Terence Young) as the first post-war

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\(^{45}\) In Appendix Three, The Best Years of Our Lives appears in 1947 as it was first given a limited West End release. It reached the peak of its success in 1948 when it was put on general release and became the most popular film of the year. *Kinematograph Weekly*, 6 December 1948.

\(^{46}\) As a copy line in the advert declares: 'although Miss Neagle will appear in WREN uniform, Wilcox says this is not [their italics] a war film. He describes it as a "domestic quadrangle"'. *Daily Film Renter*, 11 February 1946.


\(^{48}\) *Daily Film Renter*, 20 January 1949.
war film, thus denying preceding films with war-related themes the designation of 'war film'.

The dearth of semi-documentary films in the immediate post-war years does suggest that audiences may have been resistant to this style of war film. However, there were critics and publicists who considered this type of war film a good box-office proposition. For instance, the publicists of The Weaker Sex, a tribute to the role of women in wartime, specifically stressed the film's wartime associations; one advert celebrated how it is 'in essence Mrs Miniver, This Happy Breed, The Way Ahead, and In Which We Serve all rolled into one'. Furthermore, the film did perform notably well at the box-office. Another example is Theirs is the Glory (Brian Desmond Hurst, 1946); when this film was released in October 1946 one trade reviewer thought the film not only deserves maximum playing time, but was an 'excellent showman's proposition', and the film was indeed popular. It is also worth recording that Josh Billings, the most respected interpreter of audience taste, never suggested that war was unpopular with cinemagoers.

The contrasting evidence as to whether audiences liked or disliked war films is consistent with the wider sense of the unpredictability and fragmentation of audience taste in the late forties, as discussed in the previous chapter. While there was a stratum of opinion that thought the war film poor box-office, there was another that thought the opposite.

By 1950 the general perception of war films and their audiences had changed. The year was seen as a watershed as a result of the emergence of the first British cycle of war films ('war films' in the contemporary sense of semi-documentary stories about the fighting). These watershed films were They Were Not Divided, Odette (Herbert Wilcox, 1950), and The Wooden Horse (Jack Lee, 1950). To this list can also be added Morning Departure (Roy Baker, 1950), a film about a naval submarine disaster, which although not actually set in the war is to all intents and purposes a war film on account of its wartime iconography and manners. As one reviewer declared, it 'takes an honourable place alongside epics such as In Which We Serve.

49 For instance, the Daily Herald, 31 March 1950, wrote how 'it is Britain's turn to make a war film. The Americans have been doing it brilliantly with Command Decision (Sam Woods, 1949), Twelve O’Clock High (Henry King, 1949), Battleground (William Wellman, 1949), and Task Force (Delmer Daves, 1949) that we have become notably laggardly.' They Were Not Divided is discussed in Chapter Three.

50 Film advert in Kinematograph Weekly, 4 November 1948. Dates and directors of the films are: Mrs Miniver (William Wyler, 1942, US); This Happy Breed (David Lean, 1944); and The Way Ahead (Carol Reed, 1944).

51 Billings, Kinematograph Weekly, 16 December 1948.

52 Strictly speaking Theirs is the Glory is not a feature film but a dramatised documentary, but it has been included here because it was treated as a mainstream feature film. Murphy, Realism and Tinsel: 259, likewise treats such documentaries as feature films.

53 Kinematograph Weekly, 22 August 1946.

54 Daily Film Renter, 20 February 1950.
Attenborough doing a repeat performance of the one he did in *In Which We Serve* as a hysterical crew member). As a result of these films (and Hollywood’s 1950 war film releases), Maurice Speed wrote that ‘the moviemakers apparently decided that 1950 was the year to start showing such films about the last war, for we saw the beginning of a steady stream of them’. 55

All four films were very popular, as were the Hollywood pictures; in an assessment of all the trade polls for 1950, *Sight and Sound* told its readers that ‘war films are still box-office’. 56 Appearing within a few months of each other, these films marked a distinct stage in the development of the war film and can be seen as the precursors of the historical adventure-style war films that became a staple of 1950s film culture.

The question that arises is why the action war drama appeared in 1950 and not sooner or later? If the relative absence of this type of war film in the immediate post-war years is attributed to ‘straightforward war-weariness’, 57 then why ‘by 1950 [was] the time ripe for the revival of the war film proper’? 58 The first point to make is that the actual revival had begun in 1949 with the appearance of two service films, *Landfall* (Ken Annakin, 1949), and *Private Angelo* (Peter Ustinov, 1949). The publicity for *Landfall*, a tale set in 1940 about Coastal Command and the navy, hints at the increasing interest in films about the actual fighting: ‘We’ve all been only too glad to forget about the war during these past four years of peace. But now, as those grim, dark days sink back into history, war reminiscences, “our bomb” stories and the like, seem to be coming into their own again ... the odd thing is that ABP’s two previous releases have both been outstanding war films - *The Hasty Heart* [Vincent Sherman, 1949] and *Private Angelo* [Peter Ustinov, 1949]. Query - is this just coincidence or a definite trend in film fare? 59 Furthermore, in 1949 cinemas screened the first batch of Hollywood combat epics, including *Task Force*, *Jungle Patrol* (Joe Newman, 1948, US), *Command Decision*, and *Fighter Squadron* (Raoul Walsh, 1948, US), this last film doing notably well at the box-office.

The three or four year gap between the end of the war and the appearance of the first generation of combat films compares with an equivalent gap of seven or eight years after the end of the Great War. As Clyde Jeavons has written, the revival of interest in films about the Great War came in

56 *Sight and Sound*, vol. 19, no. 10, February 1951: 389.
57 Rattigan, 'The Last Gasp of the Middle Class': 149.
59 Film publicity: BFI microjacket.
1925 'in the shape of King Vidor's *The Big Parade* (1925, US). After this release, a rush of war films were produced, including Wilcox's *Dawn* (1928), and the classic *All Quiet on the Western Front* (Lewis Milestone, 1930, US). In the context of American production after the Second World War, the *New York Times* drew attention to the contrast between the two wars: 'this post-war upsurge [in war films] is earlier and more prolific than was the similar trend after the First World War'. The reason for this difference perhaps lay in the relative scale of slaughter and ensuing disillusion: the worse it was the longer the time-lapse before it could be treated on screen. Evidence for this is also found in the portrayal of the Second World War itself; films about the grim and bitter experience of the British in the Far East at the hands of the Japanese do not figure in British war films until well into the fifties, and as Pronay observes, there is nothing to compare with the harrowing portrayal of sheer human suffering which is given in these Far Eastern theatre films.

In the immediate wake of the First World War, the screening of films about the battle was 'virtually taboo', but the situation was quite different, the Far East apart, after the Second World War. The screening of the battle was not of itself an issue, and there was hardly any debate about it. One of the very few comments on the matter was in a review of *The Captive Heart* where the reviewer respectfully described how the film avoided any reference to the 'innumerable cases of social and domestic maladjustment' caused by the trauma of being a prisoner of war, concluding that 'it could not very easily be fictionalised so soon after the war when many men are still awaiting the necessary treatment'. The only controversy that did arise over the cinematic restaging of the fighting was the perceived bias of some Hollywood films. As discussed in Chapter One (pages 21-22), there was occasionally resentment at what was perceived as the 'Americanisation' of the war by Hollywood, the most infamous example of this being the row over *Objective Burma* (Raoul Walsh, 1945, US).

There are two interrelated reasons for the appearance of the trio of British war films in 1950. First, there were commercial reasons: with film production in financial difficulties at the end of the forties, film-makers sought new material to attract audiences, and stories about the battle against Hitler were ideal, as Speed suggested in 1950: 'the movies, whenever they are in the doldrums turn

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61 *New York Times*, 6 June 1948, in NTT Encyclopaedia of Film.
62 An exception to this is *Mine Own Executioner*, a film about a psychologically disturbed ex-RAF pilot who suffered at the hands of the Japanese. For further information see pages 60, 190–192.
63 Pronay, 'The British Post-bellum Cinema': 49.
65 *Monthly Film Bulletin*, vol. 13, no. 148, April 1946: 44.
to ACTION [his emphasis] to get them out of trouble and this year has been no exception. We saw a cycle of semi-factual war films. For film-makers, then, war provided an exciting, and therefore potentially profitable, subject. As well as action, it was believed that war also provided the British production industry with a topic well-suited to exploit the highly-acclaimed realist aesthetic developed in the war. James Monahan, for instance, noted how many of 'our' better films of 1950 were war films, and this was 'simply because war provides the British feature director, heir as he is to the documentary tradition, with the kind of exciting background of reality with which peace time is less generous.

Monahan's comment gives the impression that British film-makers were yearning to make war films, and were just waiting for the right box-office climate. There is something in this; in the closely related British and American film industry, British film-makers often took the lead from Hollywood, and this was certainly true of combat films, as in this field Hollywood was around two years ahead of the British film-industry. In 1948 Hollywood produced several new combat films, and by the summer of 1948 many more were in the pipeline. As the New York Times reported, the Public Information Division of the Department of the Army 'disclosed last week that his office is currently processing a dozen feature films with military backgrounds.

The three 1950 films - They Were Not Divided, Odette, and The Wooden Horse - were all very successful at the box-office, which raises the second reason for their appearance, namely that by 1949 there was a buoyant demand by audiences for war action-drama. Among historians, the consensus has been that 1950 was the year that audiences began to clamour for war-action films, but this date needs to be brought forward by a year. Exactly why there was a growth of interest in combat films at this time, and why it rapidly developed into a massively popular genre for the rest of the decade, is debatable. The common explanation is that audiences were thirsty to re-live the victory as a panacea for a loss of national self-confidence in that decade. The argument is that throughout the fifties, when factors such as the break up of Empire, relative economic decline, the cold war and the development of atomic weapons, undermined Britain's self-confidence, positive images of the British winning the last war - their 'finest hour' - provided a much needed reassurance. However, in his recent paper, Ramsden casts doubt on this kind of argument on the

66 Speed, Film Review 1950: 11.
68 New York Times, 6 June 1948, in NFT Encyclopaedia of Film.
69 For instance, Hewison posits how in the 1950s, the actual horrors being far enough behind them, British film-makers began to fight the Second World War all over again, looking for the social cohesion that some films made in wartime had helped to create. (Hewison, In Anger: Culture in the Cold War, 177.) Similarly Raymond Durgnat largely accounts for the popularity of war films from 1950 by arguing that 'the prospect of World War Three was so unappetising, that anxieties could be agreeably fed back into movies about World War Two, which was undoubtedly justified, and over, and won.' Durgnat, Raymond, A Mirror For England (London: Faber and Faber, 1970): 83.
grounds that it misjudges the mood of the fifties. He argues that, 'notwithstanding Suez - the British people had their most collectively confident period since the war'. For Ramsden, the popularity of the war film can be attributed more to production factors than particular historical events. He writes that 'it seems rather pointless to seek any other underlying explanation for the timing of the cycle than the continuous pressures of the box-office and the availability of literary material for screenplays.\(^7\)

Re-imaging the Second World War to celebrate military achievements as a means to bolster national self-confidence and patriotism in the face of the communist threat was certainly a motivation behind the production of Hollywood war films in the late forties. The *New York Times*, for example, reported that 'the present trend toward military subjects may be traced to two causes, Colonel H.J. Melchett believes. [Melchett was the US army's liaison officer with Hollywood] "We believed that the first World War was a war to end war" he said. "Now we know that is a delusion, and we are fearful of another war." Also, he declared, film producers have been frightened by charges of communism made against the industry and they are extremely anxious to refute those charges.\(^7\) Although the sensitivity to communism was far more extreme in the USA than Britain, there were parallels and, furthermore, Hollywood was a key influence on British film-makers and audiences. In Britain, the circumspect response to the re-release in 1950 of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, throws some light on the contemporary relationship between cinematic presentations of war and contemporary ideas about the nature of patriotism. Conservative critics questioned the wisdom of re-releasing a film with such a famous pacifist message at a time of growing cold war tension. One such critic was the *Daily Telegraph*’s reviewer who believed the re-release ill-timed because the present 'hour when the nation’s - and the United Nations' - existence depends on our willingness to serve, not for the aggrandizement of one but for the freedom of all, seems an odd one to revive a film designed to kill the ideal of service altogether.'\(^7\) Significantly then, the re-release of *All Quiet On the Western Front* was considered not within the context of the Second World War, but rather within the context of the cold war, a perspective that has parallels in the relationship between all post-war war films and cold war tensions.

**Conclusion**

There has been little scholarly work done on the British war film in general, and even less on the immediate post-war period in particular. Of those writers who have touched on the war film, most conclude that until the start of the fifties the war was a marginal theme on British screens. Even Pronay, who has delved more deeply than most into Second World War films, substantially

\(^7\) Ramsden, 'Refocusing the People's War'.

\(^7\) *New York Times*, 6 June 1948, in *NTT Encyclopaedia of Film*.

\(^7\) *Daily Telegraph*, 2 October 1950. Clippings file: BFL
underestimates the volume of films with war-related subject matter.

By marshalling together all British films with war and aftermath content, as well as the host of wartime war film reissues and Hollywood imports, it has been shown that there was a major body of film that could be said to have 'laid the ghosts of war'. The argument is given further credence by the presence of war subjects in newsreels, and the huge volume of books and plays on the topic, many providing the source material for the films.

Contrary to conventional thinking, then, there was no question of audiences turning their backs on popular cultural representations of the Second World War, or the film industry putting a moratorium on the production and screening of war and aftermath subjects. Film-makers were not so keen on new combat/fighting dramas until 1949, and instead proffered other treatments of the war and its aftermath. The argument here is that the serious combat film only represented one particular aesthetic by which to restage the war, and although until 1949 this type of film was less common, the rendering on screen of the war and its consequences was achieved through a variety of alternative perspectives and treatments. As the ensuing chapters will indicate, the war as a cinematic topic remained relevant precisely because it engaged with the evolving requirements of a population emerging from six years of total war.
PART TWO
REVISITING THE WAR
Chapter Three
Fighting the Enemy: prisoners of war, special operations, and the armed forces

Introduction
This chapter focuses on war films which portray the fight against the enemy, whether in terms of espionage, the use of science, or military combat. The intention is to trace the evolving subject interests of the films and explain why these trends might have arisen, and whether the films offer anything new to say about the war. The films have been divided into three theme-based groups: prisoner-of-war (PoW); secret operations and the resistance; and the armed forces. Also considered is how the inherent values, assumptions and preoccupations of the films shifted over the immediate aftermath years, with special reference to whether those films released in 1950 are qualitatively different from the preceding films. In effect, 1950 is pinpointed as a significant year in the development of the war film from its wartime role as propaganda to its reincarnation in the fifties as an adventure picture and vehicle for a conservative rewriting of the war. It is convenient for this discussion that the three watershed films of 1950, The Wooden Horse (Jack Lee, 1950), Odette, (Herbert Wilcox, 1950) and They Were Not Divided (Terence Young, 1950) are representative of the three subject groups, PoWs, secret operations, and the military, respectively. This enables a comparison to be made between the 1950 trio of films and earlier examples of each film type.

The prisoner-of-war film
Two PoW films were made between 1946 and the end of 1950,1 The Captive Heart (Basil Dearden, 1946) and The Wooden Horse, produced by Ealing and Wessex respectively. Well-crafted productions made in the restrained and stoically heroic semi-documentary style that emerged during the war, they were high profile films that generated a lot of critical interest. The Captive Heart did well at the box-office, and The Wooden Horse was a major hit.2

The Captive Heart and The Wooden Horse were the first PoW films in what subsequently became an enduring, characteristically British, formula for films and television dramas in later years. Examples include the films Albert RN (Lewis Gilbert, 1953) and The Colditz Story

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1 Other films have peripheral references to PoWs, such as The Years Between (Compton Bennett, 1946), Frieda (Basil Dearden, 1947), and Mine Own Executioner (Anthony Kimmins, 1947). There is also Hollywood's Three Came Home (Jean Negulesco, 1950), which is based on American Agnes Newton Keith's best-selling 1948 account of her life as a Japanese PoW.

2 Josh Billings listed The Captive Heart as a Notable Box-office Attraction, Kinematograph Weekly, 19 December 1946, and placed The Wooden Horse in the top three of 'five remarkable money spinners' from British Lion, Kinematograph Weekly, 14 December 1950.
(Guy Hamilton, 1954), and the BBC television series *Colditz.* At first sight it might seem odd that PoW camps became such an enduring dramatic formula when, as Nicholas Pronay says, relatively few servicemen were captured, and those that were fared reasonably well (excepting those held in Japanese camps). But, the key to the interest lay in the special relationship soldiers had to their captured comrades, and the ever-present possibility soldiers faced of having to surrender to the enemy. Thus, the PoW scenario had a relevance to the military as a whole, and not just to those who had the misfortune to be captured. Pronay also suggests that PoW films tend to question some of the deeper issues involved in warfare, and therefore formed a part of that concern with the moral and ethical questions of war and soldiering which was so central to the native culture. A further explanation for the presence of the PoW film offered by Pronay is that such stories have concrete attractions from the producer's view, being a good chase-yarn formula well proven at the box-office as well as being relatively cheap to make.

These ideas help explain the interest in the genre as a whole, but of particular interest here is the extent to which *The Captive Heart* and *The Wooden Horse* had time-specific relevance to post-war audiences. In 1946 when *The Captive Heart* was released, the subject of PoWs in Germany was a novel one for film-makers and audiences. They could not have approached the topic during the war when 'the actualities of conditions and activities within PoW camps can only vaguely have been surmised, and such stories can hardly have been conducive to a positive war effort.' Once the war was over the story could be told; *The Captive Heart* 's objective was to present an authentic account of life in a PoW camp as experienced by soldiers who had been captured in France in 1940 and spent the remaining years of the war as German prisoners. To lend the film authenticity, it was partly shot on location in Marlag Milag Nord prison camp in late summer 1945, and a former prisoner there, journalist Guy Morgan, contributed to the script. The film was made with the cooperation of the War Office and the British army which provided extras for scenes requiring large

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5 Pronay, 'The British Post-bellum Cinema': 46.

6 Pronay, 'The British Post-bellum Cinema': 45.

numbers of men. For the Returned British Prisoners of War Association, the film did capture the authenticity of the experience. In a letter to Michael Balcon the Association congratulated the filmmaking team for offering to the public 'the pathos, drama and humour, the unquenchable spirit of our soldiers in the hour of defeat, the agony of waiting for the day of liberation, the amazing initiative of men penned in behind the barbed wire of enemy camps, the hopes, joys and sorrows of the PoWs are here vividly portrayed.' On the whole, reviewers praised it in similar language, the Kinematograph Weekly, for instance, described it as 'a timely tribute to the unquenchable spirit of the prisoners'; the Daily Express trumpeted that the film had 'caught for the first time on any screen, so help me, the real heart and spirit of Englishmen at war. Here are Englishmen at war, far from home, defeated in battle, cold, hungry, without hope for the future. Men who do not exist any more, shadows of soldiers, ghosts of Englishmen, yet indestructible;' and C. A. Lejeune thought the one weakness in a film that 'gets its real force from the study of real problems and real people' was introducing into this 'honest history a completely phoney story about a Czech refugee who has taken the name and identity of a dead British captain.'

Four years later, The Wooden Horse continued the process of documenting unknown wartime stories and was referred to as a "now it can be told" war melodrama. It was based on Eric Williams' best-selling book of the same name (which had also been serialised in a newspaper and broadcast on the radio), which was a first hand account of the 'famous escape of three English prisoners from Stalag Luft III.' Williams also wrote the screenplay. It was an ideal subject for director Jack Lee, a film-maker with roots in the documentary movement who had made his name

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8 See, for example, correspondence between Balcon and the War Office (G/27 Balcon Collection, Special Collections, BFI); or the film's press book (BFI Microjacket).

9 Letter from the Returned British Prisoners of War Association to Michael Balcon, 28 March 1946 (G/27 Balcon Collection).

10 Kinematograph Weekly, 4 April 1946.

11 Daily Express, 30 March 1946.


15 Sight and Sound, April 1951: 487.

during the war with the Crown Film Unit.\textsuperscript{17} Like \textit{The Captive Heart}, the sense of authenticity was heightened by location shooting, in Germany and Denmark.

\textit{The Wooden Horse} 'caught the public imagination',\textsuperscript{18} encouraged no doubt by the enthusiastic trade and popular reviews. For instance, the \textit{Kinematograph Weekly} enthused how the film was a 'worthy tribute to British courage and initiative',\textsuperscript{19} and the \textit{Daily Express} declared that it was 'the best film we have made this year' and that its 'inspired nonchalance, good humour, and understatement will help to give this remarkable episode its rightful place in British wartime tradition.'\textsuperscript{20} Some critics were more circumspect, such as cineaste Gavin Lambert who thought that 'the characterisation one-dimensional, the dialogue somewhat monotonous' and that the script lacked 'depth and structure'.\textsuperscript{21}

Beyond the similarity of the surface realism of the two films there are differences in their values and preoccupations. \textit{The Captive Heart} focused on issues relevant to an audience in transition from war to peace, for instance projecting the problems of readjustment faced by returning PoWs and their families (a topic that also had a wider relevance to all returning servicemen). In a manner reminiscent of \textit{In Which We Serve} (Noel Coward, 1942), \textit{The Captive Heart} cuts between the home lives of the servicemen and their current situation, expressing the stresses, strains and social changes that resulted from years of separation and uncertainty. Marcia Landy highlights this aspect, concluding that the film is 'a conversion drama centring mainly on Hasek\textsuperscript{22} who assumes a new identity and a new life, symbolically representing the "new man" who has emerged from the war.\textsuperscript{23} Another issue touched on was the rehabilitation of war casualties as a sub-plot shows a recently blinded young serviceman overcoming his uncertainty about the future.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{17} After the war Jack Lee set up Wessex in partnership with fellow documentarist Ian Dalrymple. As an independent production company, they made several films under Rank's Independent Producers umbrella before making \textit{The Wooden Horse} for London Films. Macnab, Geoffrey, \textit{J. Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry} (London: Routledge, 1993): 92-93.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Forman, Denis, \textit{Films 1945-1950} (London: British Council/Longmans, 1952) : 41.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} \textit{Kinematograph Weekly}, 27 July 1950.
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Speed, \textit{Film Review}, 1949: 159.
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Lambert, Gavin, 'Writer and Director: The Wooden Horse and The Asphalt Jungle', \textit{Sight and Sound}, November 1950: 286-89.
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Hasek (Michael Redgrave) is a Czech PoW who assumes the identity of a dead British officer in order to remain alive, and it is through this narrative device that the film explores some social changes wrought by the war.
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*The Wooden Horse* displays little interest in such post-war issues. There are no references to the men's families, or hints at how imprisonment and separation may have affected those relations. The film's emphasis is on action and adventure with the first half about the plotting and digging of the escape tunnel under the camouflage of the wooden vaulting-horse. Three inmates then escape via the tunnel, and the second half of the film traces the dangerous journey of two escapees through Germany and Denmark to safety in Sweden. (The third escapee, who goes it alone, is ignored until he appears at the rendezvous in Sweden). The motivation to escape is a question of honour rather than necessity, and provides a sporting distraction to break the monotony of camp life. (Spring is the escaping season' says one character, deliberately drawing a sporting parallel). By comparison, the desire to escape for its own sake is not on the agenda in *The Captive Heart*, and all but one of the PoWs remain incarcerated until repatriated in 1944. The exception is the Czech officer who has no choice but to escape as the Gestapo suspect he is an impostor, but even then, his escape is a low-key affair. His name is substituted for another on the official camp list of those due for release, and the forgery succeeds in getting him 'repatriated' to Britain. *The Captive Heart's* primary narrative concern, then, is not the thrill of escape but the retelling of how the men coped and interacted together. In Denis Foreman's words it was 'a study of British prisoners in a German prison camp.' The *Wooden Horse* is in a different mould, its exploration of the tensions in the men's lives limited to the inclusion of the occasional argument. The lack of interest in more complex issues is particularly pronounced in the knowledge that the original novel does express these deeper issues. As Ken Worpole has written, 'Williams' account of the routines of prison life remains the most detailed and convincing of all these [PoW] books in that he spent time portraying other characters and the effect of imprisonment on them.' The book describes how an inmate retreated into a private fantasy world of 'running a farm' which is 'both moving and convincing writing.' Compared to both the original story and *The Captive Heart*, then, *The Wooden Horse* ignores questions of the psychological consequences of imprisonment, preferring to concentrate on an uncomplicated tale about an heroic escape.

It worth noting here that in the aftermath years only one film, *Mine Own Executioner* (Anthony Kimmins, 1948), attempts to evoke the extreme psychological trauma and enduring damage caused by imprisonment. The plot centres on a troubled psychologist and his ex-RAF patient who is seriously disturbed and driven to murder, the trigger being the appalling treatment he received as a prisoner of the Japanese. To get to the root of the patient's experience, the psychologist administers a trance-inducing drug, and through a flashback to the war the viewer sees from the

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patient's point of view what he endured. This six to seven minute sequence is probably the most harrowing attempt at portraying the brutality of the fighting found in any film of those years, and prompted one reviewer to wonder whether the lengthy flashbacks of war in the Burmese jungle would have been better left to the imagination. 26

The Captive Heart and The Wooden Horse display timely ideological differences in the way they present the war. Appearing less than a year after the end of the war, The Captive Heart is in tune with the rhetoric of People's War propaganda. A clear example of this is how it is peopled by a cross-section of the population (by class, country, region, and army rank) in the fashion of many wartime propaganda films, such as The Way Ahead (Carol Reed, 1944). The group, all army servicemen, include a Welsh private (Mervyn Johns); a Scottish lieutenant (Gordon Jackson); a middle-class English major (Basil Radford); a working-class thief from London (Jimmy Hanley); and a Czech captain (Michael Redgrave). Through this group, the film promotes the kind of democratic, tolerant, collectivist community that characterised wartime propaganda. As Charles Barr argues, The Captive Heart, in common with other Ealing films, brings together large groups of people from diverse backgrounds and sets them to co-operate ... No individual roles are dominant; the main psychological tension comes with the redemption of individuals, as they see the light and come to work by the group's values. 27

By contrast, the symbolic inclusion of people from a variety of backgrounds and the ethos of collective heroism, is completely absent in The Wooden Horse, because, it could be argued, such communitarian values had lost their currency. The film's key characters are middle-class English officers 28 who are uniformly courageous, and the undisputed leaders of men, and the central narrative of the film focuses on their rugged individualism. They are in effect the progenitors of the officer-class heroes that came to dominate fifties war films. (In The Captive Heart Basil Radford's middle-class officer makes a self-deprecating remark about being a 'social parasite, the sort we're fighting to get rid of', but this kind of 'people's war' joke had no place in the new officer-dominated war inherent in The Wooden Horse.) Both films, then, were part of the contemporary process of documenting - with considerable attention paid to authenticity - the events and experiences of the

26 Kinematograph Weekly, 20 November 1947. Incidentally, the description 'lengthy flashbacks' suggests there might originally have been more and longer flashbacks, raising the possibility that they were later cut because they were considered too harsh. This film is further discussed on pages 190–192.


28 An officers-only camp was, in fact, more accurate, as captured officers were separated from other rank when PoWs in Europe.
war. Framing the timescale under evaluation, the films offer clues as to the evolving portrayal of the war in popular cultural terms. Whereas *The Captive Heart* is preoccupied with wartime and aftermath issues, and is founded in the collectivist idealism projected in wartime propaganda, *The Wooden Horse* offers an uncritical, action-driven tale of individual heroics which set the pattern for the war films of the fifties.

**Secret operations**

A number of films were made about secret wartime operations, whether concerning the resistance, espionage, scientific research, or a mixture of all three. Two films, *Teheran* (William Freshman, 1947) and *But Not in Vain* (Edmond T. Greville, 1950), were cheap and poor quality productions that disappeared without trace. A third film, *Lisbon Story* (Paul L. Stein, 1946), a mixture of thriller and musical based on a wartime stage show, made little impact. The remaining five films are more substantial and provide the focus of attention here being a distinct group of films that relayed to post-war audiences the role secret operations played in winning the war. Apart from *The Small Back Room* (Powell and Pressburger, 1949), the films were intended, by merging fact and fiction, to entertainingly document actual events. All were made by major film producers, appearing at the rate of one a year from 1946-1950.

In chronological order the films are: *School For Secrets* (Peter Ustinov, 1946), made by Two Cities, the company responsible for the most popular film of the war, *In Which We Serve*. Twenty-four year old Peter Ustinov's first directorial effort, *School For Secrets* fuses a fictional story about a group of boffins with a historical explanation of the research and development of radar. *School For Danger* (W/Cmdr. E. Baird, 1947), produced by the RAF film unit for the Central Office of Information, documents the training and sabotage activities of British and French agents in France using the real agents involved rather than actors. (Strictly speaking the film is a documentary, but as it was treated as a feature film at the time, it is included here, as is *Theirs is the Glory* (Brian Desmond Hurst, 1946).) *Against the Wind* (Charles Crichton, 1948), Ealing's contribution to the secret operations cycle, is a story about sabotage activities in occupied Belgium. Powell and Pressburger offered *The Small Back Room*, a story about the work and rivalry of wartime scientists, and in 1950 Herbert Wilcox released the box-office hit *Odette*, an epic biopic of the French-born resistance hero, Odette.

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29 The *Daily Film Renter*, 5 March 1947, for example, described *Teheran* as 'disconnected, unintentionally funny and scrappily directed hotch-potch'; and *Kinematograph Weekly*, 23 February 1950, described *But Not in Vain* as 'well-meaning but incredibly arid and stagy' and as having some 'unforgivable technical lapses.'

30 Josh Billings, for instance, does not mention it. *Kinematograph Weekly*, 19 December 1946.
Curiosity about secret operations arose for several reasons, one being that espionage and sabotage was a crucial element of Britain's war effort. Pronay, for instance, writes that 'between June 1940 and the landings in Italy in 1943, the only way Britain could carry the war to Germany was by attempting either to break German morale by subversive operations, propaganda or aerial bombing.' Films about resistance fighters in occupied Europe were common during the war, bolstering the reassuring belief that the defeated nations were actively resisting the Nazis. Jeffrey Richards notes how each 'country got its tribute', such as Norway with The Day Will Dawn (Harold French, 1942), and Holland with The Silver Fleet (Vernon Sewell, Gordon Wellesley, 1943). Hollywood also occasionally contributed to the cycle, making films which 'dramatised the fight-back against a supposedly invincible enemy and helped to stimulate the idea of nations linking arms to combat fascism, both from within and without.' Films on resistance and sabotage themes became a staple of the British war film in later years: Pronay identifies 14 such films in the years from 1945-60, and argues that the genre is peculiar to British cinema.

Secret warfare was an attractive topic for film-makers on account of its inherent excitement, and relatively low production costs as they did not require elaborate and expensive sets, costumes, and battlescenes. And in the immediate post-war years there was the advantage that film-makers could tap into a source of original story material; the story of radar in School For Secrets, for instance, was regarded as a drama belonging 'to the "now-it-can-be-told" school of secrets.' School For Danger was regarded as 'an extraordinary film containing much material that to now has remained hidden in the Intelligence files of the War Office [and it reveals] many of the secrets of the gallant band of men and women who worked as saboteurs during the war years.'

The films also assumed the role of paying tribute to those institutions and individuals that had contributed secretly to the war effort. The inspiration for School For Secrets came from the 'Air

34 Pronay, 'The British Post-bellum Cinema': 46.
35 Pronay, 'The British Post-bellum Cinema': 47.
36 Daily Film Renter, 7 November 1946.
37 Daily Film Renter, 30 December 1946.
Ministry [which was] anxious to put on record Britain's discovery and perfection of radar.\textsuperscript{38} The notion of publicising the essential wartime work of boffins was welcomed; the \textit{Monthly Film Bulletin}, for instance, credited the film for allowing the boffin to emerge 'from the oblivion in which the force of circumstance placed him, and richly does he deserve his place in the sun ... [and the film] ... ought to be seen by everyone in England.'\textsuperscript{39} Similar tributes were paid to \textit{School For Danger} for providing a 'timely reminder of the debt we owe to the RAF, British Intelligence, and French resistance';\textsuperscript{40} and \textit{Variety}, in a review of \textit{The Small Back Room}, noted how 'the unsung heroes of the war, the back room boys, are gradually coming into their own'.\textsuperscript{41} Hollywood was also making films about the unknown war, such as \textit{The House on 92nd Street} (Henry Hathaway, 1945), which was released in Britain in 1946. A story about the secret wartime development of the atom bomb and the FBI's activities to keep it secret from German agents, the film's advertising described how it was about 'winning the battle of the laboratories' and the war's 'unsung heroes'.\textsuperscript{42}

In August 1945 the Ministry of Information (MOI) held 'one of its biggest press conferences ever' to publicise the crucial role of radar in achieving victory;\textsuperscript{43} the conference caught the headlines, with newspapers declaring how 'The Story of Radar is Told',\textsuperscript{44} and calling the conference 'Boffin's Day'.\textsuperscript{45} The interest endured over the years with a steady trickle of stories about their wartime achievements, such as one headlined 'Boffins Got the Secret by Plane', with copy telling how the RAF secured vital knowledge from a German radar station.\textsuperscript{46} Books were also published on the subject, such as \textit{Marconi: A War Record 1939-45}.\textsuperscript{47} It was part of a broader fascination with science and technology arising from its contribution in defeating Hitler. Science, as Angus Calder has written, had arrived 'in the corridors of power'.\textsuperscript{48} It was an ascendancy witnessed by literature

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Variety}, 20 November 1946.
\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Monthly Film Bulletin}, vol. 13, no. 155, November 1946: 148.
\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Kinematograph Weekly}, 13 December 1947.
\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Variety}, 26 September 1949.
\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Daily Film Renter}, 2 October 1945.
\textsuperscript{43} \textit{Daily Herald}, 15 August 1945.
\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Daily Express}, 15 August 1945.
\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Daily Herald}, 15 August 1945.
\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Daily Herald}, 20 February 1947.
as well as films: Nigel Balchin wrote *The Small Back Room*, a best-seller about scientists and the civil service;\(^{49}\) and C. P. Snow became identified from 1940 as an author with a thematic interest in the interaction of science and politics. After the war, science was seen as a crucial force in the battle to win the peace. Chapman Pincher, for instance, told his readers how 'the men whose skill produced the planes and the tanks and the robot gadgets which won the war are to go into action again in the factories. That is what Mr Herbert Morrison meant when he announced last night the setting-up of a high-powered industrial General Staff of Britain's top-flight boffins.\(^{50}\)

Made in the immediate wake of the war, *School for Secrets* story about radar is steeped in the spirit of 'People's War' propaganda values. Chronologically covering the whole sweep of the war from 1939 to VE Day, its characters, in similar fashion to *The Captive Heart*, are from a varied cross-section of the wartime population and the services, representing a united war effort. As the film's prologue states, 'although this film deals almost exclusively with the RAF, it is intended as a tribute to all scientists, to the men and women of all ranks in the three services, and the civilians who worked side by side with them on the development of radar.' While the chief characters are middle-class - scientists presumably cannot be otherwise - the film self-consciously introduces a working-class character (an RAF flier played by Richard Attenborough) as an essential component in the story's account of the development of radar. The democratic levelling is also reversed with the boffins being shown to encounter the dangers of the frontline in the same way as regular servicemen. The plot systematically puts each boffin into active service as part of the research procedure, and one gets killed. In another episode, boffin Ralph Richardson parachutes on to the French coast to secure a piece of German radio equipment while under heavy bombardment. At the end, the scientists' vital role in military operations is symbolised when the surviving boffins are seen newly kitted out in military uniform (and all three uniforms are represented to indicate the boffins' contribution to each of the services).

The boffins have been conscripted for the duration of the war to do scientific research in a town far from their homes and to work with people they had never met. A key thread running through the film is how they overcome their prejudices and rivalries, and eventually work together as a team for the war effort. It was theme that echoed the wartime values of films like *The Gentle Sex* (Leslie Howard, 1943), and *Millions Like Us* (Launder and Gilliat, 1943), which were about women conscripted for war work. The boffins have been recruited from a range of backgrounds: Ralph Richardson plays a zoologist; David Tomlinson is on loan from the Eureka Radio Corporation; and

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both Raymond Huntley and John Laurie play university physicists. A motley mix of quarrelsome personalities and clashing temperaments, it leads to much arguing and bickering. But by the end, as the film's publicity says, 'we eventually see how the boffins learn to tolerate and respect one another, and through co-operation achieve the wonderful results which helped win the war.'

The film projects the wartime theme of co-operation and unity by tracing the close relationship that really did develop between the RAF and government scientists. Calder writes how at the Telecommunications Research Establishment (TRE) a remarkable relationship flowered between the RAF and boffins. Nicknamed the "Sunday Soviets"... visiting officers of high rank, pilots, development engineers, scientists, and anyone indeed, however junior, whose views might help to solve a current problem operational problem, could join in free discussion. The sessions became legendary. Cabinet ministers and commanders-in-chief took part.

By its very nature, science encouraged such democratic interaction as ideas were respected regardless of their source, and so the boffins were well placed to pierce orthodox, starchy military and Whitehall conventions of rank. Calder notes how the nickname 'Sunday Soviets' was so 'hypertypical' of the period, and *School for Secrets* is an expression of that collectivist ethos with its allusion to the democratizing effect of the boffins. In one scene the film outlines the idea behind the 'Sunday Soviets': a scientist complains to an RAF chief that 'a great deal of time is being wasted by our having to see a hundred and one different people individually ... why on earth can’t we see them all together ... air marshals, pilot officers, boffins, people from the radio industry?' The RAF chief responds with horror: 'Air marshals and officers together! he exclaims, to which the scientist retorts, 'yes, together, let them forget the bowing and scraping for a change - there’s a war to be won.' The boffin carries the day and the film cuts into a 'Sunday Soviet' in session. The meeting room is crowded with a variety of RAF ranks, boffins, American pilots, and Air Ministry officials all of whom are invited to input points and ideas (about improving the accuracy of night-time bombers).

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51 Film publicity. BFI microfiche.
54 The authenticity of the gathering is reinforced by the chairman’s apology for the absence of well-known scientist Sir Henry Tizard, who ‘is still out of the country imparting our radio direction finding secrets to the Americans.’ This was perfectly true; Calder writes how Tizard took valuable radar and jet secrets to the Americans in the Autumn of 1940. Calder, *The People’s War*. 460.
Another facet of *School For Secrets* which links it to the progressive spirit of the war years, is its willingness to make potted references to emotive and divisive issues. The film invokes the infamy of Chamberlain and the 'old guard' of the pre-war years; following a radio news broadcast announcing the fall of Warsaw, there is a montage sequence juxtaposing the contrasting reactions of complacency and awareness. The complacent reactions are from Colonel Blimp types who are seen enjoying the upper-class pursuits of golf, shooting and fishing, and saying things like, 'Hitler has definitely missed the bus'. Furthermore, if war was to come, the Blimps only see it in the outdated context of the Great War. In opposition to this are sequences of a younger generation who display an awareness of new dangers, such as the RAF officer who explains to a boffin how vulnerable Britain would be to low-level air attack.

In the context of the film's 'People's War' sensibilities, there is one striking anomaly: an intrinsic element of the propaganda ideal of a democracy at war was the message that women were vital to the war effort and that they rose to the occasion, yet in the film the scientists' wives do nothing but laze around distracting the men.

In its own idiosyncratic way, *School For Secrets* relays an authentic documentary impression of the real-life research, development and application of radar from the late thirties until 1945. Calder, for instance, describes how scientists, including an eminent zoologist, were conscripted into war service, and how 'in 1939 [the starting date of the film] the universities had been emptied suddenly of many of their most brilliant men, who had largely gravitated to radar'. He goes on to describe how Solly Zuckerman, 'an expert on the physiology of apes, was called in to examine the effects of bomb blast on human beings ... [and later made] ... one of the greatest contributions to the success of D-Day with his well calculated "Transportation Plan" for the bombing of German communications.

The film's portrayal of scientists and special pilots testing radar equipment on active service also shadows actuality. Calder writes of the new hands-on approach of the scientist, how they would 'analyse the performance of guns and bombs on the spot, make notes over the corpses in the field, fly in night bombers and hobnob with generals.'

*School for Secrets* also touches on the contentious strategy of the saturation bombing of German

55 The film explains with some degree of accuracy the changing demands by the armed forces for radar as circumstances developed. It explains, for instance, how in 1940 the RAF initially needed radar as a defence against incoming German bombers, and later how British bombers required radar for night attacks. For an overview of the story of radar, see Calder, *The People's War*. 457-469.


cities. At the end of the war the policy had become somewhat discredited: Churchill, for instance, rounded on its chief protagonist Bomber Harris, and saddled him with 'sole responsibility for the strategy of indiscriminate destruction'. Churchill also ensured that 'no campaign medal was struck for it. The film has a long drawn-out sequence of a boffin flying as an observer in the One Thousand Bomber raid on Cologne, including the releasing of bombs over the already burning city (it looks like Piccadilly Circus' says a crew-member). On return, the radar equipment is deemed a 'tremendous success', and after a further test, the audience is shown some rapid cuts relating the efficient bombing of Hamburg and Berlin thanks to radar. It is ambiguous about the rights and wrongs of saturation bombing; on the one hand it shows off the ability to blow up whole cities such as Cologne (only the briefest allusion is made to any ability to isolate military targets), and on the other hand it voices the unease over the strategy by senior members of the RAF, one reckoning that of the 1000 bombers sent to Cologne there were '950 too many, to my way of thinking'.

In his autobiography, Ustinov recalls the expectations that the Air Ministry's spokesman, Sir Robert Renwick, had of School for Secrets: 'we want a good film, an informative film, a commercial film, a little laughter, a little pathos, a lot of hard facts, and a rip-roaring yarn. Because that's what it is you know. Adventure. School For Secrets does try to be all these things, and it is an interesting attempt to turn a dry subject — the scientific development of radar — into popular entertainment. It was an achievement credited by some critics, such as the Daily Herald which congratulated Ustinov for making 'an entertaining film out of unpromising material', and Peter Noble who thought that Ustinov had 'succeeded beyond all expectations'. The mass audience, though, was not so impressed, and the film did poorly at the box-office. The reason was not the subject, but that it was not a terribly well-made film: the trade press, while encouraging, recognised the problems. The Daily Film Renter believed that its 'diversity was its weakness' and that 'showing the

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59 In May 1942 Bomber Harris organised a massive raid on Cologne by one thousand bombers, which was intended not only to damage the city but to generate dramatic publicity and government support for the whole policy of saturation bombing as a tactical means to victory. See for example, Taylor, English History 1914-45: 671.


61 Daily Herald, 8 November 1946.


63 The film was not mentioned by Billings or in any other trade poll. Ustinov later claimed that the film was a great success, which led people to believe that I was an up-and-coming director, and he did go on to make Vice Versa in the following year, and Private Angelo in 1949. Ustinov, Dear Me: 156.
private lives of the boffins tends to fall apart and its artifice is emphasised by the serious main theme. Variety was more forthright and reckoned that 'writing, directing and co-producing has been too much for [Ustinov] and all three departments have suffered.

Four months after School for Secrets appeared School for Danger was released. In the words of the film's own publicity it was 'a tribute to the men, both French and English, who contributed so much towards the destruction of communications and installations in Occupied Europe, preparing for the invasion by Allied Forces on D-Day.' Unlike all the other films discussed, School for Danger is a documentary reconstruction of events re-enacted by the people involved. Sponsored by the Air Ministry, it was originally conceived as a film record of the 'secret phases of Anglo-French co-operation' and was not necessarily for public showing. A low budget production, it was made by the RAF Film Unit and completed by the end of 1945. After an unexplained delay, it was commercially distributed by United Artists in February/March 1947. It was given a prestige premiere, the invited guests including Queen Mary and the Duchess of Kent, government ministers Ernest Bevin and Hugh Dalton, and the French Ambassador.

The leading players are two British agents, Captain Harry Ree and Jacqueline Neame, who are known operationally as Felix and Cat. The film describes how they were recruited in 1943, went through an arduous training programme, and were finally parachuted into France and joined up with the French resistance. Always under threat of detection by the Germans, the film quietly shows how they helped organise resistance groups, advised on tactics, arranged supplies, liaised with London and the RAF, and succeeded in destroying a number of vital arms and communications installations. The climax of the film is when an entire French village turns out to pull Felix's escape aircraft out of the mud in which it has got bogged down. The film tells its story efficiently enough, but is curiously detached and unemotional; as C.A. Lejeune remarked it 'wastes no time on frills. It is a functional work.'

Reactions to the film tended to be respectful rather than enthusiastic. Reviewers liked its

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64 Daily Film Review, 7 November 1946.
65 Variety, 20 November 1946.
66 Publicity leaflet, February 1947. Item 31, Baird Collection. Special Collections, BFI.
67 Letter, titled 'Royal Air Force Top Secret Film.' Undated, but probably summer 1944. Item 31, Baird Collection.
69 The Observer, 9 February 1947.
understated (and therefore British) qualities and liked it as a record the secret heroism of British forces, but also implicitly recognised it was a bit dull. The problem for critics was that *School for Danger* had appeared after a series of good Hollywood spy and sabotage films, and they saw that *School for Danger* would be unfavourably compared with them. It was argued that had it been released at the beginning of 1946 before the Hollywood films appeared, it would have made considerably more impact. For instance, Richard Winnington wrote that ‘it would have gained in excitement had it been released 13 months ago, before the flood of well-made fictional O.S.S films. Nevertheless, I found it exciting enough.’ And *Kinematograph Weekly* warned that *School for Danger* was ‘made mainly for instructional purposes and not to challenge O.S.S, Cloak and Dagger, 13 Rue Madeleine and other exciting fictional adventure films [but nevertheless] contains a wealth of information and carries a substantial kick.’ *School for Danger* made little headway at the box-office.

Ealing's *Against the Wind* was another tribute to resistance forces, this time in Belgium, and framed around a fictional story. *Against the Wind* shares some of *School for Secrets* wartime concerns and values, as in similar fashion *Against the Wind* assembles a polyglot of volunteer saboteurs, this time including women, and a sizeable international contingent from Canada, France, Turkey, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Belgium, and Hungary. (The element of ‘internationalism’ in the film is, according to Barr, common to many Ealing pictures of the period, such as *The Captive Heart, The Overlanders* (Harry Watt, 1946), and *Frieda*. These volunteers, as the *Daily Express* put it, were ‘timid, soft-spoken, scholarly men and women who had forsaken the pursuit of learning for the duration ... dedicated themselves to stealth, guile, and murder.’

*Against the Wind* as an informative tribute to those involved in the secretive business of fighting the enemy in plain clothes. It devotes the first forty minutes to explaining the training of the saboteurs, and the nature of their work. Once trained, they are parachuted into Belgium to destroy a records office, the objective being to hinder the calling-up of civilians. A member of the team gets

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70 O.S.S. (Irving Pichel, 1946), *Cloak and Dagger* (Fritz Lang, 1947), 13 Rue Madeleine (1947).


73 It did not command any attention in subsequent box-office surveys.

74 Barr, *Ealing Studios: 63-64*.

75 *Daily Express*, 13 February 1948.

76 *Manchester Guardian*, 14 February 1948.
caught and has to be rescued. Much of the drama is generated by the evolving relationships within the team, with each member having his own story to tell. The most striking aspect of the tale is the element of treachery: one previous attempt to blow up the records office had failed because of treachery within the team.

The film is intriguing for the way it tugs in two directions. On the one hand it looks back to ideas of wartime unity and patriotic purpose, but on the other hand it tries to incorporate post-war objectivity by showing some problematical aspects which could not have been shown during the war itself. As script-writer T.E.B Clarke explained in his autobiography, without the wartime need 'for heartening propaganda we set out to make a film showing one aspect of the war as it really was.'

*Against the Wind* foregrounds treachery, conflicts and rivalries within the group, and gives voice to individuals to explain their motivations, the most revealing character being the traitor. Clarke created him after researching into the characteristics of resistance infiltrators and finding they were well disguised and often the most popular members. In order to highlight these qualities we duly made loveable Jack Warner a warm and cheerful character whose treachery, when discovered, would shock the audience. (The blow is softened though, by making him a bohemian mish-mash of nationalities rather than being British.) Interestingly, he justifies his treachery by explaining that mixed races like himself are the only ones that can think clearly and therefore 'we're not swayed this way or that by any silly patriotic sentiment ... personally I like the English and I hope they knock out your stinking Nazi pals, but I'm a businessman first.' Whereas the other saboteurs predictably explained their motivation to fight in conventional propaganda terms of patriotism and justice, he offers the less reassuring view of detached self-interest.

According to Clarke's autobiography the film was 'a comparative failure' and this was because cinemagoers were not conditioned for its realism, yet some popular critics liked it, and the trade papers predicted it would do well at the box-office. The *Daily Express* enthused it was the 'first [resistance] film that is not only tensely exciting but seems to be absolutely authentic'; and the *Daily Film Renter* felt it had 'the unmistakable Balcon stamp of first class documentary ... and

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78 Clarke, *This is Where I Came In*: 158. The tactic had been used before; in *Went the Day Well* (Cavalcanti, 1942), for example, Leslie Banks, who was known for playing solid reliable types, appears as a Fifth Columnist.

79 Clarke, *This is Where I Came In*: 159.

80 *Daily Express*, 13 February 1948.
will probably turn out to be as big a draw as Frieda and It Always Rains on Sunday. Perhaps a reason for Against the Wind's lacklustre performance was that, like School for Danger, it suffered from being in the shadow of Hollywood's cycle of spy and saboteur films. It was a point raised by the Monthly Film Bulletin whose reviewer, less keen on the film, reckoned that it 'would probably have been more appreciated if it had appeared earlier, before a number of its type had led to perhaps an over-critical attitude.'

Powell and Pressburger's The Small Back Room was the first film the director-producer-writer team made for Alexander Korda/London Films after defecting from Rank's Independent Producers, and it followed in the wake of their trio of colour extravaganzas - A Matter of Life and Death (1946), Black Narcissus (1947), and The Red Shoes (1949). Forsaking the Technicolor mould they changed tempo by choosing to film, in black and white, Balchin's tense novel about a troubled scientist in wartime Britain which had been a best-seller when published in 1943. Powell had been interested in filming it for some time, and Korda had to buy back the rights from Independent Producers. Korda had already had a critical success with another Balchin adaptation, the small-budgeted Mine Own Executioner which was released in February 1948.

The Small Back Room is set in London in the spring of 1943. The plot centres around Sammy Rice (David Farrar), a brilliant university scientist now working for a government research unit run by Professor Mair (Milton Rosmer). Rice has a false foot which causes him physical and psychological pain and distress. His suffering leads to bouts of bad temper, with his devoted and ever-patient girlfriend Susan (Kathleen Byron) frequently on the receiving end. Alcohol, together with his pain-killing 'dope', provide some relief. The dynamic of the narrative is how Rice conquers his inferiority complex through his professional work dealing with deadly booby-trapped bombs that are being dropped by German planes. The bombs are particularly nasty devices designed to explode on handling, and are disguised to look innocent to arouse the curiosity of passers-by, especially children. An expert on fuses, Rice is called in by the army to help, but there is little to be done until an unexploded example is found which he can then subject to examination. An unexploded bomb finally turns up, and in a nail-biting climax on Chesil Bank, Rice single-

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81 Daily Film Renter, 12 February 1948.
84 MacDonald, Emeric Pressburger: 299.
handedly has to defuse it. He succeeds and unlocks its cruel secrets. His courage and achievement help him rebuild his self-esteem, repair his relationship with Susan, and give him the confidence to accept an offer to head a new research outfit.

Rice's personal tale is set against a complicated and cheerless background of Machiavellian scheming, rivalry and intrigue by ministers, scientists, civil servants and the military. They are jockeying for control over Mair's research station and the future of a prototype anti-tank gun called the Reeves. Mair's research station depends for its existence on the uncertain patronage of the current minister, and although Mair is ostensibly in charge, he is under the influence of a sleazy, shallow and self-seeking managing director, R.B. Waring (Jack Hawkins, in a role that is the antithesis of the heroic establishment types that he played in later films). The research centre's task is to assess the viability of the Reeves Gun, but what should have been a neutral evaluation gets caught up in the politics of vested interests, some wanting the gun to get the go-ahead, others wanting it to be rejected. The in-fighting highlights Rice's personal crisis because he lacks the self-confidence to influence events, and just gets caught up in the turbulence. He despises the superficiality and underhand methods of Waring and a slippery, conniving civil servant called Pinker (Geoffrey Keen), but does not have the conviction to stand up to either. He is a prime candidate to succeed Mair when he is deposed, but is not assertive enough to pitch for the job. Once Rice has defused the bomb and regained some self-confidence though, his fortunes improve, and he can look to the future with a new-found optimism.

Like Mine Own Executioner, The Small Back Room also attracted very good notices but did not perform so well at the box-office, as Powell remembered in his autobiography: 'the critics said it was the best picture that Powell and Pressburger had ever made. The public stayed away in droves.' The positive views about the film came from trade reviewers who predicted it would be a big box-office pull, such as the Daily Film Renter which called it a 'first-class British dramatic attraction and another winner from the Korda stable. Exhibitors can book this with every confidence as a bill topper of the highest order.' Likewise Kinematograph Weekly purréd that it was 'warm, intelligent, intensely alive and breath-taking. it should prove a box-office blockbuster.' Newspaper reviewers praised it: the Daily Herald implored its readers to 'go and see

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67 Daily Film Renter, 20 January 1949.
this film. I defy you to see a dull moment; and the Daily Express stated it was 'one of the most shining examples of good filmmaking that have come out of any studio – British, American or Continental – for many months. Leading critics like Dily Powel shared the enthusiasm, writing that the film was 'sometimes funny, often exciting and always absorbing,' and the Manchester Guardian considered it 'an almost perfect giant of a film.' For most of these critics, the niggling fault in the film was the infamous 'lapse' into expressionism – the brief scene where David Farrar struggles with a huge whisky bottle in his imagination.

In view of the critics' glowing endorsement of The Small Back Room and the fact that it was based on a best-selling book, it might be expected that the film would have prospered at the box-office. The common explanation for audience resistance to the film is simply that audiences in 1949 were fed up with war stories and so stayed away. This opinion was later expressed by Powell in his autobiography, where he forcefully wrote that it was a war film. And war films were out - OUT [his emphasis].

But was it that straightforward? To begin with, none of the reviews of the film cited so far comment on the undesirability of the wartime setting, and in any case the previous chapter of this thesis argued that there was no blanket hostility to war films. Closer inspection of the reaction to The Small Back Room suggests that it was not the war setting that put off cinemagoers, but other qualities. A few pages further on in his autobiography, Powell again picks up the theme of the film's poor box-office, but this time attributes it to the difficult, unappealing psychology of the leading character, and that the more we admired and used Nigel Balchin's mordant psychology, the less the public liked the film. There is something in this idea that the film was too laden with 'mordant psychology', or the corollary that there was not enough action and drama for the popular audience. A. E. Wilson, The Star's self-declared populist reviewer who saw films "through the eyes and minds of the "the ordinary cinemagoer" foresaw the problem. In an

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90 Daily Express, 21 January 1949.
95 Powell, Million-dollar Movie: 11.
96 Powell, Million-dollar Movie: 15.
unusual example of a negative review, he told his readers that the film 'is deliberately confused by
the introduction of a psychological undercurrent. As far as its main theme is concerned it might
have been a pure thriller ... what we are supposed to be interested in is not so much the plain,
straightforward drama as the obscure psychological make-up of Rice, the scientist who, because he
has a maimed foot, is morbid with self-pity and is something of a trial to his patient girl friend.'
Another clue that the popular audience could be daunted by the psychological weight of the film
can be found in the Daily Express, which felt it necessary to warn you that The Small Back Room
is aimed at those who take their minds, as well as their emotions along to the cinema ... it
concentrates on what goes on in people's heads rather than the things they do with their legs and
arms. The idea that the film did not exude the usual box-office appeal was suggested by the ever-
original Raymond Durgnat in 1978. He argued that 'given the mass audience of the time, a certain
disorientation was compounded by P & P's mixture of terse storypointing, an oppressively gloomy
atmosphere, and a slightly unorthodox story line. To this conjunction of factors we attribute the
film's mixture of critical success and financial failure.'

The driving force behind the project to produce The Small Back Room was Powell's, 'it was the
first Archers film which hadn't been first conceived or suggested by Emeric, who found it a brittle,
cold story.' It was also only their second book adaptation after Black Narcissus, all their other
films were from original screenplays. Powell writes how he had always been an avid Balchin
reader, but that The Small Back Room was the first novel by Balchin that he wanted to film. Powell
says how he was immediately drawn by the dramatic possibilities of the bomb disposal sequence
('the high spot of the book'), and the power of the love story between a beautiful girl and a hero
with 'a tin foot and a grudge against the world because of it.' With its disturbed protagonist,
Balchin's novel shared the concern with troubled psychologies that Powell and Pressburger had
already established with films like A Canterbury Tale (1944), The Red Shoes, and Black
Narcissus.

Balchin, who has been described as the 'only new novelist of much note' to emerge from the

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100 Durgnat, Raymond, 'On The Small Back Room' in Christie, Ian (ed.), Powell, Pressburger, and Others (London:
101 MacDonald, Emeric Pressburger: 300.
102 Powell, Million-dollar Movie: 9.
war, combined writing with his wartime work as a psychologist for the War Office and as Deputy Scientific Advisor to the Army Council with the rank of brigadier. It was this wartime experience that provided him with the material for his three most popular wartime books, *Darkness from the Sky* (1942), *The Small Back Room*, and *Mine Own Executioner*. Balchin began writing screenplays after the war, although there does not appear to be any evidence that he contributed to the script of *The Small Back Room*. Among his early credits were his adaptations of Howard Spring's *Fame is the Spur* (Roy Boulting, 1947), and his own novel, *Mine Own Executioner*. In the fifties he spent several years scriptwriting in Hollywood.

Like *Black Narcissus*, the adaptation of *The Small Back Room* was quite faithful to the original. The film recreates the world of the wartime research scientist that Balchin experienced, a timely witness to the interest in the relationship between scientists and government, and the extent to which boffins had permeated the services under the guise of 'operational research'. (As Leslie Banks' army chief complains, 'this thing is spreading. The country's crawling with this and that chap's research outfit - they don't belong to anybody, they don't report to anybody.') Calder outlines the growing influence of the scientist in the war effort, noting, for instance, how they 'progressed through a maze of appointments towards some real authority'. The logic of the plot in *The Small Back Room* is underpinned by the assumption that the scientist was held in high esteem. If Mair's research station did not carry prestige and influence, civil servants and politicians would not be bothered about who controls it. As Rice angrily tells Waring, 'the plain fact is that the stuff you build your reputation on comes chiefly out of my head'. The film also shows the scientists circulating with high level War Office officials and senior military personnel, and how vital scientific findings were to the determination of policy.

A far cry from the affectionate, patriotic, and harmonious portrayal of wartime science in *School for Secrets*, *The Small Back Room* dramatises the relationships that developed between Whitehall, military, and scientific personnel as difficult and self-interested (although less so than the novel, which has been described as a 'closely observed attack on wartime British civil service


bureaucracy). The manipulative characteristics of civil servants Waring and Pinker have already been outlined, but others come in for similar treatment. The chairman of the War Office meeting is portrayed unsympathetically as a nervously perspiring individual more interested in surreptitiously gazing at a picture book than chairing a crucial policy meeting. An accusing finger is pointed at a government minister: Robert Morley nicely satirises a vain and supercilious minister who makes an unnecessary, time-wasting, inspection tour of the laboratory. Throughout the film there is not a decent government official or politician to be seen. The scientists fare better as although flawed, weak and malleable in the case of Mair and deeply troubled and antagonistic in the case of Rice, they are at least decent. Rice, the hero of the film, is a brooding, short tempered alcoholic who takes out his frustrations on his girl friend, his impotence high-lighted by his inability to deal with the intrigue surrounded him. His state of mind is further evoked by the dark, sombre and tense mood of the film, which is as much an expression of his mood as of wartime tension. The profiling of Rice's problematical psychology was in keeping with the cycle of 'psychological' films, both British and American, that appeared in the late 1940s, often about war-damaged ex-servicemen trying to re-integrate into society, such as Mine Own Executioner. In many of these films the character of the returned ex-servicemen as a flawed and restless hero emerged, and Rice is in this mould. Indeed, as the cause of Rice's tin leg is never explained (beyond a brief comment that ten years earlier he had both feet as he was able to surf), it could be assumed it was a war injury, and significantly Robert Murphy discusses the film in this context of its dealing with 'war-damaged protagonists'. To contemporary reviewers the film's image of wartime government was familiar: the Daily Express wryly noted how the viewer would 'have met practically every character in the story, meddlers, misfits, and cynics some time or other during the past few years'; and the Daily Herald commented how the 'insight into the undercurrents of officialdom, and the struggle against political and personal resistance make glorious satire and exciting drama.'

Despite the melancholic atmosphere of the film, it is nevertheless more upbeat than the original novel. In the film, Rice is largely victorious in overcoming his difficulties and putting his life back on track, but in the book he fails to redeem himself, and can only look forward to a future carrying his burden of self-doubt and frustrating equivocation. Whereas in the film he single-handedly defuses the bomb, in the novel, as a consequence of fear and nervous exhaustion, he is unable to complete the operation and feels humiliated and confused. The film symbolically consolidates his

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108 Kunitz, Twenty First Century Authors: 39.


new-found confidence through the offer of the job to start up a new research station, but this narrative twist is absent in the novel. Instead, Rice limply expects to continue in his old job, a job made worse because Waring has empowered himself further by ingratiating himself with the new director. The alteration shifts the balance of the film towards making it a tale of redemption 'like A Canterbury Tale or Black Narcissus, The Small Back Room is transformed into the story of a damaged psyche that is healed by the journey of the script.\textsuperscript{112}

\textit{Odette} is the last secret operations film to be considered, and together with \textit{The Wooden Horse} and \textit{They Were Not Divided}, one of the trio of keynote 1950 war films. Produced and directed by Herbert Wilcox, and starring Anna Neagle as Odette and Trevor Howard as her commanding officer Peter Churchill, \textit{Odette} was based on Jerrard Tickell's best-selling novelised account\textsuperscript{113} of the actual wartime experience of Odette Sansom, who became the first woman to be awarded a George Cross for her courage. The film version is largely the same as the book in terms of the storyline: it is the story of Odette, a Frenchwoman married to an Englishman, who sacrifices the safety and security of her family life in Britain to volunteer to work as a secret agent in France in 1942. After a brief training period she lands in the south of France, but after six months working as a secret agent she is captured, together with Churchill, and tortured by the Gestapo. She is finally sentenced to death, and in the summer of 1944 is transferred from Fresnes prison in Paris to Ravensbrück concentration camp, but miraculously survives because of her pretence to be married to Churchill whom she falsely claimed was related to Winston Churchill. As a 'relative' of the prime minister she has some value to the Nazis and is not killed. Odette, unbeknown to Churchill, takes responsibility for their sabotage activities in order to avoid his subjection to torture, and probable execution. In the face of the advancing Allied armies, the commandant of Ravensbrück decides to deliver her to the Americans, and the film ends with Odette and Churchill re-united in London. The basic differences between book and film is that the film develops a romance between Odette and Churchill which is absent in the book (in real-life they did marry after the war in 1947); and whereas the film is a rather flat external study of Odette tracking her life in terms of time and space, cause and effect, the novel explores her emotions and suffering, and the inspiration and beliefs that enabled her to endure the horrors.

'A kind of factual, over-simplified newsreel of events',\textsuperscript{114} the film was intended to be an authentic reconstruction of Odette's life and much of it was shot in the locations where the events took place,

\textsuperscript{112} MacDonald, Emeric Pressburger: 300.


\textsuperscript{114} \textit{Daily Herald}, 7 June 1950.
a pursuit that bordered on the perverse when they shot scenes in the actual room where Odette was tortured.\textsuperscript{115} The storyline has chronological fidelity, with the viewer being constantly informed by title-cards of dates and places, and the head of the French Section of S.O.E (Special Operations Executive), Colonel Buckmaster, appeared as himself.

The narrative structure of the film is the reverse of the PoW film: whereas the PoW film features imprisonment followed by the thrill of the escape, \textit{Odette} has the thrill of active service followed by capture. \textit{Odette} begins with a brief outline of how she came to be recruited and her subsequent training in subterfuge, and then gets into its stride as a plot-driven adventure story when she is landed on the French coast at Cassis in November 1942, with some fine location-shot street scenes evoking the mood of wartime France. Crammed into the first hour are secret parachute drops, secret meetings and hushed conversations in cafes, the passing of illicit documents, the risky use of radio communication, and the burgeoning love between Odette and Churchill.

The second half of the film relates the imprisonment and torture of Odette. It tries to give an impression of the cruelty Odette suffered: there is the interrogation where the Gestapo rip off her blouse and thrust a red hot poker on to her spine; there is a recreation of Ravensbrück replete with satanic chimneys billowing out smoke, crowds of wandering, ragged, vacant-looking inmates, the entire hell-hole overseen by sadistic Nazis. Wilcox plays up the romantic dimension to Odette and Churchill's relationship; by the time they are imprisoned the film has staked out their evolving love affair, and this is then cleverly used to give an emotional backdrop to their captivity. Wilcox, in the certain knowledge that the popular audience liked nothing better than a sentimental love affair with a happy ending, largely defines Odette's actions and feelings in terms of her love for Churchill, and the film ends on their reunion, which for the \textit{Kinematograph Weekly} was a 'wildly exciting and indescribably touching climax'.\textsuperscript{116}

The centrality of action in the film is illustrated by the proportion of time allotted to Odette's six months of active service. About half the film is devoted to this period, whereas the two years spent in captivity, despite being four times as long, attracts an equal amount of screen-time. Moreover, in real life the spirit of Odette's heroism and courage lay not so much in her activities whilst a free agent, but through her passive suffering over the two long, gruesome years spent in captivity at the hands of the Nazis. As Dan van der Vat has written, 'she had too little time at large in occupied France to do much for S.O.E. Her achievement was to inflict, alone and unaided, a moral defeat on

\textsuperscript{115} Nash, Jay, and Ross, Stanley (eds), \textit{Motion Picture Guide} (Chicago: Cinebooks, 1986): 2220.

\textsuperscript{116} \textit{Kinematograph Weekly}, 8 June 1950.
the Nazis, and thus to set a shining example of personal courage that will forever be associated with the name Odette.\footnote{Obituary to Odette, Guardian, 18 March 1995.}

\textit{Odette} avoids virtually any reference to problematic facets of her personal life, even though she is the subject of the film. For example, the only mention of her husband and father of her children, Roy Sansom, is Odette's throwaway comment that her 'children's parents have been separated for some time'. Whether or not this was true, it is a scant explanation for a conflict of loyalty and conscience over her affair with Churchill (the affair itself breaching military codes of behaviour), and which presumably contributed to the real life divorce with Sansom in 1946.\footnote{The real Odette married Churchill in 1947 having dissolved the marriage to Roy Samson in 1946. She later divorced Churchill in 1955, and married Geoffrey Halbwes in 1956, to whom she remained married until her death in 1995.} The film is also almost completely silent about the ethics of a mother depositing her three children in a convent ("I went through hell" is her only reference). The novel introduces her husband when outlining her early life and marriage (which is extensively covered, unlike in the film), but once she goes to France he also disappears from the story, even though the novel lacks the romantic sub-plot between her and Churchill.

Germans are portrayed in the film in a stylised manner. They are divided into fanatical and evil Nazis, and relatively good Germans who were nevertheless responsible for the war by their failure to resist Nazism. The main German character is the \textit{Abwehr}\footnote{The German military \textit{Abwehr} intelligence organisation was generally recognised by historians as being unsympathetic towards the Nazis. See, for example Wheal, Elizabeth-Anne, Pope, Stephen, and Taylor, James (eds), \textit{A Dictionary of the Second World War} (New York: Peter Bedrick Books, 1990): 1.} chief called Henri (Marius Goring), a cultured man who aspires to be a concert pianist, who regrets the war and despises the Gestapo but nevertheless remains obedient to his Nazi masters. While Odette does not suffer directly at his hands she has no time for his excuses and holds him - as must the audience - to be as guilty for the atrocities as the Gestapo.

By stressing the nastiness of the enemy, and concomitantly ignoring awkward or embarrassing facets of the Allied war effort as personified by Odette, the film constructs a straightforward view of the war as good versus evil. \textit{Odette}'s avoidance of wider and deeper issues contrasts with earlier secret operations films which in varying degrees ways touch on problematical areas: \textit{School For Secrets} recognises the tensions thrown up by conscription; \textit{Against the Wind} sets out the uncomfortable reality of treachery; and \textit{The Small Back Room} delights in unpatriotic politicking at the highest levels. \textit{Odette} does not consider any problematical aspects in the conduct of the war.
(there is a traitor in the French Resistance, but he is a minor, almost non-speaking, character).

*Odette* is also different from *School for Secrets* and *Against the Wind* by lacking any 'People's War' rhetoric. As indicated by the comparison between *The Captive Heart* and *The Wooden Horse*, by 1950 interest in wartime collectivist themes had faded, including the collective contribution of women. Apart from a token prologue and epilogue, and brief glimpse of a gaggle of trained women agents at the beginning, *Odette* ignores the other fifty women agents that had infiltrated France. In reality twelve of these women engaged alongside *Odette* were captured and killed by the Gestapo, two were posthumously awarded the George Cross, and all memorialised in a monument erected at St Paul's, Knightsbridge.\(^{120}\) It is interesting to speculate whether, if the film had been made earlier or by a different film-maker, it would have celebrated the women's bravery as a group. The key difference between *Odette* and earlier films about the war, is that it is a celebratory, albeit low-key, biopic of a national war hero. Instead of documenting the struggle of a 'people' at war, *Odette* is the story of one person's courage and suffering. It was a national tribute to a great patriot (even if she was French!) who in the cause of freedom suffered appalling horrors at the hands of the Gestapo. It is a film primarily about a war hero, and as such does not concern itself with introducing the wider war effort, or tarnishing the tribute with less acceptable facets of her life. The film is also firmly rooted in a traditional view of Britain with the being managed by the ruling class as typified by Buckmaster and the War Office. It was no wonder that Noel Coward, who saw the traditional class structure as a pillar of Britain's strength, liked the film.\(^{121}\)

With *Odette*, Wilcox built on the fame of Odette who at the time of the film's release was described as 'the famous George Cross heroine',\(^{122}\) and who together with Churchill were 'for a time in the early 1950s ... a pair of national heroes,' in part because of the film.\(^{123}\) At the time of the

\(^{120}\) In 1958, a film (*Carve Her Name with Pride*, Lewis Gilbert) was made about one of the other women agents, Violette Szabo. Like *Odette*, Szabo was a French woman living in Britain who volunteered for underground work in France and was captured, but unlike *Odette*, she did not survive Ravensbrück (which was ironic as she had not actually been sentenced to death as *Odette* had). Szabo was posthumously awarded the George Cross and Croix de Guerre. *Odette* was the 'technical advisor' on the film. Sellar, Maurice, *Best of British* (London: Sphere/BBC, 1987): 41.

\(^{121}\) Neagle quotes a letter from Coward: 'This is just to tell I saw *Odette* last night and thought it one of the best acted and best directed pictures I have seen in many a long day - your complete lack of compromise, your sincerity and veracity, impressed me very deeply.' Neagle, Anna, *Anna Neagle Says 'There's always Tomorrow'* (London: W.H. Allen, 1974): 169. For a discussion of Coward's views on class, see, for example, Aldgate, Anthony, and Richards, Jeffrey, *British Can Take It: The British Cinema in the Second World War* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986): 191-192.

\(^{122}\) *Daily Film Renter*, 7 June 1950.

film's premiere the *Daily Film Renter* noted how its 'subject matter [is] familiar in novel and serial form to millions of readers'. Odette's fame was also witnessed by the high-profile publicity achieved for the film. It was accorded, for example, 'the rare honour of a Royal Premiere', and when it was released in European capitals it was 'honoured by leading members of Europe's Royal families, statesmen and diplomats who requested to attend the gala premieres of *Odette*.'

Wilcox had already established a reputation as a maker of patriotic biopics - invariably with Neagle playing the subject - before the war, with such films as the two hagiographies of Queen Victoria, *Victoria the Great* (1937) and *Sixty Glorious Years* (1938). *Odette* is in this tradition; the film is an epic, patriotic, uncritical and emotional portrayal of a national hero, designed to appeal to, and reaffirm, national sentiments. In effect, Wilcox had begun the process of cinematically historicizing the war by creating the war's first filmic hero. Odette was paraded in front of the nation not in the communitarian manner of wartime, but in the manner of earlier symbols of Britain's heritage like Queen Victoria. Significantly, both Eagle's and Wilcox's autobiographies refer to Odette in historical terms: Neagle described Odette as 'almost an historical character and in some respects she had endured more, physically and mentally even than Nurse Cavell'. Neagle goes on to tell how Odette was also 'acclaimed for a great chapter in French history.' Odette then, joined Wilcox's, and the nation's, roll of honour, immortalised forever on screen.

Odette remained one the great national heroes of the war. There was a national outcry when in the mid-sixties historian M.R.D. Foot 'cast doubt on the military value of her work ... [and] ... suggested there was no evidence she was tortured by the Gestapo.' Her enduring place in the public consciousness was also witnessed by the high-profile media coverage she attracted when her death was announced in March 1995, fifty years after her release from Ravensbrück.

Popular critics and the trade press thought *Odette* an outstanding film, a deserving tribute to Odette herself, and a credit to the film-makers. The *Daily Film Renter* considered it 'one the most

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124 *Daily Film Renter*, 7 June 1950.
125 *Daily Film Renter*, 7 June 1950.
126 *Daily Film Renter*, 16 November 1950.
127 Neagle, *Anna Neagle Says There's always Tomorrow*; 163, 172.
absorbing real-life dramas ever told. Ordinary praise pales and shrinks in reviewing this film;\textsuperscript{129} the \textit{Kinematograph Weekly} declared it 'the greatest war film and woman's picture to date';\textsuperscript{130} and \textit{Film Review} described it as a 'tremendously sincere, meticulous and matter-of-fact recital of the true wartime adventures of [Odette] ... superbly acted by Anna Neagle'.\textsuperscript{131} Reviewers in the quality press also praised it, but more out of heart-felt respect for Odette than as an accomplished piece of film-making. For example, \textit{The Manchester Guardian} described it as 'not the sort of film which will be remembered as a great job of film-craft, but it will have its honourable place in the record as a simple and convincing document';\textsuperscript{132} and Caroline Lejeune praised its 'sincerity' while observing that 'Wilcox has treated the story of Odette more as a matter of historical record than a chance for imaginative film-making.'\textsuperscript{133} Other critics were less flattering, such as Denis Forman who wrote that although the 'attempt is courageously and loyally sustained ... the team is, alas, unable to cope with the realities of a situation so entirely remote from the traditional romance of the screen.'\textsuperscript{134}

Audiences flocked to see \textit{Odette} and made it a 'remarkable money-spinner'\textsuperscript{135} and one of the six most popular films of 1950,\textsuperscript{136} and for Wilcox it was his 'record film for profit, and represented the peak years of plenty.'\textsuperscript{137} It was voted the best film of the year in the annual \textit{Daily Mail} film poll and Neagle was voted the top actress;\textsuperscript{138} she also won the Best Actress award from the British Film Academy in 1950. The immense success of \textit{Odette} put it on a different plane altogether from the other secret operations films. Wilcox, with his uncanny ability to predict, and cater for, audience taste, had struck a chord with the British public in 1950 with an affirmative, uncomplicated and celebratory war film.

\textsuperscript{129} \textit{Daily Film Renter}, 7 June 1950.

\textsuperscript{130} \textit{Kinematograph Weekly}, 8 June 1950.

\textsuperscript{131} Speed, \textit{Film Review}, 1950: 134.

\textsuperscript{132} \textit{Manchester Guardian}, 7 June 1950.

\textsuperscript{133} Observer, 11 June 1950.


\textsuperscript{135} \textit{Kinematograph Weekly}, 14 December 1950.

\textsuperscript{136} \textit{Sight and Sound}, February 1951: 389.


\textsuperscript{138} Speed, \textit{Film Review}, 1951/52: 102.
The armed forces

Two trends can be discerned in films with a narrative focus on the fighting services. First, most of the films are primarily about the army 139 (and consequently the army will be the centre of attention here); and second, the bulk of the films appear from 1949 onwards. Prior to 1949, films about the war years tended to focus on secret operations and the home-front, and as they faded away they were replaced, or displaced, by films about the armed forces.

The core reason for the preoccupation with the army is that the vast majority of civilians were conscripted into it compared with the other services. Angus Calder gives these figures: in June 1941 the navy numbered 395,000, the RA F 662,000, and the army 2.25 million men 140 (making the army the service that had expanded the most with conscripts). Furthermore, the army was perceived as the least attractive of the service. Calder, for example, writes that 'members of the women's services were said to grade escorts in an order of eligibility in "which RAF officers rated tops ... naval officers came second, and brown jobs a long way behind". 141 The experience of conscription in the army was for much of the population the defining experience of the war, and this is mirrored in films' disproportionate interest in the subject. Pronay argues that a particular theme of the British cinema (as opposed to 'standard themes which the cinema, as well as drama and literature, commonly pursues in the aftermath of a major war in the course of what one might call the post-bellum post-mortem inquiry, irrespective of the country or culture involved 142) is the relationship between conscripts and the regular army. Invoking traditional British perceptions of its regular army as a necessary but undesirable institution, Pronay argues how wartime conscription forced 'ordinary, sane, Englishmen' to enter the disciplined world of the professional soldier. As a result of this 'one major theme of the post-war British cinema was therefore the encounter between [regular soldiers] and the normal Britons who, thanks to the Germans, had to be compelled to join their ranks. 143

The ongoing interest in the army was also founded in the slow pace of demobilisation and the

139 Seven films deal primarily with the army: Theirs is the Glory; Bless 'me All (Robert Jordan Hill, 1949); Private Angelo; What a Carry On! (John Blakeley, 1949); The Hasty Heart (Vincent Sherman, 1950); They Were Not Divided; and The Captive Heart. The remaining three service films are about the Navy: Meet the Navy (Alfred Travers, 1946); Landfall (Ken Annakin, 1949); and Morning Departure.

140 Calder, The People's War: 249.


142 Pronay, 'The British Post-bellum Cinema': 40.

reintroduction of conscription, in the guise of National Service, after 1945. Although the war against Germany was over, continuing international uncertainty ensured that Britain maintained a massive army. As Peter Hennessy has written, 'Britain's post-war duties as an imperial and an occupying power kept vast concentrations of khaki in a worldwide kaleidoscope.' As in the war years, the vast majority of civilian conscripts remained, or were newly enrolled, in the army; as Royle has noted: 'for every Royal Navy National Serviceman, the RAF claimed twelve, and the army thirty-three.' In 1951, the army's total manpower had reached 417,800, and because regular army recruiting had dropped so low, 50% of those were National Service conscripts. After the war, then, the army remained an unwelcome intrusion into private lives for much of the population, and films rendered the past and present frustrations of conscription on to cinema screens. Half the films do this through comedy; there are two slapstick treatments, Bless 'me All, and What a Carry On!, and one satire, Private Angelo. Quite how successful serving National Servicemen found these comedies as a means to assuage the trauma of the experience is debatable. Leslie Halliwell, for one, waggishly noted how his experience of National Service in the late 1940s was 'a lot less amusing than any army comedy I had seen at the cinema.'

Aside from the comic recycling of army life, the time was ripe for a belated tribute to the army for its role in securing victory. The two films to be discussed in more detail here - Private Angelo and They Were Not Divided - approach the subject of the army from quite different angles. Private Angelo takes an offbeat look at the fictitious adventures of a civilian conscript, and in complete contrast They Were Not Divided pays a serious-minded, semi-documentary, semi-official tribute to the Welsh Guards. Released six months apart, they offer quite different representations of the armed forces. Private Angelo's sharp humour is another example of those late forties films that dented the idealised image of Britain at war that prevailed in both the war years and the 1950s. They Were Not Divided, by contrast, began the process of rewriting the war as a triumphant episode

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144 The National Service Bill was introduced in March 1947 and became law in May 1947. It was to last until 1954, and originally bound conscripts to 12 months of service, but a year later this was increased to 18 months, and finally to two years when the Korean War broke out. By 1948 National Service had become a 'British institution' which was to last until 1963 (Royle, Trevor, The Best Years of Our Lives, London: Michael Joseph, 1986: 29). It was introduced to maintain numbers, and to help speed up the demobilising of wartime conscripts, which had become all the more urgent in the face of occasional mutinies by disaffected servicemen. (Royle: 26.)


of British history.

Based on Eric Linklater's 1946 best-seller\(^{149}\) (it was reprinted in 1948), *Private Angelo* was Peter Ustinov's third picture, after *School for Secrets* and *Vice Versa*, as producer, director and screen-writer. Ustinov was well qualified to comment on the vagaries of conscription as he was called up in January 1942,\(^{150}\) and spent some months as a private in a defensive infantry unit on the south coast. He was then seconded to the Directorate of Army Psychiatry to help Captain Carol Reed and Major Eric Ambler produce an army instructional film, *The New Lot* (Carol Reed, 1942). A forty-minute film designed for new recruits, it was 'conceived as a means of using humour to bridge the gap between civilian and service life'.\(^{151}\) While still serving in the army, Ustinov, together with Ambler and Reed (Linklater's name was also proposed)\(^{152}\) then went on to make *The Way Ahead*. A commercial feature film, *The Way Ahead* had the official backing of the Ministry of Information (MOI) and the War Office with the objective of boosting the image of the army.\(^{153}\) The film is a classic wartime expression of the people's war ethos; a number of civilians are recruited into the army from a variety of backgrounds, and after initial resistance to army life and petty squabbles between themselves, they become a unified, proud and patriotic fighting force. The official ideological project of the film was to relieve the tension between the conscript's loss of individual liberty and his subjection to army discipline. Ustinov's own agony and ecstasy as a conscripted army private, whether on the parade ground or as an army-sponsored film-maker,\(^{154}\) is humorously chronicled in his autobiography. His view of the experience is ambivalent, but he generated huge comic mileage out of the absurd situations created by war service: 'National Service is the only dictatorship of the spirit permitted in a democratic society. The navy has its own particular traditions, the air force is by definition more modern and more technical. At the time I was in it the army was the least exclusive of the three, a kind of nightmare school for backward adults, in which degrees could achieved in monstrous disciplines. I can tell you frankly that I hated it like poison,

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\(^{150}\) Ustinov, *Dear Me*: 98.


\(^{152}\) Litewski, and Porter, 'The Way Ahead': 112.

\(^{153}\) See Litewski, and Porter, 'The Way Ahead'.

\(^{154}\) After completing *The Way Ahead* Ustinov went on to work for the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF). He scanned all new incoming news footage from the battlefield with an eye to selecting suitable material for an official film about the battle. He was then detached to the Air Ministry to begin preliminary work on *School for Secrets* and was finally demobbed while this film was in production. Ustinov, *Dear Me*: 145-147.
and would not have missed it for the world.\textsuperscript{155}

Ustinov remained a private, even though he was involved in films and propaganda, and so had an understanding for the lowly side of army life that the majority of conscripts had to endure. His autobiography does not reveal why he was interested in making \textit{Private Angelo}, but it can be assumed it was a topic close to his heart, an opportunity to make irreverent comments about the war which he was unable to do while working in an official capacity. Eric Linklater, a writer of nimble, astringent wit,\textsuperscript{156} had not served in the army but was recruited 'into the public relations division of the War Office'.\textsuperscript{157} He wrote the novel during a posting to Italy in 1944 where he worked as a communications expert.

\textit{Private Angelo} was shot on location in Italy - overseas shooting was fashionable just after the war - and utilised 'a large and talented international cast [which] also includes the entire population of Trequanda in Tuscany'.\textsuperscript{158} The story revolves around an Italian, Angelo (Ustinov), who has no interest in fighting wars - he is distinctly not the soldier type. All he wants to do is live quietly in his beautiful Tuscan village and marry his sweetheart Lucretia, but this is rudely prevented by the belligerent actions of nations, and his enforced military service. Angelo first appears in the film as a deserter in Rome, where he is under the protective custody of his exasperated father, who is both a Colonel and a Count. The Colonel's problem of what to do with his deserter son Angelo is resolved when there is a radio broadcast announcing Italy's capitulation. The Colonel, fearful that his private art collection will be damaged in the chaos of the Allied advance, entrusts Angelo with the responsibility of transporting the collection to their village for safety. In the attempt Angelo gets arrested by the Germans, and then after escaping their clutches he falls into the hands of an advancing British commando unit and is obliged to fight with them against the Germans. After this unwanted slice of action, he has to rejoin the Italian army and gets a hand blown off for his trouble before he is demobbed at the end of hostilities.

The prologue announces the idea behind the story: 'to all conscripted soldiers, past and present, the world over: to all those who never really knew what they were doing: to the baffled, the cowardly, the peace-loving: to the vast majority of us, this picture is affectionately dedicated.' Although this contains no specific reference to the British, the film is clearly intended to represent the experience

\textsuperscript{155} Ustinov, \textit{Dear Me}: 129.

\textsuperscript{156} Kunitz, \textit{Twentieth Century Authors}: 586.

\textsuperscript{157} Kunitz, \textit{Twentieth Century Authors}: 586.

of the British civilian soldier, as the *Monthly Film Bulletin* dryly noted: Private Angelo is an 'Italian soldier in name only'. To this end a large proportion of screen-time is devoted to Angelo's secondment to the British army, which is a distinct shift of emphasis from Linklater's novel. In the novel, Angelo's British experience is interwoven into the narrative but is not the dominant narrative strand it is in the film. The novel, for example, explores Angelo's time in the German army and Italy's occupation by a multifarious array of cultures and creeds under the Allied flag.

Ustinov's film addresses the less glorious features of the soldiering experience, desertion and the lack of resolve to fight, that morale-boosting wartime propaganda films could not show, and fifties film-makers tended to avoid. Desertion, though, was a major problem as according to Paul Fussell, at one point during the conflict 'there were said to be around 12,000 armed deserters in Italy alone, 2000 of them British', and after the war was over it was estimated that some 20,000 unpardoned deserters were at large.

*Private Angelo* also touches on other less salubrious aspects of war, such as the disloyalty of servicemen's girl-friends, illegitimate births, and the avoidance of military service by devious means. For instance, Angelo's childhood sweetheart, Lucretia, has been dishonourable in his absence; while he was away risking his life fighting, she was enjoying a romance which also produced a baby. As Angelo dolefully observes, that is all the thanks he gets for doing his patriotic duty, and to rub salt in the wound, the father of the baby is an Englishman who fraudulently evaded military service.

The film is unusual for its lack of certainty over the purpose and meaning of the war: Britain's crusade is not presented as a clear-cut case of good fighting evil, as it is in *Odette*. Underlying the story about desertion is a message about the futility of war. Angelo's reluctance to fight is not founded so much on his cowardice (he has, after all, spent three years in combat before deserting) but on his lack of interest in fighting a war that, as far as he is concerned, is none of his business. It seems to be none of Italy's business either, as the Germans, British and Americans are all regarded

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162 Right at the end of the film there is a speech in the purposeful tones familiar in wartime propaganda. An eccentric 'good German who is a double agent working for the Allies (played by James Robertson Justice with a flamboyance which became his hallmark), tells the assembled guests at Angelo's wedding feast that the war was a just and necessary battle for freedom. He finishes his speech on a topical post-war plea for tolerance: 'please forgive my nation, and myself, if you can.' Significantly, this moralising speech is not in the book, and is out of kilter with the rest of the film. The film-makers presumably felt obliged to insert something positive to compensate for all the satire.
as foreign invaders, with Italy the victim of their warmongering. At the end of the film, when all the foreigners have gone and Angelo is left alone with Lucretia, he ponders that 'once before when the world was in despair we woke it with our painting and our poetry, and even with our quarrelling. And this time again the countries have come to us to conquer, and they've gone away wiser than they were. And in spite of everything, we're still here ...' There is the rueful suggestion that despite the upheaval of the war, nations have not learnt from the experience. In Ustinov's autobiography, he describes a scene from the film that embodies this theme. Newly arrived in Rome 'American generals were posing for American cameramen, British generals for British cameramen, and a solitary French general for a solitary French cameraman.' Observing this scene, the Count looks at Angelo and intones softly "Ah, Angelo, what have we learned? A different text for every school-book, a different inscription on every tomb. Nothing. We have learned nothing...". The film also casts a witty eye on the economic and political winners of the war. Once peace has prevailed in the village, the Count returns in his new post-war guise as the sole concessionaire for a new American sewing machine. American dominated consumerism has arrived.

In most respects, Linklater's novel is far sharper, satirical and questioning than the film. In the book, for instance, servicemen, sex and illegitimate children are ubiquitous; it questions the Allied destruction of Italian villages and towns in the name of 'liberation' (a theme which includes the Allied bombing of Italian towns by accident); it looks at the chaos of post-war Europe as a heaving mass of squabbling nationalities and political creeds. It casts a satirical glance at the mercenary nature of Italians: the Italians are most hospitable to the Americans, but not because of any grand ideas about liberation and democracy, but because they have money and supplies.

_Private Angelo_ did not do particularly well at the box-office, and this was probably as a result of its unorthodox style and its satire being too allusive for the ordinary filmgoer. For instance, _Kinematograph Weekly_ feared that 'its sallies at the Italians, Germans, Americans and British may prove a little too subtle for the "ninepennies"'. Nevertheless, despite this reservation, _Kinematograph Weekly_ still reckoned that 'it was not a proposition to be dismissed'. For _The Daily Film Renter_ the film would appeal especially to 'ex-privates who can see the funny side of soldiering ... the basic appeal of the film is therefore addressed to the humble majority of conscripts who took to soldiering, not from choice but by force of circumstances.'

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163 Ustinov, _Dear Me_: 166.

164 _Kinematograph Weekly_, 30 June 1949.

165 _Daily Film Renter_, 27 June 1949.
Reviewers gave a clue as to how recognisable Angelo's attitudes were in the war; the *Daily Express* noted how 'every army had its Angelos, and his reactions expressed the feelings all of us felt as some time during the war. Linklater's book touched us while it made us smile.\(^{166}\) And the *Kinematograph Weekly*’s review observed how the film 'subtly employs ridicule to emphasise the futility of war and commiserate with the poor suckers, drawn from all nations, who are forced to don battledress without knowing what they are fighting for.'\(^{167}\) Needless to say calling conscripts 'suckers' was a far cry from morale boosting propaganda celebrating the patriotic heroism of the civilian army.

*Private Angelo*, then, is a comparatively candid view of soldiering: whereas *The Way Ahead* presented the official view of conscription, *Private Angelo* presented the flip-side. Because the film was sufficiently distanced from the war (and not officially sponsored) Ustinov could dispense with the kind of purposeful propaganda themes and values that he was obliged to give *School For Secrets*. *Private Angelo*’s healthy dose of irony about the indignities of army conscription is a long way from the myth-affirming version served up in *They Were Not Divided*. Its director and producer, Terence Young, started his film career in the late thirties as a screenwriter, got his first directorial experience during his military service, and is best known for directing three early James Bond films.\(^{168}\) He saw active service with the Guards Armoured Division as it spear-headed its way into north-west Europe, including involvement in the Arnhem campaign, and this story is at the heart of the film.

*They Were Not Divided* was intended to relay the particular experience of Arnhem, as well as the general experience of the civilian soldier. As the prologue signifies: 'this is a story of one small part of the war, and although war will always seem different when seen through different eyes, this is still the story of every man who fought. Because this story really happened.' The first half of the film is concerned with the induction and training of recruits into the Guards Armoured Division. It begins with civilians joining up shortly after Dunkirk, and being relentlessly drilled into shape by the 'most terrifying sergeant-major seen on the screen'\(^{169}\) (the real-life R. S. M. Brittain). They do not see action until D-Day, and the film traces the tedium and frustration of years of training and waiting. Their hopes of seeing action are raised when they have to paint their tanks khaki for North

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166 *Daily Express*, 8 July 1949.


169 *Variety*, 5 April 1950.
Africa, only to be dashed when they are no longer required because of the success of the campaign. The boredom (for both the characters and the audience) is broken up with sporadic spells on leave. On these breaks, Philip Hamilton (Edward Underdown), a middle-class British officer, takes his new American friend David Morgan (Ralph Clanton) to his home and beautiful wife. To add romantic colour the American also meets and falls in love with one of Hamilton's neighbours.

The second half of the film is devoted to the battlefront and the long slog from the Normandy beaches to Germany, a journey which 'takes the Guards from Caen to Arnhem, showing quite brilliantly their famous drive from the Seine to Brussels. The film also centre-stages the comradeship between the recruits, and the danger and tragedy they encounter illustrates, by implication, the warmongering nature of the Germans. The enemy is only seen in close-up at the end of the film when the audience sees through a German sniper's gunsight the fatal shot that kills Hamilton - a cinematic device that serves to make the Germans more like cold-blooded murderers than soldiers in combat. The film ends with the death of two protagonists, one American and one British, on Christmas Day in the battlefield, and the burying of their bodies side by side in two snowbound graves. This is the weakest part of the film and the culmination of the Anglo-American relations theme that tiresomely interweaves throughout the film. It descends into dreadful bathos in the closing stages when a soldier puts a British and an American flag on each grave, and they catch in the wind and gently lean over and touch, thus symbolising how even in death they were not divided.

_They Were Not Divided_ has qualities common to both wartime and fifties war films. In terms of looking backwards, the most obvious wartime theme is the studied cross-section of nationalities, types and classes found in the unit, and how they are collectively moulded into a crack fighting force. The representative group includes the three main characters: the American; the middle-class Englishman; and a working-class Irishman (Michael Brennan). Other characters include an aristocrat; an amiable army major with a handlebar moustache (Michael Trubshawe); Welsh soldiers who 'never stop singing'; various stiff-upper-lip officer types; cheeky but deferential privates; and loud, classless, undeferential, monied, but nevertheless honourable, Yanks. Wartime values are also found in its incorporation of a sub-plot about the private lives of the servicemen. Compared, though, to some wartime films, such as _In Which We Serve_, this aspect is insubstantial because confined to isolated romantic interludes, and only to the lives of officers - unlike wartime films, there is no interest in the private lives of other ranks.

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Assembling together a motley collection of characters designed to represent a cross-section of the population, was a propaganda strategy adopted by Hollywood film-makers too. As Janine Basinger has argued, many Hollywood war films used this narrative strategy to promote the propaganda message of the tolerant and democratic nature of American society, and to help break down barriers between different groups. With reference to Bataan (Tay Garnett, 1943, US), a combat film showing a small military unit making a last stand against the Japanese, Basinger outlines how the 'men [in the unit] obviously represent the American melting pot ... we are a mongrel nation - ragtail, unprepared, disorganised, quarrelsome among ourselves, and with separate special interests, raised, as we are, to believe in the individual, not the group. At the same time, we bring different skills and abilities together for the common good, and from these separate needs and backgrounds we bring a feisty determination.\(^{171}\)

Adding to the wartime tenor of They Were Not Divided is its low-key semi-documentary style that was so associated with the war. It was shot mostly on location in Europe and England, featured many of the real people who served in the Guards, and avoided star names.\(^{172}\) The director's own wartime service in the Guards further added to the contemporary sense of authenticity. Documentary and newsreel footage are also employed, and the audience is kept informed of events by the use of maps, title cards and newspaper headlines.

For all the echoes of wartime, the film predominantly looks towards the war pictures of later years. For instance, while the film is peopled by a representative cross-section of the population, its narrative focus is on the officers rather than the other ranks. The film assumes that only middle-class recruits will be offered commissions, and the working-class Irishman never has a chance. The structure of the film is also revealing: during the initial period of induction, the cross-section of men equally share the humiliation and shock of their new military environment, but within ten minutes the middle-classes are awarded commissions, and the rest are destined to remain 'other ranks'. At this point, the narrative filters off the officers from the men, and it becomes the officers' story. The brashness of the mixed barrack-room found at the beginning of the film is replaced by the refined tones of the officers' mess, and the working-class characters merely weave in and out of the officers' lives. Thus the middle-classes resume their pre-war status as the natural leaders, and as such are the only ones deemed worthy of serious attention. Collective heroism, however, was still the order of the day, as although officers have become the focus of attention, they are not yet the


\(^{172}\) See, for example, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, vol. 17, no. 196, April/May 1950: 63.
The film is preoccupied with male relationships as despite relating back to the home-front its human interest centres on the relationship of the men in the all-male battalion. Women are no longer presented as determined defenders of the home-front as they were in wartime films, but as emotional and rather weak creatures. (In one gushing home-leave scene Hamilton's wife asks her husband and his American pal 'why are you soldiers you two? Haven't you anything better to do?' and promptly bursts into tears muttering 'oh darling I'm so sorry, on your last day too, I can't help it - why are women such stupid emotional creatures? - so sorry.') The women are entirely defined in terms of their menfolk, and pour all their energies into coping with the men's absence. They provide incidental romantic breaks while the men can get on with the all-male business of winning the war. There are a couple of brief exceptions to this: in one home-leave scene Mrs Hamilton is shown entertaining local GIs; her neighbour is seen at work in a hospital; and there is a female American war correspondent who oddly appears for a minute or two. But these are minor gestures compared to wartime films' emphasis on the contribution of women to the war effort.

As a post-war combat film They Were Not Divided was bound to be different from wartime films as it was made in the certain knowledge of victory. Whereas in, say, The Way Ahead, the conscript army marches off into the mists of an unknown future, They Were Not Divided tells a triumphant and well-known story about the road to military victory. There is no uncertainty as it relates Britain winning the war, not preparing for it or resisting German attack, but the actual march on Germany. The specific storyline - the rapid progress of the fast-moving tank divisions from Normandy to the Dutch-German border - accentuates this sense of Britain and the Allies quickly and confidently on the offensive. It shows the British army, with apparent ease (despite some attempt to suggest fierce German resistance), rapidly progressing across the continent, its achievement further vindicated by the tremendous welcome it receives en route by the liberated populations. Staged as an epic, it concentrates on the frontline of the army's advance as it pushes back the Germans in a dynamic and determined operation. Significantly, the film ignores the wider effort which went into creating and sustaining the frontline, such as the supply lines, or armaments production in the home-front.

173 For a discussion of how fifties war films characterise heroism and leadership as the domain of middle-class officers, see, for example, Ramsden, John, 'Refocusing the People's War: British Second World War Films of the 1950s', Journal of Contemporary History, January 1998: 56.

174 Lambert, Gavin, 'As They Go', Sequence, Summer, 1950: 11.
Wartime films, such as Desert Victory (Roy Boulting, 1943), include the broader scenario as a means of showing the whole population's contribution to the war effort, but by 1949 when They Were Not Divided was being made, it was only necessary to focus on the action.

In similar manner to the other 1950 productions, Odette and The Wooden Horse, the story is not marred by any untoward events or personalities. Apart from the scenes of the conscripts' induction when the film hints at the shock and unpleasantness of army life, the film is uncritical. Courage and patriotism are taken for granted, as are the leadership abilities of officers, and there is not a disreputable person in sight. The new recruits assume the professional dedication and military disciplines of their professional colleagues, and beyond the initial training there is no friction between conscripts and regulars, in fact it is difficult to tell them apart. Americans do not steal English girls, and if the American character (in civilian life a publisher and accomplished pianist) is typical of Americans, they are all cultured Anglophiles. Injury and mutilation are passed over, as is any exploration of conscripts' response to combat. There are no frictions between the Allied armies, and all other discordant or upsetting matters are avoided. The debacle at Arnhem, which demolished hopes for an end to the fighting by Christmas 1944, is only hinted at in the film. It is true that the two key characters are killed off in this encounter (and one or two others in the course of the advance), but this occurs right at the end of the film and comes across almost as an after-thought, and therefore makes little impact. The upbeat tone of the film's portrait of war service in the Guards might well be summed up by Hamilton's comment to his wife that 'the things you remember [about the fighting] are all the wonderful funny things that happen, not any of the horrors or unhappy things at all.'

Most critics quite liked the film, the main reservation being the over-indulgent sentimentalisation: the Daily Express typically thought there were 'unnecessary mush scenes with wives: cuddles in the firelight, good-byes by the wives, and lots of sentimental talk that sounds as if it came out of a play. A goodish film though', and the Daily Herald headlined its review with the question: 'Superb – but why the sentiment?' Gavin Lambert argued that for all its faults it 'manages to achieve scenes of pathos, humour, excitement, and its ultimate impression of dignity.' The trade press raved over it: the Daily Film Renter trumpeted that it was 'every inch and every foot first-

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175 This representation of Americans was already established in The Way to the Stars (Anthony Asquith, 1945). See, for instance, Akigate, and Richards, Britain Can Take It: Chapter 12.

176 Daily Express, 31 March 1950.

177 Daily Herald, 31 March 1950.

178 Lambert, Sequence, Summer 1950.
class entertainment; and the Kinematograph Weekly stated that both sexes are certain to find its tribute to the Guards and, for that matter, all who took up arms in World War Two, intensely moving, inspiring and exciting. They accurately predicted a winner, and Billings listed it as one of the runners-up to the absolute blockbuster of the year, *The Blue Lamp*, and in the *Daily Mail* annual poll readers voted it one of the best (out of eleven) films of the year.

*They Were Not Divided*’s glossed-over account of the battlefront, begs the question as to whether there were any films which evoked to post-war audiences the brutal and gritty realities of warfare? As Pronay notes, apart from *The Cruel Sea* (Charles Frend, 1953), British war films only attempt to explore the grimness of human suffering, and the moral issues raised by war, in films about the Far East. As there were no feature films made about the Far East in the immediate post-war years, the answer is no, British film-makers did not make any war films in the immediate post-war years that mirrored the harrowing realities of war. However, this is not to say that the cinema completely ignored them, but that films about the war as a subject did. Powell and Pressburger’s gloriously idiosyncratic *A Matter of Life and Death* (1947) is certainly not harrowing, but does, for example, put centre-stage the psychological and physical damage inflicted by combat on a serviceman. And there are two psychological dramas (in the sense that they are about violently disturbed personalities), *Mine Own Executioner* and *Silent Dust* (Lance Comfort, 1948), which touch, in a relatively hard-hitting manner, on some of the horrors of warfare.

*Mine Own Executioner*’s violent story about a British soldier who suffered as a prisoner at the hands of the Japanese has already been referenced. *Silent Dust* is another melodramatic portrayal of the harsher experience of war, this time on the theme of danger, fear and cowardice in the frontline. Another forgotten film (Pronay does not mention it), *Silent Dust* was popular at the box-office, and received some good reviews: the *Daily Film Renter* pronounced it ‘an excellent adaptation of the West End play’;

Variety wrote ‘this is strong meat, unrelieved in its suspense ...

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179 *Daily Film Renter*, 27 March 1950.


185 *Daily Film Renter*, 20 January 1949.
this is by no means a flawless pic., but it is an example of what can be done in a British studio on a modest budget; and the Monthly Film Bulletin argued it was 'original, moves excitingly, and drama and suspense are combined in this well-made film.' Like Mine Own Executioner, Silent Dust is more aftermath than war film (it is set in 1947 and the melodrama is framed around aftermath topics) but the film has revealing flashbacks to the battlefront, and it is this aspect that is of interest here. An adaptation of a popular West End play called The Paragon by father and son writing team Roland and Michael Pertwee, it is a melodrama founded, like The Years Between, on the 'return of the dead' formula, and is true to the original. A rich self-made businessman, Robert Rawley (Stephen Murray), has built an ostentatious sports pavilion as a memorial for his 'dead' officer son Simon (Nigel Patrick). The snag is that Simon returns a few days before the grand opening, but instead of being a long-lost hero, he is a murderous, pillaging deserter. Interlaced in this story is a romantic sub-plot; the chronicle of a blind man's obsession with his son; and a class-conscious theme designed to contrast the abrasive nouveau riche Rawley with the considerate, democratic and long-serving squire of the village, Lord Clandon.

In terms of the film's account of desertion, the implication is that desertion was only the choice of unstable malefactors. Before Simon actually appears the audience is told he has violently attacked and killed a motorist and stolen his car, and the effect of this information is to prejudice the viewer against him before he even appears. When Simon does appear he immediately seeks to blackmail his family for money, and displays a cynical and mercenary attitude towards his wife. It is made clear to the viewer that it was not war that had corrupted him, but that he was rotten before. However, Simon's own justification for his desertion has an unusual ring of authenticity about it, and is a theme that the film version expands on from the original. His reason for running away from the scene of frontline battle was cowardice and fear: to his sceptical wife, Simon initially ponders on why he had deserted, explaining 'there just isn't any answer. I never wanted to join up - I was frightened. If I had the guts I would have been a conchie, but I didn't. Oh - I was a hero as long as there was no danger about ... but when it came to the real thing, I was scared stiff.' His wife is unsympathetic to his pleas, and he angrily continues 'well you try being splattered over by someone's blood and brains. Oh I know a thousand dead heroes are better than one live coward - all right I'm a coward, but I am alive. And that's how I meant it. It's easy for you to judge me - you weren't there. Night after night, day after day with noise and horror and death and destruction ...

186 Variety, 9 February 1949.


188 Pertwee, Roland and Pertwee, Michael, The Paragon: A Play in Two Acts (London: English Theatre Guild, 1948). The screen adaptation was by Roland, who had been writing film scripts since the 1930s.
At this point the film goes into a ten minute flashback to the battle-scene itself, with Simon continuing to narrate from the present, again a sequence not in the original. The screen picture of war is unusually gruelling: from the protagonist's point-of-view (like the flashback in *Mine Own Executioner*), it is a close-up of a chaotic hillside battle replete with loud explosions, dust and smoke, entrapping barbed wire, and a strafing German plane. A few retreating British soldiers are then seen throwing themselves behind a grassy bank for protection, but they remain exposed to the German plane which returns slowly and deliberately to bomb the stranded men. The audience sees and hears the plane's menacing approach through Simon's ears and eyes, and it is at this point of impending death that Simon panics and runs away. With this in the audience's view, Simon's present-day narration resumes: 'you mustn't be frightened if you're an officer - it's against the army regulations to be frightened. You're not human any more. You're just a machine that leads his men on with a brave and cheerful smile. I'm no more a coward than the rest. What happens to your smile when a bomb falls nearly on top of you and you're left shell-shocked and wounded?' As Simon relates this last line, the audience sees his two comrades get blown up by the plane's bombs. One, according to Simon, had his 'head blown off' and the other was 'half dead'. Simon, apparently in a state of panic, then steals the dead man's identity disc and papers, and replaces them with his own, and thus in a few seconds crosses the border from legitimate officer to deserter on the run.

In this scene, even with the knowledge that Simon is a wastrel, it is difficult not to sympathise with him in the terror of the encounter. He had, after all, got this far without absconding in the face of life-threatening danger - rather like Private Angelo, some element of courageousness is established. Simon's terror, panic and cowardice was not uncommon in servicemen fighting in the frontline. For example, Fussell catalogues the living hell of frontline warfare: he writes how the 'mental attrition upon combat troops, who learned by experience the inevitability of their ultimate mental breakdown, ranging from the milder forms of treatable psychoneurosis to outright violent insanity.' Fussell then goes on to explain that 'to spare themselves the awful moment of psychological breakdown, with its appearance of cowardice, soldiers wanted to be wounded, as except for death, a severe wound was the only way out that did not imply letting the side down.'

According to Fussell, whereas in the First World War madness among troops was attributed to 'shell-shock', in the Second World War madness was more frankly attributed to fear, and in contrast to the expectations of heroic behaviour which set the tone of the earlier war, now it was

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189 The play has a throwaway line that the first hour of the bombing was accidentally by the RAF.
recognised that the fact of fear had to be squarely faced.' Fussell quotes from the US Officer's Guide: 'physical courage is little more than the ability to control the physical fear which all normal men have, and cowardice does not consist in being afraid but in giving way to fear. What, then, keeps the soldier from giving way to fear? The answer is simply his desire to retain the good opinion of his friends and associates ... his pride smothers his fear.' The film endorses this official view: Simon's unpatriotic and cowardly behaviour is explained by virtue of his inherent badness - a bad man does not worry about the 'opinion of his friends and associates', and so without this constraining social framework, he is free to descend into cowardice. Thus, as most servicemen were responsible individuals, cowardice and desertion were not normal occurrences.

Silent Dust opens a rare window on another aspect of the war: unique amongst British films of this period, Silent Dust portrays the seedy side of the Allied advance against Germany. Taking the theme much further than the play, the film shows, for instance, newly liberated Brussels, a city with a shadowy gloom reminiscent of The Third Man's Vienna (Carol Reed, 1949), which is crawling with deserters, soldiers, military police, and is full of nightclubs catering for all these types. Once on the run, Simon turns to crime and makes his way to the city, where he steals, wheels and deals for a living. After a while, as Simon narrates, the 'hunt for deserters was in full swing' and he felt the military's security net close around him. In a nightclub he is finally recognised and exposed by a member of his old army unit, but he manages to escape thanks, ironically, to the chaos and panic caused by a chance hit by a German bomb.

In the aftermath of the war then, films about the armed services focused primarily on the army, which was not surprising when it was the service that the majority of conscripts experienced. The two army films examined in detail, Private Angelo and They Were Not Divided, approached the topic of life in the army from very different perspectives. Private Angelo's relatively anarchic, unbleached, and satirical tilt on the life and times of an army conscript, is an idiosyncratic reaction to the experience and comparatively free of the constraints of propaganda and ideological objectives. By contrast, They Were Not Divided was intended as a patriotic, celebratory, and historical account of the army's contribution to the victory, and to this end put an idealistic varnish on the experience.

None of the films show the bloody violence and terror of the battlefront. Significantly, the only dramatic references to the horrors of the battlefront are found in films not ostensibly about the war, such as Mine Own Executioner and Silent Dust. It is as if the unpalatable downside of war was too

191 Fussell, Wartime: Understanding and Behaviour in the Second World War, 274.
uncomfortable a subject to be dealt with in films in which the war was the focus of narrative attention. Instead, it was a theme that could only surface in bleaker 'psychological' melodramas. In essence, the horror of battle did not have a place in 'war' as, consciously or unconsciously, filmmakers presented a sanitised version of the experience. Even *Private Angelo*'s irreverent skit had to be framed within an Italian setting.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an overview of war films which look at the fighting services, and suggested why particular aspects might have been relevant at the time. Most of the films about PoWs, secret operations, and the army were intended to document in an entertaining manner, untold stories about the war and to pay tribute to those individuals and institutions involved. They included films about the secret war waged against the enemy, the experience of men who spent the war as prisoners, and the trials and tribulations of those that were conscripted into the army. It has been shown that there is a discernable shift in the inherent values of the films over the five years. Films released at the beginning of the period in 1946, like *The Captive Heart* and *School for Secrets*, perpetuate much of the People's War ideology, spirit, and concerns of the war years. In the late 1940s, a handful of films, such as *Against the Wind*, *The Small Back Room*, *Private Angelo*, appeared and offered a distinctly darker, less idealised view of the war. 1950, it is suggested, is striking for a fresh generation of war pictures - *The Wooden Horse*, *Odette*, *They Were Not Divided* - which begin to rewrite the war in the more affirmative, action-based and conservative tones that came to dominate in the 1950s.
Chapter Four
The Home-front: life in wartime Britain

Introduction
Considered next are those films which projected to cinemagoers the home-front, whether as a topic or a backdrop. There are thirteen home-front films: three take the home-front as a topic, and the rest variously use the war as a backdrop to romance, drama, and comedy. For most civilians the home-front was the formative experience of the war; it was about six years of endurance, resistance and passive fighting rather than being involved in combat. As a discussional category, therefore, home-front films provide a narrative on the reinterpretation of the war experience common to most of the population.

Romance and drama
The romance film had always been a staple formula, and war, with all its uncertainties, tragedies and opportunities for unpredictable love encounters, provided boundless openings for new variations on the theme. Nicholas Pronay writes how this type of film re-worked 'old established conventions', such as 'return from the dead' plots.1 At least two post-war home-front films use the 'return from the dead' convention: Piccadilly Incident (Herbert Wilcox, 1946), and The Years Between (Compton Bennett, 1946). Other war and aftermath films using the convention include, as discussed in the previous chapter, The Captive Heart (Basil Dearden, 1946), with its sub-plot about the love affair between a Czech PoW and a widow whose dead husband he has been forced to impersonate in order to stay alive, and Silent Dust (Lance Comfort, 1948), with a tale involving the return of a 'dead war hero'. To post-war audiences, the 'return from the dead' formula had, in Sue Harper's opinion, a particular allure, she writes, 'enabled audiences to rehearse a number of responses in the post-war period. They could admit fears that those who returned from the war would be permanently changed; they could recognise the desire that those who were dead would return home in a stranger's guise; and that they could enjoy the provision of an alibi for having loved strangers, in that they might have been entertaining angels unawares.2

Other romance films variously use the war as an opportunity to create interesting plots: The Courtneys of Curzon Street (Herbert Wilcox, 1947) centres on a romance set to the background of three wars; Woman to Woman (Maclean Rogers, 1946) is the third film version of a play about the Great War (updated here to the Second World War) and concerns the extra-marital affairs of an officer sent behind enemy lines; The Woman with No Name (Ladislas Vajda, 1950) constructs a love triangle between a Blitz victim disabled by amnesia, her husband whose existence she forgets,


and a Norwegian pilot; and *The Cure For Love* (Robert Donat, 1950) is a sentimental story about a Lancashire lad's return home on leave to find himself embroiled in love complications.

Romance became a particularly attractive topic for film-makers towards the end of the war. 'A popular subject this year,' Maurice Speed commented in 1945, 'has been the wartime romance. To wed or not to wed has been the question, and most of the companies [US and British] have made one or two dramas or comedies trying to answer it.' Herbert Wilcox, showman and shrewd reader of box-office trends, initially exploited the screen demand for matters of the heart by making *I Live in Grosvenor Square* (Herbert Wilcox, 1945). Made in the style of Hollywood's 'British' films, the film carries an imposing Anglo-American relations theme incorporated into a mushy, good-natured, love triangle. With *Piccadilly Incident*, Wilcox aimed to 'repeat the outstanding success' of *I Live in Grosvenor Square*, and he did so admirably. The popularity of both films led to the production of three more films in a similar format, *The Courtenays of Curzon Street, Spring in Park Lane* (1948) and *Maytime in Mayfair* (1949).

The plot of *Piccadilly Incident* is straightforward; upper-class Alan Pearson (Michael Wilding) of the Royal Marines, meets lower-class WREN Diana Fraser (Anna Neagle) in Piccadilly, London, during an air-raid in 1941. The 'incident' of the title is that they immediately fall in love, and then rapidly get married. Their happiness is soon brought to an abrupt end as Diana is posted off to Singapore as a radio operator. Tragedy strikes when Diana, escaping by sea from the Japanese advance on Singapore, is shipwrecked and washed up on a desert island with a handful of other survivors. Alan assumes she is dead and remARRies (an American), and they have a child. Three years later in 1944 Diana returns and is devastated to find Alan married (note the gender reversal - it was usually the man who 'died' and then returned). Being a decent sort, she realises that her return will cause tremendous heartbreak, and so she pretends her love for Alan has faded, and seeks a divorce so he can legitimise the new marriage. Alan, who is still in love with Diana, soon realises she is still in love with him, which leaves the story with a difficult problem to resolve. The path of resolution is contrived to say the least - a chance air raid just happens to send a brick wall crashing down on top of Diana and killing her. This enables Alan to be responsible and devote himself to

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4 During the thirties and the war years, Hollywood made a number of 'British' films, so called because they were set in Britain and characteristically portrayed Britain in a warm and sentimental glow, often with a romance at the core of the story. Examples include *A Yank in the RAF* (Henry King, 1941, US); and *The White Cliffs of Dover* (Clarence Brown, 1944, US). See, for example, Short, K.R.M., 'The White Cliffs of Dover': Promoting the Anglo-American Alliance in World War Two*, Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television, vol. 2, no. 1, 1982: 14; and Glancy, H. Mark, *When Hollywood Loved Britain: The Hollywood 'British' Film, 1939-1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

5 *Daily Film Renter*, 26 August 1946.
his marriage rather than pursue the turbulent course of true love, which would have entailed separating from his 'wife' and child.

The parents of the baby are still left with a problem however, as the return of the first wife has technically made the baby illegitimate. According to Variety, this conundrum was central to the genesis of the film: Variety wrote how Wilcox 'had used a little flaw in British legal procedure as the basis for his latest film. If a man, thinking his wife is dead, marries again, the child of the marriage will be illegitimate beyond all redress should his first wife prove not to have died after all. That's what the law says in Britain.' Variety went on to explain that Wilcox, 'diving into musty records [found] some 200 cases of this kind exist at present.' The legal position of the baby is crudely brought into focus by framing the love story in a present-day setting. These scenes are set in a court of law in which a judge deliberates on the legal status of the baby. In effect, the bulk of the film - the wartime love story - is a flashback, and serves to explain, justify and legitimise in moral terms the status of the child. The film, then, carries a deliberate and obvious social message about the unwarranted stigma attached to war babies born outside wedlock. The insertion of an overt contemporary social comment was unusual for Wilcox (as an advocate of cinema for 'entertainment and not education) and its inclusion in the film can be seen as a consequence of the wartime shift towards social realism and the concern to inform. The trade press, normally suspicious of 'messages' in films, actually praised this aspect of the film, albeit with the caveat that wily old Wilcox had cleverly disguised it. Kinematograph Weekly, for instance, noted how 'the infallible facets of best-seller fiction are skilfully patterned and employed to draw attention to a particularly harsh clause in British law. Director Herbert Wilcox is far too clever to put pamphleteering before entertainment ... it succeeds, in spite of its war background and unhappy ending, in clothing its urgent message in grand and infallible box-office raiment. In effect, if the self-conscious courtroom scenes at the start and end of the film were removed, it would not make an ounce of difference to the integrity of the romantic tale.

The significance of Piccadilly Incident lay beyond the specific problem of illegitimacy arising out of inadvertently illegal marriages (if indeed it was a problem - no historian consulted alludes to this scenario) with the general problem of illegitimate births in wartime. Wilcox coyly couched the wider problem of illegitimacy in a respectable framework: the baby in the film was not a product of casual sex, but a marriage - well-intentioned if unlawful. Most reviewers recognised the broader implications: the Daily Film Renter for instance, made no reference to the specific scenario of the film, but thought more generally that the film dealt with a 'poignant and topical problem'.

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6 Variety, 4 September 1946.
7 Kinematograph Weekly, 29 August 1946.
8 Daily Film Renter, 26 August 1946.
Likewise the *Monthly Film Bulletin* gravely pondered how 'the picture ends on the bitter thought that according to English law nothing can legalise the position of the baby, who will always be subject of the penalties, both legal and social, of illegitimacy.' Illegitimacy had reached unprecedented levels by the end of the war: as Antonia Lant has written, 'it almost doubled between 1940 and 1945 (whereas 70% of illegal conceptions were regularised before the war, only 37% were in 1945). In addition, a Birmingham Health Officer observed from his local survey, "during the last two years of the war a third of all illegitimate children in the city were born to married women".

Illegitimacy was not just a legal problem but a social problem: as Calder suggests, unmarried mothers were 'made to feel the weight of their "sin" and more.' John Costello though, suggests attitudes were changing, arguing that the 'most significant change was that unmarried mothers were enabled to collect minimal child support and maternity grants'; and as further evidence of a more tolerant attitude he notes that even Barbara Cartland (then working as a wartime voluntary welfare officer) 'admitted that it was hard to condemn the girls for succumbing to the temptations of wartime promiscuity'. *Piccadilly Incident* offered no solution to the problem of illegitimate children, but did plead for greater understanding and tolerance.

The connection between war and sex has been well established. Costello's excellent book charts this 'war aphrodisia'; he writes how the Second World War served as a 'tremendous stimulus to extra-marital sexual activity', which peaked in the war's closing months. Romantic films such as *Piccadilly Incident* are cinematic evidence of the phenomenon of 'war aphrodisia', and it is not a coincidence that the bulk of these appeared at the same time as sexual promiscuity peaked - at the end of the war. In tune with the cinematic codes and conventions of the day, the films made little direct reference to extra-marital relations, and tried to couch wartime love within a traditional and respectable framework. *Piccadilly Incident*, for example, presents love and sex not as an abandonment of restraint in the face of temptation and opportunity, but as an honourable encounter that will lead to marriage. Diana and Alan's intentions are seen as perfectly respectable, and they are not compromised by having other partners, except when the partner unexpectedly 'returns from the dead'. There is one scene though, where the film goes to some length to show that soldiers could be sexual adventurers. This is the desert island sequence; in a crude Robinson Crusoe-style

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sub-plot the two servicewomen and four servicemen (who were ship-wrecked escaping the Japanese) manage to survive together on a remote desert island for three years before escaping. (The publicity material proudly boasted how the background footage was specially shot on the island of Tobago.) One of the men persistently tries to 'make love' to Diana, and without the protection of normal civilised society she is vulnerable to his advances, although naturally she resists him. Variety described the island scene as one of 'Adam-and-Eve temptation'. It was as if, far away from civilisation in a stylised jungle environment with the characters reduced to wearing rags, it was safe to reveal the sexual passions of soldiers serving away from home.

The huge success of the film is well documented. Billings lists it in joint second place with Hollywood's The Bells of St. Mary's (Leo McCarey, 1945, US) as the 'Biggest Box-office Attraction' of 1946. First place went to The Wicked Lady (Leslie Arliss, 1944). The film came top in the Daily Mail Annual Film Award, Wilcox won the British Oscar for the best film of the year; and in the 1947 Bernstein Film Questionnaire Wilcox was voted by cinemagoers as their second favourite film director (first place went to Hitchcock) on the strength of I Live in Grosvenor Square and Piccadilly Incident. The trade press knew it would it be a money-spinner: the Daily Film Renter confidently claimed it had 'all the efficient expertness and crisp showmanship of the commercial American product,' and the Kinematograph Weekly knew of 'no surer box-office recipe.' Serious critics were less impressed: Sight and Sound sniffed that it was 'third-rate by any reasonable critical standards, but so shrewdly manoeuvred a showman's piece that it is said to have topped the bill for box-office receipts'; and the Daily Herald found it 'a bit boring.'

Piccadilly Incident seeks to give an emotional, sentimental, and nostalgic evocation of wartime life, and to generate a touching sense of the tension and excitement arising from uncertain futures

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14 Variety, 4 September 1946.
15 Kinematograph Weekly, 19 December 1946.
18 Organised by Sidney Bernstein, founder and chairman of the Granada circuit of cinemas, the Bernstein Film Questionnaire was an occasional survey of the film tastes of Granada's patrons. According to one contemporary account it was 'considered the best gauge of public opinion in Great Britain on stars and films'. Miller, Maud, M. (ed.), Winchester's Screen Encyclopaedia (London: Winchester Publications, 1948): 217.
20 Daily Film Renter, 26 August 1946.
21 Kinematograph Weekly, 29 August 1946.
23 Daily Herald, 23 April 1946.
and the vicissitudes of fate. Many of the most atmospheric scenes are those where the romance is acted out to the realistic background of wartime London, as the Daily Film Renter approvingly observed: 'Wilcox's wartime London is disturbingly accurate, with the swoosh of bombs; the tinkling of wrecked windows; the sudden dives under the piano; the early, indecently early, morning tea; the imperturbable and humorous fire-watchers on the rooftops, and the welcome sound of the all-clear.'

The film has shades of Brief Encounter (David Lean, 1945) with its understated poignancy arising from a chance encounter and its doomed future. But whereas Brief Encounter is tragic, Piccadilly Incident has a sense of fun; Neagle and Wilding, for example, do a series of neatly performed song and dance numbers. (Neagle's character, Diana, is a dancer, and so she can dance her way through the film both on stage entertaining the troops, and in private accompanying Wilding's piano-playing officer. There is also a clever piece of choreography by Wendy Toye, in which two sets of dancers represent, in opposition, the cultural forces of American Boogie and Beethoven.) The film captures the spirit and flavour of the war experience that Costello has distilled. He writes how 'the extensive personal testimony to the emotional impact of World War Two suggests that what men and women were fighting for had less to do with abstract notions of freedom or patriotism than with the need to protect the personal values represented by sweethearts, wives, and families.' It is precisely this personal and emotional reaction to war that underpins the whole film. The casual meeting of Diana and Alan that occurred thanks to a chance air raid, their sudden marriage by special licence and honeymoon within a 72-hour leave period, was a classic wartime experience, as was the film's humour and warmth. It conveys the kind of wartime mood described by Costello:

the "weekend", snatched on a forty-eight-hour pass, that preceded many wartime weddings, often substituted for a honeymoon ... The passion of affairs in wartime was heightened by the need to make the most of every hour, and the sadness of frequent partings was intensified by the uncertainty of whether the partners would survive to meet again. It was a time of great personal emotional stress and also of adventure. "My war memories are some of horror, but also of an immense amount of good times," remembered one woman, "it really was the happiest time of my life. People were friendly and we were all in it together." The film successfully conjured up for post-war audiences the transient and temporary relationships thrown up by war, and captured for cinemagoers the fleeting and unique flavour of love, sex and war. In 1946, the war was still a fresh memory, and the film portrayed it in a mood of wistful

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24 Daily Film Renter, 26 August 1946.
26 Costello, Love, Sex and War: 19.
reminiscence. Other signs of its closeness to war include its interest in overtly portraying a social message, and its major narrative theme about the breakdown of class values as articulated through the cross-class romance of the key players. Diana is definitely lower class, a point emphasised by her third class train travel; Alan, by deliberate contrast, is an upper-class officer with an appropriately sized country manor, a Mayfair London house, and a devoted valet. Their trouble-free inter-class romance was in keeping with the 'peoples' war' propaganda rhetoric and the promotion of the democratic ideals of the war. Its wartime associations are all the more noticeable in the knowledge that it was made by Wilcox, whose inclinations were towards films about the upper classes and a more traditional view of British society.

*Piccadilly Incident*, in line with wartime propaganda rhetoric, foregrounded the role of women in the front line of war; it does this primarily through Diana's own contribution in the WRENS and her 'death' in active service. Another wartime issue was the positive presentation of Anglo-American relations. Wilcox had already laboured this in *I Live in Grosvenor Square*, and it remains a lingering theme in *Piccadilly Incident*. The idea is that the amity of America and Britain is symbolised by the Anglo-American baby, although in view of the fact that the baby is illegitimate as a consequence of the false premise underlying its conception, the allegory seems flawed - or inadvertently perceptive.

*The Courtneys of Curzon Street* was Wilcox's follow-up to *Piccadilly Incident*. Also starring Neagle and Wilding as the romantic leads (the Courtneys), the film covers their lives from 1900 to 1945, tracing how three wars (the Boer and the two World Wars) and military service in India, had shaped and influenced their destinies.²⁷ The top grossing film of 1947,²⁸ this film has been overlooked by historians as a film about the Second World War; but via historical parallels with earlier wars, it is overflowing with Second World War images, sentiments, and values. It has for instance, an archetypal Second World War theme about the breakdown of class, with its cross-class marriage and romance between upper-class Guards Officer Wilding, and Irish servant-girl Neagle. It shows how futile and outdated class prejudice was at the turn of the century when Wilding's relatives disapproved of his marrying beneath him, a hostility that led to Neagle disappearing to Ireland to avoid causing Wilding any more embarrassment. At the end of the film, the joke is that the situation has turned full circle when, in 1945, their grandson brings home a working-class girl who he wants to marry, it is her parents who object to her marrying a boy from the upper classes.

*The Courtneys of Curzon Street* engaged with the topical matter of death, and the prospect of

²⁷ The similarity of the film to *Cavalcade* (Frank Lloyd, 1933, US) was alluded to by some critics. The Daily Film Renter (9 April 1947) for example, quipped that it was "another "Cavalcade" which will appeal to cinema patrons with exactly the same force and achieve similar results."

death, in war. Neagle loses her father in the Boer War, her son is killed in action in India, and the shock of this causes his wife to die in childbirth. The child survives and is brought up by grandparents Neagle and Wilding, but after Dunkirk he too joins up and thus his family face the possibility of further bereavement. Neagle also has to cope with Wilding going off to war, first in 1914 and then volunteering again in 1940. When Wilding tells her he has volunteered again in 1940, she breaks down in despair at the prospect and sobs that war has 'taken the best years of our lives'. But the family survives World War Two intact, despite getting caught up in a ferocious attack by the Luftwaffe.

War is ever present in the film through the use of familiar images. There are long drawn out sequences of the Great War, including the use of title cards recording well-known battles; Neagle sings popular wartime songs to the troops of both world wars, such as 'Soldiers of the Queen', 'Roses of Picardy', and 'Lili Marlene'; news of their son's death is brought to them by the classic wartime harbinger of tragedy, the telegram; the closing scene of the Luftwaffe raid has all iconographic ingredients of wartime images of the Blitz; and in another classic image, characters are huddled around a wireless listening and responding to a stirring Churchill speech.

In similar fashion to Piccadilly Incident, The Courtneys of Curzon Street richly and sentimentally evoked for aftermath audiences the tragedies, the uncertainties, the goodbyes, and the temporary separations caused by war. The film's mood was best described by the News of the World which wrote that 'every now and then the men of this country are snatched away from their wives, their sweethearts and their local cinema in order to fight some would-be conqueror across the channel. After the scuffle, we come back to settle down again, desperately hoping there will be no "next time" ... the film is charged with that tenacious, patriotic fervour that Winston Churchill so memorably brought to his wartime broadcasts.'

Comedies

There are five comedies or comedy-thrillers set in home-front Britain which make comic mileage out of wartime. Two are examples of comedy in the Aldwych farce tradition of the pre-war decade, This Man is Mine (Marcel Vamel, 1946) and While the Sun Shines (Anthony Asquith, 1947), and both derive from successful wartime stage productions. The latter film derives from Terence Rattigan's play of the same name, and the former film derives from 'A Soldier For Christmas' by Reginald Beckwith. As well as being the products of well known film-makers the two films have


30 Asquith's reputation needs little explanation beyond the reminder that he was at his peak at this time with such acclaimed films as The Way to the Stars (1945) under his belt. Vamel was 'Britain's king of comedy in the 1930s and 1940s' and under his guidance 'such figures as Will Hay, Arthur Askey, The Crazy Gang and George Formby did 90% of their best work for the cinema.' This Man is Mine was Vamel's last film before his untimely death in 1947. Quinlan, David, Quinlan's Illustrated Guide to Film Directors (London: Batsford, 1991): 302.
much in common, including being low quality adaptations which made little headway at the box-office or with reviewers.\textsuperscript{31}

Both films exploit the class based opportunities for complicated and farcical relationships thrown up by the forced circumstances of wartime domestic life. \textit{This Man is Mine} is set in a middle-class household and draws its humour from the encounters between various billettees and family members that descend on the household for a wartime Christmas. The film satirises aspects of wartime life, such as shortages and the black-market. The Ministry of Information is the butt of at least one joke: when the family's Christmas turkey gets lost in transit, the maid sagely mutters to the matriarch of the family ‘you must look on the bright side and remember there's a war on. They [the MOI] say it is "your Courage, your resolution, your cheerfulness that will win".’ This is an allusion to a slogan that exemplified the incompetence of the MOI at the start of the war.\textsuperscript{32} The democratisation of society and the ensuing turning upside down of normal roles provides the mainstay for some rolling jokes: an ex-maid becomes her former employer's guest; a posh daughter falls for a regular Canadian serviceman; a cook stops cooking in order to write a book; a ‘daily’ becomes an outspoken Marxist. For all the good-humoured anarchy, though, the romantic tangle is only resolved when the lovers keep to their own class, a prediction of the ensuing disintegration of the wartime ideal of classless unity. The film wryly acknowledges one or two of the darker aspects of Britain at war. There is, for instance, a sub-plot based around gangsters who plot to rob a post-office van of its Christmas mail, a hint of the problem of crime in the war years.\textsuperscript{33} Compared to \textit{This Man is Mine}, \textit{While the Sun Shines} lacks sharpness and depth. The protagonists are aristocrats, two of whom have lowly wartime service roles: one is a WAAF corporal and the other a lowly able-seaman. In a drawing room setting, a stream of romantic mix-ups occur as a result of their mistaken identities, but the film does not attempt humour beyond these stock class situations.

Film-makers Frank Launder and Sidney Gilliat made two comedy-thrillers in the aftermath of war, \textit{I See a Dark Stranger} (Frank Launder, 1946) and \textit{Green for Danger} (Sidney Gilliat, 1947). Like many film-makers in the forties, Launder and Gilliat were riding on a wave of success (and were among Rank's privileged 'artistic' film-makers\textsuperscript{34}) with films such as \textit{Millions Like Us} (1943) and \textit{The Rake's Progress} (1945). \textit{I See a Dark Stranger} has its roots in the war, Launder getting the

\textsuperscript{31} Billings, for example, does not mention either film. \textit{Kinematograph Weekly}, 19 December 1946, 18 December 1947.

\textsuperscript{32} The slogan was identified as 'the first of the lessons which the MOI had painfully to learn about the limitations on government as compared to commercial advertising.' For an explanation as to why this slogan backfired see Balfour, Michael, \textit{Propaganda in War 1939-45} (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979): 57.

\textsuperscript{33} See page 180.

\textsuperscript{34} See pages 28 – 29.
nucleus for the idea from an intelligence officer during a trip to Ireland in 1944. The espionage plot is about the adventures of an English-hating Irish girl called Bridie (Deborah Kerr). She tries to avenge her forefathers by helping the Nazis against the English, before she finally comes to her senses. The tale takes the audience on a chase through Ireland, the Isle of Man, and Devon, and involves no less than the secret plans for D-Day itself. The film is a home-front spy story, and is one of only two films made on this subject in the aftermath years.

The second spy film is Night Boat to Dublin (Lawrence Huntington, 1946), and like the Launder and Gilliat film, is also founded in wartime. In 1945, Huntington, who was also co-author, 'got the idea for the story from a paragraph in the press some months ago describing how German agents had endeavoured to kidnap a famous Swedish scientist in Stockholm. The film, described as a 'breezy espionage comedy-melodrama', weaved into the formula spy plot the current fascination with the atomic bomb, including an earnest speech by Robert Newton, as the sleuth, about its horrific potential, and reference to the grisly possibility that the Germans could have developed the bomb before the Allies. Its topicality was praised by Kinematograph Weekly which thought the film 'a welcome sign that British studios have discovered the box-office value of topicality. It is atomic in more ways than one. The sleuth, on the trail of the missing Swedish atomic scientist, encounters the smuggling of atomic secrets to the Nazis via Dublin. The atomic scientist is finally tracked down to a grand mansion in Devon where he is imprisoned by British Fifth Columnists, who are led by the local squires and a respectable London lawyer.

Nazi spies and Fifth Columnists in Britain had not been a major problem during the war, but at the time there had been a perception - at times obsessional - that they existed. Calder, for example, writes how 'the existence of a strong Fifth Column was taken for granted, it would seem, in the highest circles', and he goes on to describe how a Fifth Column paranoia gripped the country. This was fuelled by the MOI's steady flow of propaganda throughout the war warning of the threat.

36 Daily Film Renter, 25 April 1945.
37 Kinematograph Weekly, 8 January 1946.
38 Kinematograph Weekly, 8 January 1946.
39 This upper-class background of the Fifth Columnists is reminiscent of, or a lampoon of, the upper-class traitor in the wartime film Went the Day Well (Cavalcanti, 1942), a propaganda film whose aim was to alert the public to the danger of a Fifth Column.
40 Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards, for instance, have written that 'actual German operations in Britain were not extensive. One historian has concluded that during the war "the number of German agents in Britain was small, their information unreliable and most of their communications under observation."
including such memorable slogans as 'Careless Talk Costs Lives'. What these two comedy spy films do is enjoy the absurdity of the wartime notion of a Fifth Column from the safe distance of victory. It is no coincidence that both films appeared straight after the war as this kind of ephemeral memory would soon lose its immediacy, and would have little relevance to later generations who had not experienced the spy mania.

*I See a Dark Stranger* is by far the more accomplished and sophisticated of the two films. It makes, for instance, more than a passing reference to the official MOI film about the risk of 'Careless Talk', *The Next of Kin* (Thorold Dickinson, 1942). Like *The Next of Kin*, the Britain portrayed in *I See a Dark Stranger* is crawling with Fifth Columnists: they infiltrate trains full of servicemen; they use book-shops as meeting places; they take advantage of slack security; and 'Careless Talk' posters adorn walls. The self-deprecating humour was appreciated by reviewers such as Peter Noble, who chuckled at how the film's 'unintelligent Intelligent Officers gave us a lot of fun at the expense of the British Army'.

As commentaries on contemporary preoccupations, the two spy films are revealing for their interest in the wartime role of Ireland, and linking espionage and the Irish. In reality Eire was used by the Nazis as a base for espionage activities, and it was an activity to which the Irish authorities turned a blind eye.

Contemporary reviewers articulated unease over Ireland's role: Noble, for one, praised *I See a Dark Stranger* for beautifully capturing the 'perverse character of the neutral Irish during the war', and *Sight and Sound* noted how the film-makers 'took the vexed question of Anglo-Irish relations as background'. As with Nazi activities in Britain though, Eire posed little threat; Calder has written how 'on balance Irish neutrality was effectively pro-British, and the Germans were not able to enlist effective help from the IRA.'

Neither film made much of a splash at the box-office in Britain, but *I See a Dark Stranger* did go down well in the US. Launder and Gilliat's next film, the comedy-thriller *Green For Danger* was


43 Other films too make incidental references to the Irish working against the British: examples include *Against the Wind* (Charles Crichton, 1948) which features an Irish girl who is a Nazi spy; and *Next of Kin* which has an Irish courier who works for the Nazis.


45 Noble, *British Film Yearbook*: 16.

46 *Sight and Sound*, vol. 15, no. 59, Autumn 1946: 94.


48 Billings does not list it, *Kinematograph Weekly*, 19 December 1946.

more popular, at least in Britain,\textsuperscript{50} and was one of three comedy successes that sparked off a spate of comedies in the following year. In a skit on the detective genre, Alastair Sim plays a dotty detective who has to discover 'whodunnit'. This classic narrative structure was adapted to wartime: the country house is a temporary wartime emergency hospital; the murder suspects are gathered together only because of their involvement in the war effort; the murderer's motives are intrinsically tied up with the war. It generates a tense, nervous atmosphere between the staff of the hospital, where years of enforced working and living together has taken its toll and led to friction, jangled nerves and distrust. The tension is dramatically heightened by the constant threat of V-bombs, the hospital being in their flight-path. Moreover, the murders are committed by a nurse who cracks-up under the stress of war. She blames the leader of the rescue team (the postman) for her mother's death after a bombing raid because he was unable to save her. The resentment festers away until an opportunity arises where she can kill him off. A clever, underrated film, it offers a glimpse of the strain and nervous exhaustion of people living with war.

The last comedy to mention is \textit{Whisky Galore} (Alexander Mackendrick, 1948), which was shot on location in the island of Barra. This witty comedy-drama film is based on a true incident which was subsequently novelised by Compton Mackenzie and published in 1947. The story is set in 1943 on a Hebridean island, and centres on the population's outwitting of an English Home Guard officer in order to illegally salvage 50,000 cases of much-needed whisky stranded on an off-shore ship-wreck. For an Ealing film, it is unusually 'cruel and clever',\textsuperscript{51} the butt of the film's satire being the well meaning and inherently decent English Home Guard Captain Waggett (Basil Radford). His obsessive refusal to allow the islanders access to the ship-wrecked whisky makes him, and the English notions of law and order that he represents, appear absurd and pompous. (And probably especially so to a post-war audience living with acute rationing and shortages). The film then, is a mildly anarchic parody of benevolent authority. As a post-war perspective on 1943 the film satirizes, to use Clyde Jeavons' words, 'every [wartime] sacred cow in sight'.\textsuperscript{52} For instance, not only is the Home Guard vilified, but self-interest prevails as the islanders only concern is to keep the whisky for themselves. Perhaps if the film had been made in wartime, it would have concluded with the islanders giving the whisky to the authorities with patriotic good grace.

Recognised as a classic today, \textit{Whisky Galore} did not attract special attention when it was released. \textit{Kinematograph Weekly}, for instance, reckoned it was just another 'regional wartime comedy drama', with the further problem that 'there is a tendency to repeat the gags, and this takes the edge

\textsuperscript{50} Billings lists it under 'Other Notable Attractions' (\textit{Kinematograph Weekly}, 18 December 1947); and Laundier later said that after a lacklustre start due to distributors' lack of interest, the film 'gradually built up to a success in Britain.' Brown, \textit{Laundier and Gilliat}: 120.


\textsuperscript{52} Jeavons, Clyde, \textit{A Pictorial History of War Films} (London: Hamlyn, 1974): 163.
off some of its wit. Women will we fear, find its fun a trifle laboured.\textsuperscript{53} The film did not do especially well in England and Wales, judging by its absence in the trade polls. In Scotland it seems to have done better, Kinematograph Weekly noting how \textit{the press and public reception of Whisky Galore in Scotland is possibly the finest yet given by the north to a film made in England about Scotland.}\textsuperscript{54} It did attract notable plaudits from some reviewers though: Speed thought it a 'wonderful comedy'; and Richard Winnington praised Sandy Mackendrick for directing 'some of the freshest British comedy sequences of the post-war years.\textsuperscript{55}

The home-front as a topic

As a vehicle for deliberate and overt political comment \textit{The Years Between}, released in July 1946, stands head and shoulders above all other home-front films of this period. It was based on Daphne du Maurier's play, her first, of the same name, which had a successful run on the London stage during 1945,\textsuperscript{56} and was adapted by husband and wife team Sidney and Muriel Box, and produced independently by Sidney Box Productions. It followed their huge box-office hit \textit{The Seventh Veil}, also directed by Compton Bennett. \textit{The Years Between}'s radical, and direct, contemporary social message was unusual, for although the Boxes were socialists, they acknowledged it was not their business to imbue films with their political opinions. For Muriel Box, \textit{The Years Between} did 'give a hint of the things we wanted to say politically, but it was an exception.\textsuperscript{57}

Using the 'return of the dead' formula, \textit{The Years Between} is the story of a rural middle-class housewife Diana Wentworth (Valerie Hobson) who learns in 1940 that her husband Colonel Michael Wentworth (Michael Redgrave) has been killed on active service overseas. In the following 4-5 years (the precise chronology is muddled\textsuperscript{58}) she not only finds another man but also takes over her 'dead' husband's parliamentary seat and becomes a well-known political campaigner on behalf of women. The husband is found alive in a prisoner-of-war camp in Germany in the spring of 1945, and returns just as his wife is about to remarry.

\textsuperscript{53} Kinematograph Weekly, 2 June 1949.

\textsuperscript{54} Kinematograph Weekly, 1 September 1949.


\textsuperscript{57} Interview with Lady Gardiner (formerly Muriel Box), in Aspinal, Sue, and Murphy, Robert (eds), \textit{Gainsborough Melodrama} (London: BFI, 1983): 65. 88-89.

\textsuperscript{58} For example, the husband's death is announced in June 1940, but the wife has a diary entry from him dated December 1941.
The husband's return occurs about half-way through the film, and the second half is then devoted to their problematical reconciliation. He is affronted and appalled at the change in his wife, as well as other domestic consequences of five years of war; he has returned to a strange and bewildering post-war world. All he wants, he says, is 'the wife I left behind'. By the same token, his wife finds her husband's old values untenable. She does have a conscience over her husband's confusion at not finding the same wife he left behind, but she also has no desire to revert to her pre-war role as a mere devoted wife. (Just in case the audience does not grasp the point that war had caused great changes, an old postman, played by Edward Rigby, appears at regular intervals throughout the film muttering 'do you know what I say? Nothing'll ever be the same again after this war, you mark my words, nothing will ever be the same again, and that's a fact.') They almost separate, but stay together thanks to the intervention of their faithful old retainer Nanny (Flora Robson), who passionately pleads with home-spun good sense that there can be no hope for peace if couples, like nations, cannot 'collaborate' and have 'faith' in one another. In the search for a happy ending they effect a compromise; she relinquishes her seat, thus allowing Michael to recover his former status and position as MP for his locality. She continues her political career by standing for another seat in the 1945 general election. The film ends on a scene with MPs boisterously returning for the new session of parliament (accurately set in the Lords as the bomb-damaged Commons was unusable at the time), and she is to be seen on the opposite benches to her husband. She has changed parties from Conservative to Labour.

The film might be categorised as an aftermath film as it partly explores the readjustment and reconciliation necessary after the effects of separation by war. However, the film is particularly interesting for robustly portraying a tremendous shift in the social and political status of women during the war years. The concern of the film is not so much post-war readjustment as establishing that the expectations of women were dramatically raised during wartime. It is a study of women in wartime rather than a study of post-war resettlement, a point evidenced by Kinematograph Weekly which introduced the film as a 'wartime domestic melodrama'. This attention to women's achievements in the war years marked a shift of emphasis from du Maurier's play, which is more concerned with the reunion of the 'dead' husband and the wife. About a quarter of the way into the play, it jumps from 1942 to 1945 with Michael's return from the dead. In the film Michael does not return until half-way through and the period is extended by starting it in 1940, and most significantly it opens up the narrative to painstakingly record the process of Diana's success. The film portrays her campaigning speeches, her busy and pressed life in London as an MP, her growing influence and impact, and her appearances in parliament. As the Manchester Guardian wrote at the time, the 'things which on the stage were established in a few minutes are here examined from their start, so that the entire emphasis of the story is differently placed. It is less a study in efforts to rekindle the domestic hearth than the story of a woman's assumption of

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59 Kinematograph Weekly, 11 April 1946.
responsibility in wartime.60

The film goes to some trouble to illustrate the metamorphosis in Diana's sense of self-identity. For example, in a flashback sequence Diana relates via her diary her life with Michael before the war, and the entries build up a profile of Diana as a woman whose life was utterly dominated, defined and given meaning only through her husband. The diary entries include such reverential comments as '1934, Robin christened - thank you Michael!', and '1937, seven years of Michael!!! Or is it seven months?' When she learns of his death, she has nothing to live for and withdraws from the world, until slowly but surely, through taking up politics, she begins to realise her independent self-worth and strength. As if to contrast further her journey from meek housewife to career woman, she becomes not just an average constituency MP in the mould of her husband, but an outspoken progressive. When the local Tory constituency party accepted her, they believed they could 'depend on her being a safe party member', but to their growing dismay she becomes increasingly vocal and reluctant to keep to the party line.

Diana voices strong political messages for better conditions for women: at the beginning of 1944 she addresses a mothers' meeting and calls for the provision of creches in work places; to a female audience in a factory canteen she declares how 'women workers make armament components for 20% less than male workers, because women are less well paid'; at a women's rally she asserts that 'this business of standing in queues all day has got to stop'. The progressive nature of the attempted political message of the film is epitomised by Diana's laboured maiden speech to the House. To the growing alarm of some Conservatives, she departs from the party line as laid out for her in a prepared speech, and makes a populist speech more in tune with opposition demands for a brave new post-war world. Using 'Mrs Smith' as a metaphor for all women, she passionately speaks of her post-war aspirations: 'when Mrs Smith has time to think, which isn't very often, she thinks of a happier more pleasant world after the war. She wants quite a lot of things out of the post-war world. A decent home to live in, and in time for the day when Mr Smith and her baby come back to join her.' Diana goes on to say how 'Mrs Smith' wants the best education in the world for her children, a little money saved against her husband's return...'. The mood and sentiment of this maiden speech certainly mirrored the kind of expectations that were abroad in the aftermath of the war and which contributed to the Conservatives' massive defeat in 1945. As Kinematograph Weekly observed, the heroine's maiden speech ... must have been one of the reasons why the Tories lost the last election.61 Diana goes on to make more controversial demands in the House, arguing that as long as Mrs Smith 'is doing a man's work she doesn't see why she shouldn't have a man's pay packet at the end of the week.' Women did make great strides in gaining better pay but there was a lot of resistance to the concept of equal pay. Diana's pro-equal pay position was therefore

60 Manchester Guardian, 25 May 1946.
61 Kinematograph Weekly, 11 April 1946.
controversial; Churchill, for instance, took an outspoken stand against equal pay for teachers, and succeeded in getting the House of Commons to meekly revoke its amendment to the Education Bill giving women teachers the same pay as men.62

The radical stance of the film is further illustrated by the relative lack of sympathy accorded to the returning soldier (a theme developed in Chapter Six). The audience is not invited to feel compassion for him despite his own patriotic heroism and sacrifice; instead the film reserves its sympathy for Diana. To begin with, as Variety commented above, Michael's return so far into the film's story presents him as an unwelcome intruder and wrecker of Diana and Richard's endearing engagement. Richard, incidentally, is guided by his conscience and sense of duty, and argues that Diana must rejoin her husband. Any sympathy for Michael is also subverted when it is revealed that his 'death' was faked in the first place. Before being caught and imprisoned, he had been working in the 'underground', and for the success of the operation he had to be declared dead. It is hard to feel compassion for a character who leaves his wife in the certain knowledge that she will soon become a 'widow'. Some reviewers felt strongly about this, such as Variety which pondered 'how a star of Redgrave's calibre could have been persuaded to play a part as subordinate as it is unsympathetic'.63 The Daily Express castigated Michael for being 'either a sadist or a blind, insufferable prig' for knowingly walking out on his wife to 'death', adding conspiratorially that in 'real life the War Office assumes the wife will be told'. Holt thought Diana, instead of having him on her conscience, should 'laugh in his face or spit in his eye'.64 Michael's bitter criticisms of his wife's achievements further undermine his standing. He notes with bad grace that she stood unopposed for the seat, and merely fed off the sympathy vote for widows, which is clearly not the case as Diana's character and achievements are presented as honourable and heroic throughout the whole film. She is not compromised in any way.

Indicative of the thrust of the film's message is the manner in which the conflict between Diana and Michael is resolved. Marcia Landy writes how the 'final scene shows Michael back in the House of Commons with Diana in the gallery', and from this she concludes that Diana is 'reduced to silence after having experienced an active life.65 Landy has misread this last crucial scene: Diana is not in the public gallery but on the opposing benches to Michael. It should be noted that contemporary reviewers also recognised this, such as the Daily Express which described how the final scene shows her smirking at him from the opposition benches, so it may be assumed that she has

63 Variety, 10 April 1946.
64 Daily Express, 25 May 1946.
reserved herself the right at least to go into a different lobby. This telling twist signifies that Diana has won herself the prerogative to choose an independent career, and is not prepared to give up the new life she had forged for herself in Michael's absence. Michael has to back down and recognise that his wife has a new role. The ending also implies that her progressive and idealistic political standpoint has a real future as she is now a member of a party that shares, to some extent, those ideas, and moreover, it is now the party in power. The differences projected by the two protagonists are so exaggerated by the narrative that their reunion is unconvincing. It would have been more credible to have ended the film with their divorce, which would have been in keeping with the rising post-war divorce rates which resulted from the war's sexual fallout. The happy ending of the film was a significant deviation from du Maurier's ending which displays a level of uncertainty about their future: although they stay married in the play the resolution of their relationship is left open because Michael decides to leave by accepting a job in Europe.

The film's most radical comment is its conclusion that women had earned the right to hang on to their new found influence and work once the war was over. This was a viewpoint not universally shared by women - many women were happy with the prospect of returning to domestic normality but was witness to increasing political activity by women during wartime to hold on to their gains. Costello, for example, notes how the 'women's Advisory Committee on Post-war Reconstruction tried to persuade the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party to support their resolution: "Women have established their claim to a share in the economic life of the nation. By having shared equally with men the tremendous task of producing for the needs of the war, they have an equal right to employment after the war". This was going against the political tide after the war, as 'in politics, as in industry, there was a growing post-war reassertion of deeply embedded social beliefs about gender roles ... It was as much an economic as a sexual reaction, a response to pessimistic predictions on both sides of the Atlantic that the end of the war would bring an end to full production and a return to the Depression, with men being thrown out of work in favour of lower-paid women. On the whole, films endorsed this trend; Sue Aspinall has suggested that at the end of the war films 'seemed to delight in reducing "strong" women to size' with the implication

66 Daily Express, 25 May 1946.

67 See, for instance, Aldgate, and Richards, Britain Can Take It: 161. They note that the divorce rate increased from 10,000 in 1938, to 25,000 in 1945.

68 There is some debate as to the extent to which women wished to return to their former lives. A Mass Observation report entitled 'Will the factory girls want to stay put or go home?' argued that 'most women wanted traditional arrangements to be reinstated after the war'. Harper, Sue, 'The Representation of Women in British Feature Films, 1939-45', in Taylor, Philip (ed.), Britain and the Cinema in the Second World War (London: Macmillan, 1988): 171.

69 Costello, Love, Sex and War: 366.

70 Costello, Love, Sex and War: 365.
that these narratives proved 'that even self-sufficient women cannot manage without men.' Hollywood also went down this path; with reference to the portrayal of women in American war films, Jeanine Basinger has argued that 'not only did the need to see women in war go away, but apparently the need to teach them to go back home became important. A particularly large group of films in which women are punished, victimised, driven crazy, or presented as evil were made in the immediate post-war period.\textsuperscript{72}

*The Years Between* does not fit in with this model and instead portrays the strong woman as a faultless heroine, with all the associated sub-textual implications for women's role in the post-war world. It is interesting to observe that the film's publicists did not advertise the film in those terms. They publicised the film thus: 'As a result of war, this problem has doubtless arisen thousands of times; men who have been reported dead, have returned to the bosom of their families. The "readjusted" wives have to readjust all over again when they find they are not widows but still wives.'\textsuperscript{73} The implication that the wife had to 'readjust' back is clearly not the message of the film. It is significant that the publicity department chose to focus on the notion of the female as the one who had to readjust and not the man. It is indicative of the dominant cultural force after the war which sought to return women to their traditional gender roles.

*The Years Between* presents a clear statement that during the war years women were able to transcend their normal gender role. This in itself was not striking, as wartime propaganda films such as *Millions Like Us* were designed to celebrate women's contribution to the war effort, but *The Years Between* goes further by making Diana not a woman involved in mere regular war work, but an active political campaigner seeking, as she said in the House, 'an equal say in the government of this country.' She was in effect part of the 'radicalised significant minorities of the upper and middle classes.'\textsuperscript{74} Diana's wartime journey of self-realisation could have been an expression of Muriel Box's own experience, as by her own account the war was a profound turning point in her life. In her autobiography she describes how 'during the six year period when we were fighting for survival, it was obvious that attitudes to everything were substantially changing, mine included. I found I was forced to take stock afresh, not only of my self, but of the world as a whole. My life could be said to divide neatly into two halves, the first pre-1939, the second post-1945. The years between were a land of mental détente enabling me to reach a new assessment of


\textsuperscript{73} Film publicity: BFI microjacket.

my place in the general scheme of things.\textsuperscript{75}

It is ironic that a film which so polemically detracts from traditional ideas about the place of women should have portrayed this in a class format that harked back to pre-war years. The filmmakers did not embrace the progressive wartime shift towards the representation of ordinary lives, but retained the landed-gentry setting of du Maurier's original. The main characters, the Wentworths, are local squires and the lives of the ordinary folk who live 'down in the village' gravitates around them. This kind of scenario harked back to the upper-class world of pre-war cinema, and so was in effect a reaction back to representations of a traditional, hierarchical society. Several reviewers complained about this: Kinematograph Weekly sagely asked if it 'isn't very nearly time that British films rid themselves of snob appeal? Pay-as-you-earn picturegoers cannot be expected fully to appreciate the tantrums, inhibitions and jealousies of those with time on their hands?\textsuperscript{76} and Noble yawned that it was the kind of lamentably "good class" production that Britain made so often before the war, with a nice comfortable English background, and nice comfortable emotions.\textsuperscript{77}

The Years Between did quite well at the box-office with Billings listing it as a 'Notable Box-office Attraction'.\textsuperscript{78} Of the trade reviews, the Daily Film Renter gave it the seal of approval by billing it 'a highly topical woman's picture that cannot fail to do smash-hit business',\textsuperscript{79} and the Kinematograph Weekly more cautiously thought that while it 'should appeal to better-class audiences' its 'chances with the industrial ninepennies are less certain.\textsuperscript{80} Critics' comments were mixed: the Manchester Guardian concluded that it did not 'deeply care' about the characters' problems, and that it 'is the small part playing and the convincing background of scenes in town and country which are the chief merit of a decent and serious, but rather dull entertainment.\textsuperscript{81} In counterpoint to this was the Daily Express which thought that 'this trying theme is displayed brilliantly by both players and developed with cunning and care',\textsuperscript{82} and Speed believed that it dealt with a current problem with 'thought and intelligence', adding that 'direction, production and acting are all excellent and the film

\textsuperscript{75} Box, Muriel, Odd Woman Out (London: Leslie Frewin, 1974): 146.

\textsuperscript{76} Kinematograph Weekly, 11 April 1946.

\textsuperscript{77} Noble, British Film Year Book, 1947-48: 21.

\textsuperscript{78} Kinematograph Weekly, 19 December 1946.

\textsuperscript{79} Daily Film Renter, 4 April 1946.

\textsuperscript{80} Kinematograph Weekly, 11 April 1946.

\textsuperscript{81} Manchester Guardian, 25 May 1946.

\textsuperscript{82} Daily Express, 25 May 1946.
has a rare overall polish which makes it stand out.83

There is one other film of the aftermath period, apart from The Years Between, that takes the homefront role of women as a topic. Unlike the Boxes' film, The Weaker Sex (Roy Baker, 1948) is no radical feminist critique of the war years, but, as the film's title suggests, is a sentimental, nostalgic portrait of suburban Britain at war, with particular reference to the contribution of the housewife. In the words of the film's own publicity it was designed as a 'well-merited pat on the back for the housewives of Britain'.84 Baker's second directorial credit after The October Man (1947), The Weaker Sex was based on a successful 1947 play by Esther MacCracken called No Medals. The story has a strong element of romance, but it is not the driving force of the narrative as in, say, Piccadilly Incident. The film does not have much of a plot, but rather just traces the everyday, interacting lives of a housewife Martha Dacre (Ursula Jeans), her family and her billetees from just before D-Day to the present. It is intended as a story of ordinary people living with war, and the sense of drama is intensified as they live in the naval town of Portsmouth. Apart from Martha, the key characters are all in uniform and involved in the D-Day landings. The idea is that Martha provides the stable and reassuring home background that was so essential for those actually involved in the uniformed part of the war effort. The film is presented in wartime semi-documentary style, with plenty of documentary and newsreel footage to illustrate, and provide a chronological framework for, the external events of the war that so dominates their private lives.

The atmosphere of the film is that of the quietly understated heroics of wartime propaganda films like The Way to the Stars (Anthony Asquith, 1945),85 with the characters going about their wartime duties with a resigned but good-humoured sense of patriotic duty. The film's publicity highlighted its wartime feel and similarity to wartime films like This Happy Breed, The Way Ahead, and In Which We Serve. If anything, The Weaker Sex expresses a twinge of regret that the war is over; as one character says meditatively whilst looking out to sea, 'I can hardly believe yet there'll be no more bombing, no more fire-watching, they've become part of our lives.' The film's mood is one of a nation at peace with itself looking back with a satisfied sigh at the years of upheaval. For the Daily Herald,86 such qualities lent the film the 'rambling double appeal of remembrance and domestic familiarity', while Variety questioned the motives for making a film so lacking in story values, and devoting so much 'of its footage to recalling the war days without saying anything new.87

83 Speed, Film Review, 1946: 140.
84 Film advert, Kinematograph Weekly, 4 November 1948.
85 See, for example, Richards, Jeffrey, 'National Identity in British Wartime Films', in Taylor, Britain and the Cinema in the Second World War: 59.
86 Daily Herald, 24 September 1948.
87 Variety, 13 October 1948.
As the story unfolds into the years of austerity, it reveals no disillusion or rancour over the lack of any tangible benefits from victory. It displays good humour and a proud resilience over the ongoing discomforts of post-war shortages (‘we may be shabby, but we are not shoddy’, says one character). Moreover, the film ridicules the controversial British Housewives League as an undesirable, unwarranted and disruptive force. There are no fears displayed over jobs for demobbers or their readjustment to civilian life; affable Geoffrey Radcliffe (Cecil Parker), a Naval Commander billeted with, and later married to, Martha Dacre, easily slips back into the nine-to-five routine of his City job. Martha herself, quite unlike Diana in *The Years Between*, presents no threat whatsoever to male hegemony as she happily re-establishes herself as a normal peacetime housewife whose concerns are shopping, cooking, and generally clucking around her family. The only unease or contentious issue reflected in the film is directly attributable to the deteriorating international situation in 1948. The film ends on fears about another impending war, but even this serves to reinforce the sense of pride the family feel at having fought off the last threat to Britain’s freedom.

The conservative nature of the film is also reinforced by the typology of the characters. They are the middle-class of middle England, presenting in the same way as *In Which We Serve* a traditional, hierarchical view of family and society. In tune with the post-war sense of democracy, though, Martha Dacre’s home is not of the grand country house variety so beloved of British filmmakers (like *The Years Between*), but actually a semi-detached in a self-consciously suburban street. The choice of the housewife as hero can also be seen as a conservative element. The celebration of the housewife in war presented a highly orthodox and unthreatening picture of women, when compared to a portrayal of women doing war jobs that were seen to transgress the normal female gender role, as in *The Years Between*. *The Weaker Sex* embodied the post-war shift towards the more traditional values outlined above, and it also epitomised the widespread feeling that most women regarded their wartime "gains" as "time out" for the duration from their traditional role centred on marriage, home and dependency on the male breadwinner. At the box-office, *The Weaker Sex* proved reasonably popular; Billings for example, listed it as a ‘runner-up’ to the big successes of the year, *The Best Years of Our Lives* (William Wyler, 1946, US) and *Spring in Park Lane* (Herbert Wilcox, 1948).

*No Room at the Inn* (Dan Birt, 1948) is the only film which took a contentious wartime issue - the treatment of child evacuees - and exposed it to the full glare of screen publicity. The film was based on a successful play by Joan Temple, which ran for two years after being first staged in the

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18 The British Housewives League was a pressure group that blamed Labour for the shortages. See, for instance, Addison, *Now the War is Over*: 40.

summer of 1945. The film rights were snapped up British National in December 1947, and the adaptation was written by Ivan Foxwell with a contribution by Dylan Thomas. Dan Birt, the director, had made his name in the thirties as an editor before drifting into documentary direction during the war. *No Room at the Inn* was his second feature film after *The Three Weird Sisters*, but he was not destined to become a distinguished director, even if he had not died prematurely in 1955. Costing only £95,000 to produce, *No Room at the Inn* was a low-budget 'bread and butter' film which could be expected to make a profit from the domestic audience.

A reasonably faithful reproduction of the play, two of the original cast appear in the film: Freda Jackson plays the leading role of the monstrous Mrs Voray and Joan Dowling plays a mischievous cockney child evacuee. The story is set in the early years of the war and focuses on a provincial home for evacuee children in Nottingham's slums, which is run by a despicable alcoholic prostitute, Mrs Voray. She does not merely overcrowd her home with unwanted evacuee children and keep them in squalor in order to make money from the meagre state allowances which the evacuees attract, but also calculatingly exploits them. She starves them whilst using their ration quotas for herself, and sells any valuable possessions that they may have arrived with. In the original version of the play, Mrs Voray also runs the house as a brothel, but the censors 'opposed anything which showed that the central figure had let rooms "for immoral purposes". The censors also objected to swear words and some unfavourable comments about borstals in the original script submitted to them. The sorry tale begins with the arrival of a new girl, Mary O'Rane, accompanied by the town's billeting officer, at Mrs Voray's establishment. Mary's mother has been tined and her father is a serving seamen. She is different from the four child evacuees that she joins; whereas they are working class kids from London, Mary is middle-class and actually from the local town, which is given the middle-England sounding name of Market Norton. Mrs Voray's slum house is on the outskirts, as is established in the opening shots which show her house existing within a wash of industrial symbols, being adjacent to a grimy railway bridge and backgrounded by a gasworks.

Mary symbolises the moral corruption of the children: the film charts her descent from a nice, polite, well dressed, well-behaved girl, to a common and dirty one just like the other long-servers

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90 Thomas had written film documentaries in the war, and when short of money after the war he sought script-writing in the commercial cinema. After contributing to a script that was not produced, he then 'polished the dialogue of two films directed by Dan Birt, *Three Weird Sisters* (1948) and *No Room at the Inn* for British National' (Ferris, Paul, *Dylan Thomas*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977: 215), after which he spent a year at Gainsborough. The extent to which Thomas may have influenced the script is arguable.


93 Robertson, *The British Board of Film Censors*: 172.
(a scenario that inverts the popular notion that it was working-class children who ended up in middle-class homes and/or a rural environment, which generally improved their moral and physical health). After initial class tension between the prim Mary and the streetwise kids they become friends, and as a group try to protect themselves from the worst excesses of Mrs Voray's wickedness. The film reaches a climax towards the end when Mrs Voray arrives back home in a drunken rage after a disastrous night on the town to find that the children have accidentally ruined her prized hat. She sadistically reacts by locking up nine year old 'blitz orphan' Ronnie in a rat-infested cellar. Once she is asleep the other children go to rescue Ronnie, but she wakes up and goes to investigate. The film then comes to an abrupt conclusion when she falls down some stairs to her death. This unsatisfactory ending was substituted for the original in which two of the girls were driven to murdering Mrs Voray. Presumably a portrait of child-killers and the lack of a future that implied, was considered just too bleak for a film. By contrast, Mrs Voray's accidental death allowed the possibility of a new dawn for the children.

The wickedness of Mrs Voray towards the children is but one dimension of the narrative as the respectable inhabitants of Market Norton are also implicated. Mary's teacher is the only adult who appreciates how rotten the conditions are for the evacuees, and she tries both to expose Mrs Voray, and to rescue her pupil Mary. (There is initially an unconscious class prejudice here; for most of film the teacher is only concerned about middle-class Mary's well-being, and appears to regard the working-class London children as urchins and as much a corrupting force on nice Mary as is Mrs Voray. By the end of the film though, she is also campaigning for them.) The teacher's quest to bring the true nature of Mrs Voray to the town council's attention is thwarted at every turn as Mrs Voray has most of the town council, including the Billeting Officer, under her spell. The source of her power is primarily sex which she sells to buy both influence and black-market goods, the town's councillors largely being shopkeepers. In one scene at the local butcher's shop, Mrs Voray is offered some extra tripe 'under the counter', and then for payment the butcher escorts her off to the back of the shop. This inference of the exchange of tripe for sexual favours must have caught the censor off-guard.

As a result of councillor's dealings with Mrs Voray, the teacher's accusations about her fall on deaf ears. They think that while Mrs Voray may not be perfect, she certainly is not as bad as the teacher makes out. If their complacent inaction bordered on the criminal, then the wider population was also to blame for the children's plight. Mary ended up at Mrs Voray's because no other Market Norton resident would have her - there was no room at the inn for Mary. In a couple of scenes the film shows the teacher trying to persuade middle-class households to billet Mary, but although they offer sympathy, they cannot be bothered to give Mary a home. It was precisely this abdication of responsibility that empowered the criminal Mrs Voray. The film also implicates the irresponsibility of parents in wartime with regard to their own children. One of the slum kids explains her presence at Mrs Voray's by saying that 'my muvver's gorn of wivva soldier'. Mary's own father is also
complicit in her desperate situation. On leave, and in his seaman's uniform, he pays a visit to his daughter at Mrs Voray's, and to begin with he believes the accusations Mary makes about her 'foster mother'. However, Mrs Voray soon charms him with a drink, a night on the town, and the promise of sex. By the morning, he has handed to Mrs Voray the child's treasured watch for her safekeeping, and endorsed her as Mary's guardian. There is also an undercurrent of class politics here, as the film goes to some length to explain that middle-class Mary's mother 'married below her'. It would have been perfectly logical for Mary's father to have been as middle-class as her mother, but this would have led to the uncomfortable situation that a male member of the middle-classes, a serving member of the Royal Navy (and probably an officer), recently bereaved and with a teenage daughter to care for, was happily sleeping around with a 'trollop'.

Class is also at the root of the London children's unlucky fortune to have ended up at Mrs Voray's; one of the urchins says they cannot go anywhere else because 'we ain't respectable'. Friction is also alluded to between the evacuees and the native children in class terms. In a schoolroom scene, for example, the teacher reads out an evacuee girl's essay on the subject 'My impressions of Market Norton'. The essay reads 'I think that all the girls are swanky, stuck-up ... and they think we don't know anything and they don't want us here. The whole place is dull as dishwater and there isn't any fun and it's full of a lot of stinkers.'

The discussion of the film so far may suggest that it is unremittingly bleak, and so attention must be drawn to its humour and humanity. The film actually has much warmth and humour, some of it accessible only to the eagle-eyed: the street name-plate on the outside of Mrs Voray's house of horrors reads 'Pleasant Street'; the sight of Mrs Voray and Mary's seaman father getting drunk out of their wits in one of the town's pubs is backgrounded by a wartime navy morale-boosting poster with a picture of a sea captain, and the caption 'Back them up!'. The script is also surprisingly (in terms of censorship) rich in witty, spicy and risque innuendos and jokes (a quality accentuated by Dylan Thomas?), which moreover have kept their vitality as witnessed by audience laughter at a fairly recent public showing of the film. Much warmth in the film derives from the indomitable spirit of the hapless children themselves, even though the narrative is at the same time trying to establish them as delinquent products of their environment. Indeed the producers hoped to cash in on this human side by publishing the film music of a touching section in the film 'which covers the scene in which Joan Dowling, as "Norma", tells in her own cockney language the story of Cinderella. Entitled "Room for Love." 95

In terms of its dealing with the subject of juvenile delinquency and social transgression, No Room at the Inn is certainly partly a spin off from the preoccupation with those lurid themes in the late

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95 Film publicity: BFI microjacket.
forties. As will be discussed in Chapter Eight, there was a timely obsession with juvenile delinquency and gangsterism, which spawned a spate of films on these topics. In fact the producers attempted to exploit the preoccupation with juvenile delinquency by adding a rather clumsy introductory scene set in the present day. In the first few minutes of the film Norma is shown being caught shop-lifting, and the real cause of her criminality is then attributed to her evacuee experience in the war - the story then being shown as a flashback, although the film-makers did not bother to add a present-day epilogue. The film's publicists also sought to trade on parallel fears about cruelty to children: one advert, for instance, reads 'although No Room at the Inn deals with conditions that may seem exaggerated, it has been proved by the Curtis Report, which was circulated recently to all local authorities, that hundreds of homeless children live under the most appalling conditions. Your local authorities will want to see No Room at the Inn'. The interest in wayward youth is also witnessed by the proposal of one of the censors to give the film 'a contemporary setting since child cruelty was much in the news.'

In his history of British censorship Robertson dismisses No Room at the Inn as merely a 'product of its time and rescued from total mediocrity purely by Freda Jackson's performance.' Robertson is wrong, as despite its cheap production quality it is a sharply scripted and a meaningful commentary on a wartime issue. It is different from its peers in the post-war juvenile delinquency cycle because it is, uniquely, located in wartime, and consequently its unflattering picture of small-town Britain rife with petty corruption, black-market dealings, sexual misdemeanours and the maltreatment of evacuee children, punctures the reassuring propaganda images of Britain at war. No Room at the Inn also stands out from the other films because, however crude or sensational the approach, it tried to document what was recognised as a real wartime and aftermath problem, and indeed Joan Temple's play was apparently inspired by a 'real-life story'. The significance of the film to contemporary audiences lay beyond the melodrama of Temple's particular story in the wider issue of children as 'orphans of the storm'. (Children as casualties of war was a particularly popular aftermath theme with European and American film-makers, if only because the plight of children was not controversial or political as with other aftermath themes, and its inherent sentimentality was ideal for cinema audiences, hence Wilcox's adoption of the illegitimate child storyline in Piccadilly Incident).

96 Film publicity: BFI microfiche.
97 Robertson, The British Board of Film Censors. 172.
98 Robertson, The British Board of Film Censors: 172.
99 Daily Express, 14 December 1946.
100 Examples include The Search (Fred Zinnemann, 1948, US), and Germany Year Zero (Roberto Rossellini, 1947, France/Italy).
When Temple’s play first appeared in early 1946, its exposure of the plight of evacuee children caused a storm. It generated a lot of publicity: it was serialised, for instance, in the *Daily Express*,\(^1\) and was broadcast on the radio in January 1948.\(^2\) The investigative nature of the film was praised at the time. *Kinematograph Weekly*, for example, likened the film to *Love on the Dole* (John Baxter, 1941) with its ‘valuable documentary quality’, and went on to say how the ‘genius of the film is its ability to mirror the truth and convert its ugly facts into entertainment.’\(^3\) P.L. Mannock, of the *Daily Herald*, thought ‘one of the lesser known horrors [of the war] was the frightful demoralisation of evacuees in bad homes. Personally though, I am sure this was much more than offset by the improvement, moral and physical, of youngsters sent to better homes than their own.’ She went on to note how ‘Mrs Voray is shocking enough, even after the censor’s toning down’ but concludes that the ‘picture has sincerity, humour and character.’\(^4\) The seriousness of the film appealed to at least one ordinary cinemagoer who wrote, in a letter published in the *Daily Herald*, that the film had a ‘message which, so far as I am concerned, went home.’\(^5\)

It goes without saying that this kind of image of Britain at war was at odds with wartime propaganda films. In *No Room at the Inn* children are victims, the middle-classes are tainted as are the working-classes, sex is freely bought and sold, pubs are not jolly rural venues for community but debauched places more akin to Victorian gin palaces, and corruption and spivery abound. It is on a different plane from such wartime propaganda films as *Went the Day Well?* (despite its Fifth Columnist) with its idyllic projection of rural England and its infinite capacity to welcome Cockney evacuee children. Despite the melodramatic story, *No Room at the Inn* is more truthful about many aspects of the home-front experience than any other film of those years. This is not to say that the calculated abuse of evacuee children was widespread (although it did occur\(^6\)) but that the film, unlike the wartime propaganda films, does touch on the problematical and less honourable aspects of wartime. The experiences of evacuee children was varied; for some it ‘opened a door to a new future, a door that would have remained closed had it not been for the evacuation. Yet the fact remains that others were wounded so badly that they still carry the pain with them.’\(^7\) As suggested in the film, certain classes of children were seen to be undesirable:

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Calder, for instance, has written how 'nicely dressed children were whisked away by local big-wigs ... and there was likely to be a residue of unwholesome looking waifs whom nobody wanted.' The film's central idea of the deterioration of the evacuees' sense of right and wrong also echoed reality. Calder, for example, notes how wartime children 'left to their own devices in a hostile, and later terrifying, environment, might well develop anti-social attitudes.'

On its general release in November 1948 No Room at the Inn was popular, and far from being the sensationalist melodrama destined for instant obscurity that Robertson implies. Billings, for example, lists it under 'Other Notable Attractions,' and it was given feature status in at least one popular film annual. In a one-off article about film costs, Kinematograph Weekly listed No Room at the Inn in their top grade 'Class AA' of quality British features, a list which included such treasures as Oliver Twist (David Lean, 1948) and Hamlet (Laurence Olivier, 1948). No Room at the Inn's appeal to audiences was founded, according to one trade reviewer, on its hard-hitting realism: the Daily Film Renter saw the film as 'a red raw slice of life addressed to those who like their entertainment rough, tough and realistic.' The Kinematograph Weekly summed up the film's appeal as a 'true and holding story, excellent characterisation, human interest, humour and accurate reporting.' Other critics were not so enamoured with the film, such as the Daily Express which said that the film 'now seems to have lost its point. When playgoers saw it two years ago and the Daily Express serialised it, the problems and experiences of wartime evacuate children were still fresh, and sore, in people's minds.'

In view of the relative success of the film (it also must have made a good profit in view of its cheap production costs), and its unusually damning view of Britain at war, it is odd that it has been all but completely ignored by film writers. Apart from Robertson, who in any case was only discussing it within the context of censorship, the only other writer to mention it is Robin Cross who in a brief, albeit perceptive, reference commented how No Room at the Inn (together with some other films) 'faced up to the problems and legacies of the wartime years.'

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110 Kinematograph Weekly, 16 December 1948.


113 Daily Film Renter, 20 September 1948.


115 Daily Express, 29 October 1948.

Conclusion
Films looking back to the wartime home-front made little attempt to comment seriously on the trials and traumas of wartime life in Britain, apart from two exceptions, The Years Between and No Room at the Inn. Britain's experience of war on home soil was less agonised than those countries that were occupied or defeated, but nevertheless the destruction, death and general upheaval endured by the population was considerable. There are no penetrating profiles of the impact of war on individuals, how they coped in dire circumstances, or the extent to which their commitment to war may have wavered, or how they reacted to being conscripted into the labour force. There are no semi-documentary accounts of real-life war stories - as there were with the military services films - such as factory life, or living through the blitz. Films barely relate the bleak, darker aspects of the home-front experience, such as the physical and personal devastation wreaked by the bombing of towns and cities. The films make little reference to the victims of war, the homeless, displaced or bereaved. Most of the films are inclined towards re-establisising a more traditional social and political picture of British society, rather than developing wartime themes about a progressive and more democratic post-war society. With wartime censorship restrictions lifted and pressure to make upbeat morale-boosting propaganda, more critical pictures could have been made.

This is not say, however, that home-front films were irrelevant in relaying that experience, or that audiences were not interested in re-living the war years. In treatment they range from farce to serious drama. Some films offered audiences a comic, or occasionally sharply satirical, reaction to the war, such as poking fun at the infuriating MOI, or pompous Home Guard officers, or even the problem of wartime crime. Other comedies laughed at the apparent democratising effects of the war, or enjoyed peculiar situations that arose for the duration. These films offered comic relief by giving cinemagoers an opportunity to laugh at themselves, and by taking a sideswipe (sometimes effected by making cinematic references to wartime propaganda films) at an assortment of irritating wartime institutions, regulations and individuals. Love stories relived the excitement and romance of war that had overtaken so many people, and are witness to the loosening of conventional sexual codes of behaviour that occurred in wartime. Occasionally these romances carried overt social messages, such as Piccadilly Incident. These films and others, such as The Weaker Sex with its self-conscious tribute to women in the home-front, manifested a sentimental and nostalgic view of those years, almost as if there was some sadness and regret that those heady and incomparable days were over. This often quirky, sentimental, funny and diverse body of film then, did not pick over the depressing bones of the war, but tended to look on the bright side of the experience, on the whole perpetuating the kind of upbeat, low-key heroism that imbued wartime propaganda films.

The Years Between shares many of the qualities outlined above, but stands apart because of its
conscious political message about the 'gains' made by women during the war, and the contentious and highly topical issue as to whether they should retreat back to their former prewar status. Progressively, the film suggested women could hang on to their new-found prestige and that men would have to adjust accordingly. The most intriguing of all the home-front films viewed is No Room at the Inn. This film is startlingly different from all other films of the period because it confronts head-on the sinister, corrupt and joyless countenance of the war. It explodes many of the established wartime myths about the patriotism and selfless generosity of small-town Britain during the war, and showed there were innocent victims of war and a legacy that was still a current problem.

A general conclusion that can be drawn from these films is determined by the chronology. As Appendix One illustrates, all but two of the home-front films (Whisky Galore and The Cure for Love) appeared by the end of 1948, and the subject of the home-front remained an uncommon theme in war films of the ensuing decades. The concentration of eleven home-front films in the years 1946-48 suggests that the subject of these films was founded in the immediacy of war, and therefore represents an ephemeral response to the wartime experience. Furthermore, of these eleven home-front films over half were popular at the box-office, and two, Piccadilly Incident and The Courtnays of Curzon Street, were big hits. The majority of these films have been forgotten in film histories (and those that have attracted attention stand out because they have unusually strong messages, such as The Years Between, or because they have notable artistic merit, such as Whisky Galore). Yet surely taken as a whole they manifest an identifiable body of film that recycled the domestic war experience to post-war audiences. The diversity of these films makes it problematical to draw conclusions about these post-war preoccupations about the home-front, but that said, this diversity is a comment in itself. What these films achieved in cultural terms was the expression of a host of post-war emotions, concerns, and attitudes that befitted a nation whose individual experiences of war were unique and varied.
PART THREE
THE AFTERMATH OF WAR
Chapter Five

The International Legacy of War: 'Who said there is hope for Europe?'

Introduction

The last two chapters investigated how the war years were recycled on cinema screens; the next two chapters switch gear by looking at films which deal with the war as a current event in terms of its aftermath. The focus, then, is not so much about the ongoing re-interpretation of a past event but about how the cinema dealt with issues that British society was living through at that moment, and in view of this there is more emphasis on the historical context.

British film-makers in the late forties made at least nine feature films which in some manner engaged with the European dimension of the aftermath of war. (Film-makers did not concern themselves with international aftermath themes outside Europe.) This chapter considers how individual films interpreted the European situation, and what insights they offer on British perspectives and attitudes towards Europe. A theme weaving through the discussion is that there is an underlying shift in the preoccupations of the key films between 1947 and 1950, from a singular preoccupation with the 'problem' of Germans and Nazis, as exemplified by Ealing's Frieda (Basil Dearden, 1947), to an increasing concern with the wider European questions of post-war dislocation, demoralisation and division, and with the emerging cold war. The key films in this latter mould are The Lost People (Bernard Knowles, 1949) and The Third Man (Carol Reed, 1949). The argument to be pursued in relation to the shifting interest of the films, is that the trend was symptomatic of the fluid international situation as the German enemy was eclipsed by the Soviet one, the films echoing this by progressively backgrounding German military themes, and foregrounding themes such as the cold war, the plight of Germany, and Europe's apparent inability to stop warring. As the progressive shift in the subject matter of the films is itself a theme, the films are discussed in a broadly chronological order.

The German 'problem' and the threat of Nazi re-emergence

Victory over Germany presented the Allies with the thorny question of how to treat the defeated enemy. It was hardly a new problem: as the population in 1945 was only too aware, the settlement after the Great War had failed miserably to arrest further German expansionism. The cardinal 'problem' of how to deal with Germans and the German state was confronted as an explicit narrative subject in only one film, Frieda. Based on a moderately successful play by Ronald Millar, staged in London in the summer of 1946, the film/play is about a German girl called Frieda who is brought to England at the end of the war by a British airman, but whose presence in

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the airman's home town generates a storm of controversy on account of her being German. The idea behind both the play and the film was to articulate, by personalising the issues, the emotive arguments surrounding the treatment of the ex-enemy. As the film's publicity outlined, 'the picture makes one pause to think - 'Would you take Frieda into your home?' There are arguments pro and con and Frieda is bound to provoke discussion among people who have devoted thought to the question of what to do about Germany in the post-war era ... It is capital entertainment yet also evidence that the screen has a function as a means of intelligently discussing vital problems confronting the world today.

Frieda's project to discuss intelligently Anglo-German relations was recognised and appreciated by many reviewers: the Manchester Guardian, for example, liked its 'attempts to deal seriously with a modern problem'; Maurice Speed observed how 'basically its main theme was, what shall we do with the Germans now that the war has ended and passions roused are being put tidily back in place? A big problem, a mighty big problem,' and the News of the World thought it 'a grippingly important story ... [with] ... some of the most penetrating and provocative dialogue the screen has offered in years.' The film's topicality struck a chord with viewers and was both a critical and popular success. This was a rare achievement in itself, but even more so for a film with overt

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3 According to Millar's autobiography, the story was inspired from a newspaper story published in early 1945. It was 'about a British officer who had married a German girl in unusual circumstances ... and brings her home with him to wartime England, to the dismay of his family and in defiance of a scandalised public to whom "feminisation" with the enemy ... is akin to treason.' Millar, Ronald, A View from the Wings (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1993): 122.


5 Film publicity: BFI microjacket.


9 Frieda's box-office success is indicated by Billings, Kineinatograph Weekly, 18 December 1947, who lists Frieda as one of six runners-up to the year's biggest attraction The Courneys of Curzon Street (Herbert Wilcox, 1947). Terry Lovell says Frieda 'was given a cool critical reception' but this was hardly the case. (Lovell, Terry, 'Frieda', in Hurd, Geoff (ed.), National Fictions: World War Two in British Films and Television London: BFI, 1984: 31). Of the reviews scrutinised here, only the American Variety, 25 June 1947, had serious reservations, seeing it as limited and 'overladen with symbolism.' Even the coolest British reviews still found considerable merit in the film: for instance, the Manchester Guardian, 5 July 1947, judged that the 'only fault of this worthy film is that it is all a little slow and a little obvious;' The Times, 7 July 1947, although criticising the film's 'fantastic' Hollywood-style presentation of English life, nevertheless thought that Frieda surprisingly recovers itself by the skill with which it presents the
social comment.

Frieda's story starts in March 1945 in Poland, in 'no-man's land between the German and the Russian armies,' with two people getting married in a bombed-out church while the battle rages around them. It transpires that one is a German nurse, Frieda (Mai Zetterling), and she has just helped British airman Robert Dawson (David Farrar) escape from a German prison camp. The marriage is intended to enable Frieda to obtain a British passport and so be allowed into Britain. Robert has apparently agreed to do this as repayment for her help in aiding his escape, and because her own life is now at risk. For Frieda, another reason for accompanying Robert is that she loves him. On their train journey to Britain, Frieda expresses anxiety about how, as a German, she will be received in Britain. Robert confidently reassures her that his comfortable, sleepy hometown of Denfield 'near Sevenoaks' in rural southern England will welcome her. His prediction is proved wrong though, and his family, although politely welcoming, are variously embarrassed, uneasy or antagonised, while the townsfolk are openly hostile.

Robert's aunt Nell (Flora Robson) holds particularly hawkish views, but she nevertheless predicts that Frieda will be accepted by the town within six months, Nell herself excepted. The prediction comes to pass, and by Christmas 1946, she becomes, as Robert's mother puts it, 'one of us now'. As Frieda becomes integrated into Denfield society, she and Robert grow closer together and the future looks rosy for them. However, the tranquillity is disturbed by a ghost from Frieda's past when one evening at the cinema they see a newsreel about the Allied discovery of Belsen,¹⁰ and Frieda admits that she knew of such camps. The revelation threatens to come between them, but they manage to put the episode behind them. By the end of the year, the worst seems to be over.

Germs.¹ All the other critics so far unearthed unstintingly praised the film: the Daily Express, 4 July 1947, for example, thought it 'a well-made film that will make most people argue;' the Daily Herald, 3 July 1947, applauded it as 'skillfully made with immense sincerity by one of our ablest young directors;' Sight and Sound, vol. 120, no. 63, Autumn 1947, lauded Frieda for tackling the German question 'with conviction, facing the facts squarely, and not shrinking from some of the awful dilemmas involved ... it is impressively sincere and honest.' Trade press reviewers also liked it: for instance, the Daily Film Renter, 23 June 1947, summed up the film as 'definitely a picture of great interest and intelligence'; and Today's Cinema, 20 June 1947, commended the film's 'sensitive direction, realistic all-round portrayal, authentic backgrounds of English village life. Stimulating general entertainment, appealing specifically to discerning patronage.'

¹ Presumably the idea is that the footage was being shown for the first time in British cinemas, but if that is the case the chronology is confused. Belsen was exposed by Allied troops in April 1945, and the newsreels revealed it to a shocked public from the beginning of May 1945, Daily Film Renter, 3 May 1945, but in Frieda some months had passed after victory. In the play, there is no mention of Belsen and so the chronological confusion probably arose as a result of the adaptation (which presumably also accounts for other plot oddities, such as the mysterious presence of the boy Tony in the household - in the play it is explained that he is Mrs Dawson's son from a former marriage).

Incidentally, James C. Robertson proposes that although the newsreel footage of Belsen is in the original print (and the copy viewed here) it was cut from the film on 22 May 1947 by the BBFC, thus lessening the impact of the scene. (Robertson, James C., The British Board of Film Censors: Film Censorship in Britain, 1896-1950, London: Croom Helm, 1985: 165.) On the evidence of reviewers, this seems not to have been the case: The Times for example, refers to the picture of Belsen via 'the long-range medium of the Gaumont-British News'.

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and they look forward to the new year and a new life. To complete the happiness Robert has now fallen
in love with Frieda, and she at last agrees to marry him, and the family offers its blessings. The
war it seems, is now confined to a memory. Again though, Frieda's German history returns to haunt
them, and this time it is caused by the unexpected appearance of Frieda's soldier brother, Ricky
(Albert Lieven, a political exile from Nazi Germany). He arrives dressed in a Polish army uniform,
but this disguises his true identity as an unreconstructed Nazi, which Frieda, and the audience, learn
about when he gives her a symbolic Swastika brooch. She is horrified and disturbed that Ricky
remains a fanatical Nazi. Ricky is later recognised by an ex-PoW British soldier as a barbaric
prison-camp guard, and is arrested. When Robert discovers Ricky's Nazi credentials, it awakens a
latent anxiety about Frieda's German past, and he loses faith in her. He reacts violently against her
and tells Nell she was right after all, and he wishes Frieda 'were dead'. In despair at losing Robert's
confidence, Frieda attempts suicide by jumping off a bridge into an icy river. At the last minute
Robert, alerted by Nell, comes to his senses and is able to save her, and the film ends happily with
them reunited in love.12

Frieda's melodramatic story was effectively linked into contemporary thinking and policy-making
on the problem of how to deal with defeated Germany. For Sight and Sound the film 'squarely'
asked two crucial questions: 'How far are the German people to blame for having allowed
themselves to be subject to [the Nazi spirit]?'; and 'Can the Nazi spirit be eradicated?' 13 What
exactly were these contentious issues and how did Frieda portray them?

A key concern of the Allies was to contain any future German militarism, and with this objective
there was Allied agreement that Germany should be beaten into unconditional surrender and then
occupied for the foreseeable future.14 Under the Potsdam Agreement of summer 1945, the
occupying forces of France, the Soviet Union, the United States, and Britain undertook to oversee
the denazification, democratisation, deindustrialisation and demilitarisation of the country, which
were known as the four 'Ds'.15 British policy was not to emasculate Germany as had been initially

11 The wedding in Poland was a Protestant ceremony, but as Frieda is a Catholic she does not recognise it as legitimate.
To sanctify the marriage Frieda requires a Catholic ceremony. Robert wants to go through the second ceremony
immediately they arrive in Danzigs, but Frieda is more cautious. She wants to wait until she is sure her presence in
England is no longer an issue, and that Robert loves her.

12 The play is more pessimistic as Frieda decides to return to Germany because she realises that being German is an
impenetrable barrier between her and Robert.

13 Sight and Sound, vol. 16, no. 63, Autumn 1947: 120.

14 See, for example, Balfour, Michael, 'In Retrospect: Britain's Policy of Re-education', in Pronay, Nicholas, and Wilson,
Keith (eds), The Political Re-education of Germany and Her Allies (London: Croom Helm, 1985).

15 See, for example, Mayring, Eva, A., 'British Policy in Occupied Germany: Democratisation and Social Democracy',
Brivati, Brian, and Jones, Harriet (eds), From Reconstruction to Integration: Britain and Europe since 1945
(Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1993).
proposed by France and the US, but to aid its economic recovery with the simultaneous 'democratisation' of the Germans through a programme of 're-education'. Underlying this strategy was the fundamentalist belief - most associated with Robert Vansittart of the Foreign Office - that the German race was culturally and socially predisposed towards war, and that Hitler was just another 'war-leader in their preferred image'. German 're-education' was an ambitious project to eradicate from the entire German race such 'ideas and the ideals on which the authoritarian and militaristic political systems of Germany had been based - and to substitute for them the ethical, philosophical and political ideas of Britain and her transatlantic descendants.

The belief that Germans could be re-educated and converted away from militarism attracted popular interest. Michael Balfour, for example, notes how Henry Faulk, a notable advocate of re-education, believed 'the British public was immensely afraid of future wars and was convinced that Nazism was a political form of nationalism and aggressive nationalism a peculiar German disease', and hence there was a 'popular demand for re-education'. There was an argument that 'all the Germans had to do was to go back to their traditions. What they had to do was to go back to the liberal tradition which by common consent existed in Germany and to which some Germans had all along remained faithful.

Frieda schematically rehearsed those arguments about Germany's guilt, its predisposition to expansionism, and whether the country or individual Germans could be democratised. Nell's hawkish anti-German views articulate the fundamentalism embodied by Vansittart. She encompassed the Vansittart view that every German, including Frieda, was personally responsible for the war. As she declares to assembled townsfolk at an election meeting, 'the responsibility for plunging the world into the misery and disaster of the last five years is not the responsibility of one man or one group of men, but of every individual member of the German nation, man and woman ... Passively or actively, she [Frieda] has been party to a monstrous crime. She cannot evade it was argued that suppressing Germany's economy would lead to uncertainty and discontent, and hinder wider European recovery. The economic and political development of Germany on the western model also became increasingly important as a buttress to growing Soviet power. See, for instance: Deighton, Anne, Britain and the Cold War, 1945-55: An Overview, in Brivati, and Jones, From Reconstruction to Integration: 11; and Mayring, 'British Policy in Occupied Germany', in Brivati, and Jones, From Reconstruction to Integration: 89.

16 It was argued that suppressing Germany's economy would lead to uncertainty and discontent, and hinder wider European recovery. The economic and political development of Germany on the western model also became increasingly important as a buttress to growing Soviet power. See, for instance: Deighton, Anne, Britain and the Cold War, 1945-55: An Overview, in Brivati, and Jones, From Reconstruction to Integration: 11; and Mayring, 'British Policy in Occupied Germany', in Brivati, and Jones, From Reconstruction to Integration: 89.

17 Pronay, Nicholas, 'To Stamp Out the Whole Tradition', in Pronay, and Wilson, The Political Re-education of Germany and her Allies: 12.

18 Pronay, 'To Stamp Out the Whole Tradition', in Pronay, and Wilson, The Political Re-education of Germany and her Allies: 1.

19 Balfour, 'In Retrospect: Britain's Policy of Re-education', in Pronay, and Wilson, The Political Re-education of Germany and her Allies: 140.

20 Balfour, 'In Retrospect: Britain's Policy of Re-education', in Pronay, and Wilson, The Political Re-education of Germany and Her Allies: 142.
responsibility for it, she has no right to escape its consequences.'

Nells' views are given substance through plot developments and visual style. Frieda is shown to be at least aware of Nazi atrocities, if not actually a one-time sympathiser. In a fit of self-guilt after seeing the Belsen newsreel, she confesses she was aware of the horrors: 'I knew that there were such places, we all knew.' As if to heighten the sense of Frieda's murky past, the film switches at this point to a dark, film-noir style, replete with tilted camera angles and shadowy lighting. Frieda's less than honourable past is later alluded to when she angrily confronts Ricky over his ongoing Nazi faith. Although Frieda claims 'I was not a Nazi ... I was just a nurse in a hospital', Ricky accuses her of conveniently forgetting that 'you were also not anti-Nazi'. He then observes that her anti-Nazi comments have only arisen in defeat: 'Did you say this in victory?' he asks, with some conviction. Frieda hesitates and cannot reply, and Ricky grins at her in the knowledge that he is correct, and she knows it. Lovell points out how the mise-en-scene also contributes to the necessary hesitation over Frieda. She notes, for example, how the iconography of a pastoral scene of Frieda 'atop a horse-driven load of hay, singing a German song ... is precisely that appropriated for the Nazi idealisation of the "good Aryan" - nature, fertility, health, strength and dazzling blonde beauty.21

Nell shares the hardline stance of Vansittart with her opinion that all Germans are predisposed towards militarism. She argues that you 'can't take Germans individually ... because there's a link, a common-denominator in every one of them, something that twice in our time has set the world ablaze. Call it the essence of Germanism, the German mind, call it what you like. It's common to every German, man, woman and child. And we're blind idiots if we believe otherwise, it's inborn. It's in the blood.' Her views are seen to be justified by Ricky's unreformed militarist ambition. Ricky is the wartime stereotype of the cold, calculating, nasty Nazi, and evidence of Nell's predictions. In an outspoken justification of his Nazism he declares, 'we are one, all Germans are one ... You must believe it. We must all believe it if our country is to be great again. Divided we are nothing. United we are a great people, 80 millions, the heart and soul of Europe.' Ricky goes on to express Nell's, and the audience's, worst fears that Germany will rise to fight again: 'I want it [war] again! and again! and again! and again! What else is there for me but war? What else do I know?'

In the manner of Vansittart, then, the film implies all Germans are to some extent responsible. Ricky represents the visible, violent, vanguard of Germany's inherent militarism, while Frieda, as the Daily Film Renter put it, 'although not an avowed Hitlerite, was, like many others of her kind, guilty by acquiescence.22

The film indicates that Nell's views are shared by most of Denfield. About to fight a local

21 Lovell, 'Frieda', in Hurd, 'National Fictions'; 32.
22 Daily Film Renter, 23 June 1947.
parliamentary by-election\textsuperscript{23} she finds her chance of winning is handicapped by her relationship with a family that has accepted a German into its household. Party agents make it quite clear to Nell that unless she unequivocally declares her anti-German position she must give way to another candidate as otherwise the party will lose, such is the local strength of anti-German feeling. Nell takes up the challenge and unequivocally condemns Frieda and the German race, much to the delight of the people of Denfield who duly elect Nell as their MP.

With its establishment of German guilt and fears of Nazi resurgence, the film may well be judged as an anti-German document. However, the film also argues that some Germans, like Frieda, who despite a shadowy past, can in the right conditions learn to respect democratic traditions: in other words, they can be re-educated. In answer to Sight and Sound’s other question - to what extent can the Nazi tradition be eradicated? - the film acknowledges that there are irrecoverable Nazi fanatics such as Ricky, but crucially, it balances this by arguing the existence of basically decent Germans like Frieda.

The film-makers achieve this by attracting sympathy for Frieda at every turn. She is pretty and charming, and endears herself to both screen characters and viewers, and the idea that she could be inherently evil becomes inconceivable. Moreover, the audience knows that the actress playing Frieda is not German.\textsuperscript{24} As Today’s Cinema asserted, ‘it is Frieda herself who turns the scale with her wisely loyalty, her devotion to his farm and people, and finally her proffered sacrifice of life itself.’\textsuperscript{25} She is so effective in attracting sympathy that the dominant image of her is not so much as a possible accomplice to Nazism, but as an innocent victim of Denfield’s mindless prejudice. The dynamic of the romantic plot requires Robert and Frieda to stay together, and for this to happen she has to be as decent as he is. The film also appeals for understanding and compassion towards Frieda by hinting at the mutual suffering caused by the war. In one exchange, for example, Frieda is told that Robert’s brother was shot down over Cologne, but this is countered with the news that Frieda’s parents, who lived in Cologne, were killed by Allied bombing.

Frieda’s credentials as a good German are reinforced by the fact she helped Robert escape the PoW camp. Frieda may well have acquiesced during the rise of Hitler, but she did at least finally take a

\textsuperscript{23} As the election occurred while the war was still on, it must be a by-election, and not the general election, as Lovell (Friedd, in Hurd, ‘National Fictions’:31) asserts. Furthermore, foreign policy was not a major issue in the general election, as Angus Calder notes. (Calder, Angus, The People’s War, London: Pimlico, 1992: 578. First published 1969).

\textsuperscript{24} Millar implies that anti-German feeling forbade the casting of a German in the Frieda role. (A New from the Wings: 125.) And in similar vein, Zetterling - rather wassishly - comments how the film company looked for a suitable actress in Sweden rather than Germany itself, because ‘they were themselves prejudiced against having a German actress in the part, feeling that it was too soon after the war.’ (Zetterling, Mai, All Those Tomorrows, London: Jonathan Cape, 1985: 67.)

\textsuperscript{25} Today’s Cinema, 20 June 1947.
stand. But, even if she had arrived in Britain with any residual empathy for German militarism, her stay in Britain influenced her away from such malignant beliefs. After Ricky has announced his undiminished faith in Nazi ideology, she pleads to him that he could be cured of his fanaticism if he stayed in Britain; 'in England' she says 'you will learn peace, you will find a new life'. She also implores Ricky to recognise and rediscover the 'other' Germany of 'Heine, Goethe, Schiller, Beethoven, Brahms, our true greatness.'

The message of the film then, echoes the aspirations of the re-education policy as a means of dealing with the German problem. Lovell, who omits any reference to re-education, concludes that the film 'judges the issue of Frieda's political responsibility. The terms of the resolution require only that Frieda be good "in herself" - almost irrespective it seems of what she may have done,' but this misses the point. If the film's project was to explore the nature of political responsibility, she would be right, but it was not. The film acknowledges Frieda's complicity, but strives to show that she not only realises the evil nature of Nazism, but also comes fully to endorse British values of democracy and tolerance. In effect, Frieda echoes the thinking behind re-education as a means of dealing with Germany; the film displays the underlying fear that all Germans are extremists, but at the same time says they can be successfully re-educated towards civilised values. The parish priest typifies this idea when he argues that there exists the 'potentially good German, the man and woman who in time can be re-educated."

Frieda makes another case that there is a decent side to German nature is but one aspect of its plea for a humanitarian approach to the ex-enemy. Frieda does not just see the German as a problem external to Britain, but also argues that an insidious, vindictive treatment of Germany has domestic ramifications, corrupting the treasured values of decency and tolerance that the country had fought to protect. This theme is definitively expressed through the actions and thoughts of Nell, the spokeswoman for anti-German fundamentalism. Whereas everybody else's prejudice and hostility towards Frieda dissipates by Christmas and they return to their normal English values of compassion and friendship to outsiders, Nell alone continues her stand against accepting Frieda. Yet, she is not a bitter individual bent on revenge and retribution, but a warm-hearted, intelligent woman who has rationally concluded that the Germans cannot for the foreseeable future be treated as equals. She experiences an emotional conflict between her intellectual rejection of Frieda, and the emotional pity she feels for the girl. However, by the end of the film, she loses her humanity and becomes a fanatic as a result of her hardline opinions. Chillingly, Nell allows Frieda to leave the house with the intention of committing suicide, and for a few deadly minutes, Nell cannot bring

26 Lovell, 'Frieda', in Hurd, National Fictions: 34.

27 In the original play, the priest has just returned from Germany, but in the film, he is the parish priest. Perhaps the reason for this alteration was to strengthen the credibility of his views: a priest who had chosen to serve in Germany might have been deemed as 'soft' on Germany.
herself to call for help to avert Frieda's imminent death. Finally her conscience prevails and she alerts Robert, who, by a whisker, foils the suicide attempt. After the event, Nell observes, with startling calculation, that logically Frieda's suicide would have offered 'the one sure way out for all of us'. Later Nell recognises that just by contemplating sending Frieda to her death, she herself had descended into Nazi-style inhumanity. Because of this she registers a change of heart, and sees the flaw in her anti-German stance: 'You cannot', she says, 'treat human beings as though they were less than human without becoming less than human yourself.' For the author, it was the phrase that summed up the film.28

The government policy of aiding the economic and social recovery of Germany did not sit easily alongside a widespread and vehement desire for revenge and retribution. While the reaction against Germany was much calmer than the frenzied nationalism that accompanied the Great War, there nevertheless existed during the war years a deeply ingrained hostility,29 and this hostility intensified after the discovery of Belsen in April 1945. Robert Murphy, for instance, states how Belsen set off 'a wave of revulsion against the Germans' as the atrocities they had committed made 'it impossible to regard them merely as the defeated enemy' but something far worse;30 and Balfour describes how the percentage of those surveyed by Mass Observation who supported more 'constructive' policies fell to 7% after the exposure of concentration camp atrocities.31 Hardline anti-German sentiments were not confined to the public at large, but existed in government circles. Vansittart has already been mentioned, but his views were shared by many policy-makers in government, and public speeches by ministers such as Clement Attlee and Ernest Bevin were also in this fundamentalist vein.32 Alan Bullock, Bevin's biographer, recounts how he could never forgive the Germans for the war because he felt they had betrayed the efforts which he and other trade unionists had made to re-establish relations of trust after 1918. "I tries 'ard, Brian", he told General Robertson, the British Military Governor, "but I 'ates thern", and showed reluctance to visit Germany or meet German politicians.33

28 Millar, A View from the Wings: 141. In an interview he also added that he had not actually written the phrase but wished he had thought of it. Interview conducted 4 September 1995.

29 For example, Balfour records how on five occasions between May 1942 and April 1945, Mass Observation asked a cross-section of the public what kind of settlement should be imposed on Germany. The commonest answer was 'preventive' but revengeful always came close behind and once was in front.' Balfour, 'In Retrospect: Britain's Policy of Re-education' in Pronay, and Wilson, The Political Re-education of Germany and Her Allies: 140.


31 Balfour, 'In Retrospect: Britain's Policy of Re-education', in Pronay, and Wilson, The Political Re-education of Germany and Her Allies: 140.


Anti-German hostility was further provoked by the unforeseen cost of victory over Germany. Britain, far from getting any spoils from her triumph, instead had to 'take responsibility for the 24 million Germans in her zone.'34 This responsibility included feeding the ex-enemy as faced with the prospect of widespread famine in Germany arising from the destruction and dislocations of war, Britain was obliged to divert some of its own vital grain supplies to Germany, a factor which contributed to the introduction of bread rationing in July 1946. This caused an outcry and fuelled anti-German hostility; some newspapers, as Harry Hopkins has written, 'reminded their readers of Belsen. Why should we deprive ourselves to feed the Germans, whining away again in their well-known Teutonic fashion?35 The hatred was also fuelled by the outrage and notoriety generated by the news that British occupation forces were freely 'fraternising' with Germans.36 A policy of 'non-fraternisation' had been introduced in the spring of 1945 and remained a stricture of British occupation policy, in theory if not in practice, until June 1948.37 Although the policy was motivated partly by the desire to be seen to uphold moral standards and reassure wives and girlfriends at home,38 it was also an expression of Vansittart-style fundamentalism as the implication was that all Germans were guilty. The policy of 'non-fraternisation' also expressed, as Constantine Fitzgibbon argues, 'a feeling that the Germans were "morally infectious".'39

The climate of hostility towards the Germans was at its height during the time of Frieda's production and release (in July 1947), and so the film's plea for a more humanitarian approach was an attempt to influence attitudes. It was a polemic in sympathy with the views of campaigning liberals, such as Victor Gollancz, Michael Foot, Bertrand Russell, and the Bishop of Chichester, who took a public stand against mindless and indiscriminate anti-German feeling, and argued for a reasoned approach to the problem.40 The extent to which Frieda influenced mass audience opinion cannot be measured, but so far as reviewers went, they tended to be non-committal, refraining from declaring their own personal conclusions about Frieda and Germans. They outlined the film's

37 Daily Express, 5 June 1948.
38 Costello, Love, Sex and War: 345.
case for and against acceptance, then stood back and, like Ealing's advertisements for the film, said filmgoers must decide for themselves. *Today's Cinema*, for example, declared that 'patrons will make up their own minds as to whether such arguments are conclusive. For ourselves, we are content to record they are presented with intelligence, and enacted with no little degree of conviction.' Those few critics who did voice their own opinions only did so in the personal context of Frieda herself, and so avoided committing themselves about the wider German question. The *Manchester Guardian*, for instance, felt the humanitarian answer in the film was an 'obvious one, at least it is the answer which is obviously dictated by Christianity', and the *Kinematograph Weekly* praised it for 'coming to the estimable conclusion' that is encapsulated in Nell's conversion speech (quoted earlier) at the end.

The reluctance of most critics wholeheartedly to support the film’s humanitarian message is a telling comment on the strength of anti-German feeling at that time. There were also hints of this in their evaluations of the opposing arguments in the film. For example, the *Daily Herald* regretted that 'any German bride, for some time to come, has to face the conviction honestly held by so many British people, that there is no such thing as a decent German; and that any citizen of the fatherland must be held personally responsible, in some degree, for Belsen.' The *Daily Express's* critic, echoing the paper's belligerently anti-German editorial policy, stressed the more questionable aspects of Frieda's history, and noted how the film's ending, although 'happy', still displayed plenty of healthy scepticism about 'the Germans ever becoming a changed people.' *Kinematograph Weekly*, which read the idea underpinning Frieda as one of letting bygones be bygones, expressed the reservation that some people 'may consider it a bit early to talk about shaking our enemies by the hand.'

**The Nazi fights on**

In contrast to Frieda's considered approach, there were at least three films which revelled in populist anti-German sentiments. These films, the comedy *It's Not Cricket* (Alfred Roome, 41 Todqy Onema, 20 Jum 1947.


47 Apart from the full-length feature films dealt with here, it is worth recording that some shorts were also made on the subject. *Eyes That Kill* (Richard M. Grey, 1947) is a crude film about Nazi leader Martin Bormann's escape to Britain and his activities with the Nazi underground; and *Penny and the Pownall Case* (Slim Hand, 1948) is a lively action yarn about an secret Nazi organisation which specialises in helping Nazi war-criminals escape. A number of Hollywood films with strong anti-German messages were also released in Britain, such as *The Stranger* (Orson
1948, and the thrillers Snowbound (David MacDonald, 1948) and Counterblast (Paul L. Stein, 1948), feature Germans who are not only Nazis, but Nazis who, like Ricky, remain hell-bent on their quest for world domination. It's Not Cricket is a slapstick comedy hung around a tale about a dangerous underground Nazi, formerly reported killed, who escapes from Occupied Germany to Britain to join other Nazis still battling for victory. A low-budget starring vehicle for comic duo Basil Radford and Naunton Wayne, it had little impact. It was a fate shared by Snowbound, an adaptation of Hammond Innes' 1947 novel The Lonely Skier, various mysterious British, German, and Italian guests collect in a ski-lodge in the Dolomites with the common purpose of finding a cache of gold bullion hidden by the Nazis. Significantly, the German protagonist is different from the other nationalities: whereas the Italians and British villains pursue the gold for (understandable) reasons of greedy self-interest, the German is motivated by the fanatical desire to finance a 'Fourth Reich'. As he says, 'make no mistake my British friends, there will be another Reich, and this time it will spread all over the world.' Furthermore, unlike the other characters, the German has no redeeming qualities, and neither is another 'good' German character present to offset the negative Nazi image.

The most substantial example of a film portraying the ongoing threat of Nazism is Counterblast. Made by British National and released in the summer of 1948, Counterblast is a well-made melodrama about a Nazi activist in post-war Britain. Dr Bruckner (Mervyn Johns), a Nazi scientist held in a PoW camp in the home counties, is freed by the Nazi underground, and then directed by his Nazi controllers to continue his research into bacterial warfare. He has to invent a vaccine that will protect Germans from the bacterial weapon they intend to use in their attack on Britain. He resumes his researches by impersonating an Australian bacteriologist who by coincidence is about to arrive in Britain to take up a research job. Bruckner kills him, assumes his identity, and sets

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Welles, 1946, US), 'a chilling film that suggested that the world had not heard the last from German fascism.' (Morella, Joe; Epstein, Edward, Z., and Griggs, John, The Films of World War Two, New Jersey: Citadel Press, 1973: 238.)

Comedians Radford and Wayne first appeared in The Lady Vanishes (Alfred Hitchcock, 1938) as a pair of Englishmen, with a passion for cricket, called Charters and Caldicott. The success of the characters led to more film appearances and a radio show. (Brown, Geoff, Launder and Gilliat, Undon. BFI, 1977: 90.)

It did not, for instance, attract the attention of Billings, Kinematograph Weekly, 16 December 1948.

The theme of hidden Nazi treasure had been topical news. The Times (29 June 1945), for instance, reported from Salzburg that 'gold valued at more than £7 million and weighing over 4.5 tons, which was hidden on Ribbentrop's orders, has been found ... the gold was composed of British, American, and Italian coin and bars ... and was fitted into three large metal-lined wooden boxes and buried three feet deep.'

Snowbound was not mentioned by Billings, Kinematograph Weekly, 16 December 1948. Critics were indifferent to it: for instance, Kinematograph Weekly, 1 April 1948, concluded that the film was 'little more than a routine job'; the Manchester Guardian, 27 March 1948, reckoned that it was one of those thrillers which appears to mistake chaos for excitement; and To-Day's Cinema, 30 March 1948, feared that the film's early promise was 'hardly fulfilled in mass of half-hearted espionage and desultory dialogue.'
himself up in the laboratory allocated to the Australian. Bruckner succeeds in developing the vaccine, but before he has time to escape back to Germany, his true identity is discovered and he becomes a fugitive. The film closes with a police chase which climaxes with Bruckner climbing aboard a ship bound for Holland. The ship becomes his graveyard; it is in the process of being fumigated against rats, and he is gassed, which is a fitting gas-chamber death for a Nazi rat. (Kinematograph Weekly approvingly noted 'that poetic justice spectacularly overtakes the villain in the end'.

Counterblast harks back to a familiar wartime theme concerning spies in our midst, as represented, for example, by The Next of Kin (Thorold Dickinson, 1942), which presents a view of Britain riddled with Nazi spies, who are often professionals such as doctors and dentists. The similarity is all the stronger as the films share Mervyn Johns as an undercover Nazi and Nova Pilbeam as an innocent girl caught up in the intrigue. Although the earlier films are actually set when the war was in full swing, and Counterblast during the peace, the Nazis are just as belligerent in Counterblast. For them, defeat is just a setback, and the war carries on: 'we have made mistakes,' says one undercover Nazi, 'but while there's life in us we shall fight on'. The film is a full-blown story of undying Nazi ambition to enslave the world, which, so far as the Monthly Film Bulletin was concerned, was 'not only topical, but [one] which also seems rather disturbingly plausible' (a striking comment in view of the journal's dislike of this kind of sensational, populist fare). The Daily Herald found it predictable and superficial, dismissing it simply as 'mad German scientist prepares germ weapons for next war. Too long and none too convincing.'

Counterblast, unlike anti-Nazi films made in wartime, was made in the knowledge of Nazi wartime bestiality, and the film sensationally incorporates references to some of the Nazi brutalities that were exposed at the end of the war; for instance, a vicar who is reading a newspaper story about Bruckner's escape, says to his neighbour (who just happens to be Bruckner in disguise), 'You must remember the German doctor [Bruckner], the so-called scientist, the beast of Ravensbrück. He used human beings as guinea-pigs in the concentration camp, I don't think I ever read of a more horrible case, injecting women and children with plague and other foul diseases, and then to watch them die.'

Not only does Counterblast fuel its portrayal of the Nazi as evil by reminding audiences of wartime atrocities, but it implies that virtually all Germans are Nazis. This can be seen in a sub-plot that portrays nearly every German PoW as an unreformed Nazi; the only anti-Nazi inmate in

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52 Kinematograph Weekly, 27 May 1948.
54 Monthly Film Bulletin, vol. 15, no. 175, July 1948: 91.
55 Daily Herald, 11 June 1948.
the prison (and the only 'good' German in the film) is put before a kangaroo court of Nazis, sentenced to a beating up, and then murdered by Bruckner (disguised this time as a British doctor). Before dying at the hands of Bruckner, he despairs at the ongoing fanaticism of his fellow-countrymen saying that 'the truth is ... they lie even to themselves. They make believe that another Hitler will come. I lost all I had, even my wife. I spit, I told them Hitler made savages of the German people, slaves! To hell with Hitler ... to hell with all Hitlers!'

Counterblast, like It's Not Cricket and Snowbound, was not a notable box-office success. The trade press regarded it as a solid box-office earner: the Kinematograph Weekly assessed it as a 'good popular booking'; and The Daily Film Renter as a 'fast-moving efficient thriller with plenty of surface excitement for the popular theatre.' As expressed by Today's Cinema, the consensus was that the film was 'unpretentious thriller entertainment aimed exclusively at popular appreciation.' There was also the hint that audiences were beginning to tire of Nazi stories as the Kinematograph Weekly, for example, wondered 'whether or not the public has gone a little stale on Nazi spies.'

The fading ghost of Nazism

By the end of the forties the intensity of the anti-German backlash had begun to dissolve into a latent distrust and resentment. Attitudes mellowed with the passage of time, the desperate social and economic plight of Germany, and the growing threat of communism. Bark and Gress have argued that 'in hindsight Allied resentment at the Germans for having started a war and causing untold misery, ruin, and death, disappeared remarkably swiftly. The spectacle of millions of desperate, starving men, women, and children in Germany, the spectre of a highly literate, bureaucratic, and complex modern society reduced in many cases to less than subsistence level, evoked pity rather than contempt, even though their predicament was directly caused by their own leaders.'

Two films appeared at the end of the forties which are indicative of those changing attitudes. Whereas the Nazi films discussed so far are obsessed with the idea that Nazis remain a threat, Portrait from Life (Terence Fisher, 1948) and The Angel with the Trumpet (Anthony Bushell, 1950) relate Nazism as a spent force, and, in the case of Portrait from Life, also show the horrors of life in post-war Germany, the only British film of the period to do so.

56 Today's Cinema, 21 May 1948.
57 Kinematograph Weekly, 27 May 1948.
59 Hollywood, so often the trendsetter for British films, had made at least three films set in Occupied Germany, all of which were released in Britain. For example, A Foreign Affair (Billy Wilder, 1948), Berlin Express (Jacques Tourneur, 1948), and The Search (Fred Zinnemann, 1948).
*Portrait from Life*, released in December 1948, is a well-crafted film based on an original story by David Evans and adapted for screen by experienced writers Frank Harvey, and Muriel and Sydney Box. Director Terence Fisher, now best known for his Hammer Horror films, had been an editor for thirteen years before cutting his teeth as a director on three short films made in 1947 and 1948, before making *Portrait from Life*, his first full-length directorial credit. It did not do notably well with audiences, but did receive some encouraging notices: *Kinematograph Weekly*, for instance, thought that 'the acting and direction are much above average and more than compensate for the few loose ends,' concluding that the film was 'novel, topical and occasionally exciting, it's not only a credit to Gainsborough, but a potential box-office turn-up,' *The News of the World* summed it up as a 'well made film, though rather a grim one', and the *Daily Express* regarded it as a 'tense little film.'

Major Lawrence of the Control Commission (Guy Rolfe), an archetypal version of the quietly charming, understated officer-type, arrives back in London on leave from duty with the British Occupation force in Germany. He wanders into an exhibition of war paintings. Inside, he is struck by a portrait of a young girl, a displaced person (DP), leaning on a gate; it is entitled 'Hildegard'. While he is deliberating on the picture, Professor Menzel, a Jewish refugee from Austria (Arnold Marle), also discovers the painting. Astonished, he tells Lawrence that it is his daughter whom he has not seen since 1938 when he left for Britain prior to the Germans invading Austria. With time on his hands and a growing fixation about the girl in the portrait, Lawrence decides to help the professor find his daughter. They start by tracking down the artist, a drunk who soon dies, and establish that she was living in a DP camp.

Lawrence prematurely returns to Germany and uses his remaining leave to search for the girl, and the rest of the film (the bulk of it) is set in German DP camps. He starts his search for the girl with the British Red Cross, but when it cannot help he goes on a mad ten day search around twenty or so camps. Finally he finds a girl who looks likes Hildegard (Mai Zetterling), but confusingly she is apparently a German girl living with her parents, the Hendlmanns (Herbert Lom and Sybilla Binder). She seems oddly nervous and Lawrence is suspicious. Through a combination of flashbacks and contemporary scenes, it emerges that the Hendlmanns are not her real parents at all, but fugitive Nazi war criminals. At the end of the war they assumed the identity of a Sudeten German family called Hendlmann who had been 'liquidated' by the Nazis. The Hendlmanns though, had had a daughter, and so, as Hendlmann puts it, they 'had to have one as well'. By chance

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60 See, for instance, Quinlan, *Quinlan's Film Directors*: 93.


63 *Daily Express*, 17 December 1948.
they came across Hildegard, a refugee liberated from a concentration camp, suffering from amnesia, and the 'Hendlmanns' forcibly adopted her as their daughter, and Hildegard appears to accept them as her parents. The Hendlmanns keep the British authorities fooled until the arrival of Lawrence. Once 'Hendlmann' realises that Lawrence suspects him, he locks Hildegard away in a secret Nazi bunker, and pretends she has run away. The film reaches its climax when Hendlmann beats to death an overly inquisitive German who finds the secret hideaway. A search party from the camp then finds both his dead body and the bunker with Hildegard safe and well inside. Hendlmann is denounced, and Hildegard, with the memory-jogging aid of some childhood toys sent over by her father, begins to remember who she really is. Inevitably there is the flicker of romance between Lawrence and Hildegard, and the film ends on the happy note that she can accompany him to England (and presumably enjoy a better reception than Frieda had).

*Portrait from Life* sketches the tragedy of life in Germany in the aftermath of war; for the *News of the World* it was a 'sincere attempt to extract drama and romance from post-war Germany.' The biggest source of misery was the shortage of food in the Western Zones, a problem especially acute in the first two years of peace. Food intake was pitiful: tens of thousands of deaths were caused by starvation or the consequences of emaciation, and most of the population lived in a state of hunger-induced exhaustion. Chronic shortages of other essential goods, fuel, and housing, contributed to the despair, and whole families were crowded in underground bunkers without light or water. Clothes and medicines were un procurable, and money had lost its value. The result was profound demoralisation.

Unparalleled population movements contributed to the chaos. In the wake of the advance of the Red Army some six million Germans fled westwards of which about one million died, a migration compounded by a second wave of Germans moving from east to west 'swelling the population of all four Allied zones by about 10 millions.' On top of this were one million soldiers held in captivity by the Allies and another million who were missing, and there were also some ten million imported foreign workers who suddenly found themselves at liberty, and who then struggled to make the long trek home. The monumental scale of the population movements, combined with the collapse of the administrative machinery of the state, meant millions of people had little idea of

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65 See, for example, Bark and Gress, *From Shadow to Substance 1945-63*: 130-131.
67 Malzahn, Manfred, *Germany 1945-1949: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1991): 134. The reconstituted states of Poland and Czechoslovakia, whose populations had suffered appalling under the German policy of Lebensraum, were 'keen to get rid of the Germans left in their territory'. The western Allies had agreed to this policy in principle and had to accept them. The bitter and brutal expulsion of these Germans cost an estimated 2 million lives. (Malzahn: 134.)
the whereabouts of relatives and loved ones, or whether they were dead or alive. The Red Cross became the central clearing house for enquiries, and the magnitude of its task is illustrated by the fact that by October 1946 it had received approximately eight million requests to locate missing persons.69

The central storyline in Portrait from Life - the search for a lost relative - poignantly personalised the wretched plight of much of the German population. Most effective are the scenes where Lawrence trawls a series of camps in his search for Hildegard. He describes those ten days as 'more like a nightmare than the real thing', and the film visually tries to evoke that nightmare image. Using both actual footage and realistic reconstructions of the camps, there is a rapid sequence of shots of any number of camps, all teeming with hungry, depressed, shadowy, tragic inmates. Lawrence meets some of these lost souls, many of whom are driven to tell pathetically obvious lies to try and please Lawrence in the hope of securing material reward. Some reviewers considered the film's evocation of DP camps to be authentic: Kinematograph Weekly, for example, praised its 'accurate impressions of life in a displaced person's camp';70 and the Monthly Film Bulletin was impressed with its 'realistic glimpses of camp life.'71

The film hints at the breakdown of moral codes, corruption, and the cheapness of life as people were forced, in order to survive, into trading anything on the black market that flourished between the occupiers (especially the relatively well-off Americans) and occupied. As Grosser has written, 'soldiers' rations of cigarettes and coffee could buy anything from Leica cameras to sex.'72 Portrait from Life coyly acknowledges such trade; a few cigarettes can buy information, and a few more can buy a girl. For the price of a mere fifty cigarettes the artist (who painted Hildegard) could take her to a secluded woodland spot for an afternoon to use as a model, a scenario which has a distinct undercurrent of sexual prostitution. Similarly, when Hildegard disappears, her 'father' insinuates that she ran away because Lawrence was taking advantage of her, which is a situation that some assembled British officers obviously recognise. Hendlmann, although faking a fatherly concern for Hildegard's welfare, convincingly argues that the camps are not 'like civilised countries' and consequently 'pretty girls' need protecting. The film unconsciously endorses this as for all his respectability, Lawrence (and another British officer who gets involved through a sub-plot) have a decidedly voyeuristic interest in the pretty and vulnerable Hildegard.

Portrait from Life's projection of conditions within Germany sets it well apart from the other

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69 Bark and Gress, From Shadow to Substance 1945-63: 41.
70 Kinematograph Weekly, 23 December 1948.
72 Grosser, Germany in Our Time: 48, 52.
German-themed films which have no interest in Germany itself. Significantly, Portrait from Life is also different in its presentation of the Nazi; Hendlmann, the Nazi protagonist, unlike the key Nazi characters in the other films, does not express any fanatical belief about Nazism or plot to fight another day. Certainly he does not like the Allies - he is sullenly resentful in defeat - and he remains ruthless enough to murder a man and kidnap Hildegard, but his actions are motivated by personal survival rather than to further the Nazi cause.

_Portion from Life_ is also distinctive in the way it balances out the Nazi character with anti-Nazi Germans. The narrative establishes that there were wartime Germans (or at least half-Germans) who resisted the Nazis, and were persecuted for their actions. The film tells, for instance, how the real Hendlmann, a 'Sudeten, half-German half-Czech', suffered five years political imprisonment in Ravensbrück, and how his wife and daughter were in Auschwitz for two years before they were all 'liquidated'. Other Germans who live in the camp are also portrayed as 'good'; they pose no threat to the British, and they help run the camp and in so doing are on affable terms with the British administrators. Moreover, when the underground Nazi bunker is discovered, these Germans display a healthy bitterness towards the Nazi High Command which built it. Hildegard might also be seen as an advertisement for the 'good' German. Although she is Austrian (Austria being seen at the time as a victim of German aggression) she might easily pass for German, as indeed she does until her true identity is established. In the first place, the brief explanation of her Austrian origins is easily missed (most reviewers omitted any reference to her nationality, often just calling her a DP). In the second place, Zetterling's Hildegard is interchangeable with her Frieda, and audiences must have been aware of this. Hildegard, like Frieda, embodies the iconography of the pretty blonde Aryan Fraulein. And also, similarly to Frieda, Hildegard is designed to attract sympathy, being pretty, honourable and endearing, as the _Daily Express_ evidences in its description of her as a 'touchingly lovely waif'. However, Hildegard is different from Frieda in one crucial aspect: whereas Frieda has a dubious, shadowy past association with Nazism, Hildegard is not tainted by such a history. Hildegard is unambiguously a victim of Nazism, a stance further established by her youth, as she would have been too young to assume any responsibility for the rise of Nazis. A balanced projection of Germans as good and bad was also the message of Hollywood's _Berlin Express_. A thriller set chiefly amid the post-war ruins of Frankfurt, the story revolves around the struggle between the Occupying powers (with the aid of 'good' Germans) to build a peaceful new Germany, and the attempts by villainous Nazis to sabotage this and continue their fight for the Nazi

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73 Churchill and other officials 'took up the cause of Austria by including the country among the nations that were the victims of aggression.' (Malzahn, _Germany 1945-1949_; 55.)

74 In her autobiography Zetterling complains how her role in Portrait from Life signified she had become typecast as a refugee. She bemoaned that 'I must have trudged, looking pathetic, through more bombed cities and rehabilitation camps than any other living actress.' She was to play another refugee in the following year in The Lost People, which will be discussed shortly. (_Zetterling, All Those Yesterdays_; 83.)

75 _Daily Express_, 17 December 1948.
Like Portrait from Life, The Angel with the Trumpet presents the Nazi as a spent force. Its roots go back to the war, as it is based on a 1944 novel by Austrian Ernst Lothar, an anti-Nazi refugee from the 1938 Anschluss who settled in America. An Austrian film adaptation was made in 1948 (not released in Britain), and the same producer went on to produce the British version, directed by Antony Bushell. It was Bushell's directorial debut, the film being one of a small series of 'actor-turned-director' productions that Alexander Korda encouraged at that time. It features accomplished British actress Eileen Herlie who plays the leading part of Henrietta Alt, the indomitable matriarch at the centre of the narrative. While the film does have a certain mesmerising compulsion arising from its floridity and self-conscious solemnity, it is an over long, overblown oddity. 'It meanders along', as the Daily Express said, 'like a river which has forgotten which ocean it is heading for.' Gavin Lambert confined it, with three other films, to 'Freaks Corner' and also accused the film-makers of 'fraudulent conversion' for not crediting the Austrian technicians involved. In places its production quality is severely limited: as the Monthly Film Bulletin rightly pointed out, it is 'an astonishing, possibly unique piece of jobbery ... it is padded out with long stretches of the original [Austrian version] ... the resulting impression of glue and string is reinforced by some poor dialogue and incompetent direction.' Some commentators found merit in the film though: Speed argued that despite being 'slow, long and measured' it was also 'graceful with a certain distinction'; and Kinematograph Weekly found it 'generously endowed with feminine appeal' and therefore had 'excellent general and family appeal.'

The monumental saga of the lives of the fictional Alt family are woven into the lives of real historical figures and events. Briefly, and in the words of The Times, the story begins in 'the days of Mayerling and does not stop until after the last bomb has fallen on Vienna in the last war. It is a kind of cavalcade of the Austro-Hungarian Empire as seen through the earnest eyes of an English studio ... it traces the rise, progress, and fall of the House of Alt, respectable middle-class Viennese with a tradition for making pianos. The first third or so of the saga is devoted to the years that led up the Great War, and the rest is taken up with the aftermath of that war and the rise of Nazism in

78 Daily Express, 17 February 1950.
79 Lambert, Gavin, 'As They Go', Sequence, Summer, 1950: 16.
81 Kinematograph Weekly, 16 February 1950.
82 The Times, 17 February 1950.
the thirties. The Second World War is crammed into a few minutes at the end, but it is a highly charged few minutes and crucial to the project of the film.

The film presumes that Austria was a victim of Nazi aggression, although it does acknowledge that the Nazis had their supporters. A crucial element to the story is how one of the Alt sons becomes a Nazi (despite being part Jewish) and the other remains a flawlessly good son. The film goes to some length to signify that the Nazi son, Hermann, is not a typical or normal Austrian: in the Great War he displays a disturbingly aggressive nationalism; he is greedy for wealth yet is condescending towards those who actually generate it; he gets into debt over shady arms deals and blackmails his mother into bailing him out; and for good measure he is also unpleasantly vain. The film reaches its grimmest point when Hermann's fellow Nazis arrive at the Alt home to arrest his mother (whose father is Jewish) for not flying the Nazi flag and then accuse her of having Jewish ancestry. Rather than succumb to Nazi tyranny, she hurls herself to her death from an upstairs window.

*The Angel with the Trumpet* leaves the viewer with the impression that it is ambitiously trying to be a large canvas about war, death, regeneration, and the vicissitudes of fate, all distinctive aftermath preoccupations. The laboured and self-conscious moral of the film is that despite man's occasional descent into fascism and war, the forces of good are greater, and civilised values will prevail. An angel and trumpet make up the trademark for the Alt's piano business symbolising the forces for good of God and Art. Once the dust from the Second World War has settled, the Alts intend to resume piano production, and this is a symbolic statement of confidence in man's future. As the closing address says, 'for almost two hundred years [the Alts have made] pianos in spite of war, poverty, hunger, simply because they believed what they were doing was more important, more lasting than those other things ... if ever you should lose hope, if ever you feel that the madness of the world is too much for you, then remember the advice of the man who began it. When in doubt, go by your trademark, the trumpet says make music, the angel says serve God.'

**New dangers on the European horizon**

The remaining European-themed aftermath films made at the end of the forties - *Children of Chance* (Luigi Zampa, 1949), *The Lost People* and *The Third Man* - background Germany and instead concern themselves with new dangers to European stability. *Children of Chance* is apparently (it has not been possible to view a copy) a 'story of "chance" children left behind by the Allied Forces and cared for by a humanitarian priest.' An Italian-British co-production, two versions were made with different casts, one in Italian, the other in English. An unusual experiment at getting around the language barrier of foreign films, it seems to have been of a poor quality.

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83 *Daily Film Renter*, 10 October 1949.

84 *Speed, Film Review*, 1949: 99.
and soon forgotten.

A more important film is Gainsborough's *The Lost People*. It is loosely adapted from *Cockpit*, an experimental play by Bridget Boland, which she wrote 'while serving in occupied Germany, just after the war.' It was first staged in London in February 1948 and ran for two months, and while it was not a big commercial success it was valued as a document that 'can take the mind beyond the theatre to the troubled heart of post-war Europe.' Boland also did the screen adaptation, with additional scenes written (and directed) by Muriel Box.

The story is almost entirely set within a British-run transit camp (an old theatre) in Germany soon after the end of the war, and assembled in the camp awaiting repatriation are a cross-section of European races (Germans apart), ideologies, and religions. The camp, though, is not a place of harmony, but a seething battlefield of racial, national and cultural prejudices and hatreds. The idea of the scenario was to allegorise Europe, and portray it as a continent of warring factions. Although set in May 1945 it was, as will be shown, a starkly topical commentary on the state of Europe at the end of 1949, when the film was released.

The story begins with a British officer, Captain Ridley (Dennis Price), arriving in Germany to take over the running of the transit camp, and since he is new to Germany he is not prepared for the madhouse he inherits. Ridley also inherits the tough and experienced Sergeant Barnes (played by William Hartnell who was to become typecast in this kind of character), who patiently explains to his new superior that running the camp is 'murder'. As he tells Ridley, 'you need to be a cross between a lion-tamer and King Solomon to try and sort this little lot out.' Barnes proudly shows off to the newcomer how he's already sorted out, and cordoned off, the squabbling refugees into groups such as 'white Russians', 'Greek exiles', 'Poles', and 'Eyeties'. The rest of the film is a patchwork of sub-plots framed around the prejudices and rivalries of the various factions. An assortment of hatreds and contentious issues are identified, such as that between Jewish and non-Jewish Poles. In a cutting dialogue two Polish women dispute ownership of a bag: the non-Jewish Pole arraigns; the Jewish Pole 'you ghetto Yid - look at all the baggages she's got that's a Jew for you!' The Jewish Pole sarcastically retorts 'I am a Jewess so I must have stolen it [the bag]', and she then accuses the other. 'I say I'm Polish [but] ... it is the Poles I hate more than any other people in the world. That is what the country we live in means to us Jews!' Two French refugees violently

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85 Boland, Bridget *Cockpit*, in Trewin, J.C. (ed.), *Plays of the Year* (London: Paul Elek, 1949). It was Boland's first play, although she had been writing screenplays from 1937, such as *Gaslight* (Thorold Dickinson, 1939). Later credits include *War and Peace* (King Vidor/Mario Soldati, 1956, US/Italy) and *Anne of the Thousand Days* (Charles Jarrott, 1969). (St. Claire Byrne, Muriel (ed.), *The Lisle Letters: An Abridgement* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1985): 1.)

86 Variety, 7 October 1949.

87 Trewin, *Plays of the Year*: 7, 26.

denounce each other for collaborating with the Nazis. Marie (Siobhan McKenna), a communist Resistance fighter, accuses a fellow countryman of aiding the Nazis by growing food for them, and in turn he accuses her of helping the Germans by working in a munitions factory. Similarly, Slavs attack each other over alleged pro-German activities in wartime Yugoslavia. The only national group that are at peace with themselves and others are the Dutch. As Barnes says, 'You can put the Dutch anywhere'.

The occasional references to Germans show them as unrepentant and arrogant in defeat. The owner of the theatre (the only German character, and he only appears briefly)\textsuperscript{89} displays no remorse at all for the war and contemptuously calls the foreign DPs 'the scum of the earth'. The audience is also told that the surrounding townsfolk are hostile to giving the required levy of food for the camp. There are constant reminders of Nazi atrocities, such as the priest whose mangled hands are testament to Nazi torture, and refugees who have concentration camp numbers prominently tattooed on their bodies. At one point Ridley asks 'if there is any fresh air left in Germany?' But while audiences are not allowed to forget Nazi horrors, Germans are not depicted as still harbouring Nazi aspirations, but, as in Portrait from Life, suspicious and hostile.

Underlying the film's image of a fractured and unstable Europe are cold war preoccupations and anxieties. Communists are identified as a disruptive force; led by the French communist Marie, they plot to wrest control of the camp from Ridley by seizing control of food supplies, although in the event the plan fails. Russia is clearly identified as a looming threat to Europe: a non-communist Polish professor, for instance, fears persecution at the hands of the Russians. If Poles are dispatched eastwards in the same convoy as the Russians, he declares 'it will be murder, they will kill us'. When Ridley naively tries to impress on him that the Russians are allies, the Pole insists 'I tell you the Russians are my enemies. They took one half of my country, Germany the other half... but now the whole country is under their [Russia's] heel. They do not need a Tsar to be imperialist.' The sense of the bipolarisation of Europe into east and west is symbolised by the straightforward choice of destination Ridley offers the DPs; he simply divides the DPs into two convoys, 'east-bound and west-bound'.

The antagonism between the various groups only subsides when a case of Bubonic plague is discovered. Faced with a common enemy the quarrelling parties pull together for the common good, as they appeared to do in the face of the Nazi threat. However, once it is announced that the diagnosis is incorrect and they are not threatened by the plague, they are at each other's throats once more. This time, though, it accidentally results in the death of an innocent young refugee called Lilli (Mai Zetterling, in her third typecast role as a European refugee). To draw attention to the futility of her death, Ridley lays out her body before the assembled DPs, and makes a plea for

\textsuperscript{89} The play gives a slightly higher profile to Germans, including the presence of German corpses, killed by vengeful DPs.
peace. He regrets that Lilli's death was a consequence of their prejudices and fears being greater than their common sense, and he concludes you can live in peace and harmony if you want it badly enough. I've done all I can, I cannot do any more. Now it is up to you, peace or war, madness or sanity. Only you can decide, and when the choice comes, I hope you will remember her.'

_The Lost People_ was a dramatic expression of the British perception that post-war Europe was an embittered, fractious continent upon which Britain looked with exasperation from the outside. _Today's Cinema_ outlined the film's contemporary relevance: _The Lost People_ has peculiar topicality through the Strasbourg conference [a move towards European federation] for it tells a tale of Europeans who cannot sink their bitter differences except at a time of common danger. The spirit of hate and distrust that has permeated the world since the war ended is clearly exemplified here by reference to problems that seem no nearer solution than they did at the time recreated. The reviewer concluded that the film was 'a gloomy, depressing essay into world politics', and other reviewers agreed. _Kinematograph Weekly_, for instance, observed that 'to add to its cheerlessness, its moral is, "there is nothing like a bubonic plague to bring out the best in DPs". Who said there is hope for Europe?' The pessimism of the film was seen as a handicap to its box-office career; _Variety_, for example, believed that despite 'its satisfying dramatic entertainment ... its depressing subject will limit its appeal.'

For these critics then, _The Lost People_ portrayed an image of a warring Europe that was too close for comfort. This was not surprising as by late summer 1949 when it was released, hopes for a post-war future of peace in Europe were well and truly dashed as the cold war atmosphere gripped Europe. By the time of the Berlin blockade in June 1948, 'it was evident that Russia, rather than the old threat of Germany, was viewed as the potential enemy. The cold war was well under way.' It seemed that no sooner was the war against fascism over, than there was depressing talk of another world war, a possibility that was discussed in parliament as early as January 1948. In a foreign affairs debate, for example, Prime Minister Attlee declared 'there is general apprehension at the state of the world two and a half years after the war. I do not think it to be good talking of war. On the other hand there is no good shutting our eyes to the possibility.'

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90 _Today's Cinema_, 19 August 1949.

91 _Kinematograph Weekly_, 25 August 1949.

92 The play is more depressing than the film; the dialogue is harder-hitting and it lacks the fun of the romance between Ridley and Marie. The original allegoric title, _Cockpit_, also suggests the play's grittier message.

93 _Variety_, 7 September 1949. Its prediction was correct, as the film did not achieve any notable success at the box-office.

94 Morgan, _The People's Peace: British History 1945-1989_, 58.

95 Reported in the _Daily Express_, 24 January 1948.
The manner of The Lost People's portrayal of Europe echoed some deep-seated British attitudes towards Europe. There was a sense that, in view of its long history of conflicts, Europe was incapable of living without warring. For Morgan, the Foreign Office's view was that 'the centuries of Franco-German hostility dating from the time of Charlemagne, the urge of Germans for reunification with their fellow-nationals in the East, the internal divisions of Belgium over language and the monarchy, the post-fascist weakness of Italy, the comparative irrelevance of the Dutch and Luxembourgeois, would ensure that all grand designs for closer unity would founder.'

The British also enjoyed a feeling of moral and political superiority over Europe, and the assumption that Britain was, or should be, the leader of Europe, and these were sentiments well expressed in The Lost People. A smug implication running through The Lost People is that the British are above the petty and parochial squabbles of the Europeans, but like school masters they are occasionally obliged to step in and restore order. As Ridley retorts when Marie accuses the English of meddling unsuccessfully in European affairs for the last 500 years, 'we're heartily sick of having to come and clear up your muddles. As far as I'm concerned you can all stew in your own juice. My job's over when I've sorted out this tangle [the DP camp], and after that you can look after yourselves.'

Ridley stands as evidence for Morgan's argument that the war reinforced a sense of national self-sufficiency and independence which led, among other things, to a condescending view of Europe. Morgan's description of popular attitudes in the late forties perfectly describes the underlying values in The Lost People. The French, he writes, 'were patronisingly regarded as politically disorganised, the Low Countries as relatively trivial, and Germany and Italy as defeated enemies who needed to be taught a lesson... The famous football match at Hampden Park, Glasgow, in 1947, in which Great Britain comprehensively defeated a "rest of Europe" side summed up much of the popular psychology. European culture was commonly presented in the newspapers in terms of simple historical stereotypes, and only of interest to a few unrepresentative intellectuals such as art or film critics. Bevin and the British did not believe there to be a coherent European political culture at all.'

For Ridley (Britain), the shock was that the DPs (the rest of Europe) rejected the British style of democracy that he thought they had all been fighting for. When the communists try to persuade Ridley that the 'fascists' should not get food, he exclaims that 'democracy is what you've been fighting for, and democracy is what you're going to get! And that includes food for people who don't agree with you.' Furthermore, hostility to British political ideals is not restricted to outspoken and volatile communists: when Marie declares to the assembled DPs that Europe does not want a

British-organised peace, the whole camp cheers, and the two Britons are isolated with only their guns for protection.

*The Lost People* is an intriguing snapshot of the volatile couple of years that followed in the wake of the war before Europe consolidated into a more predictable bipolar balance of power. Germany is no longer the focus of attention as in earlier films like *Frieda* and *Counterblast*, but neither is *The Lost People* a 'cold war' film. It does not simplistically divide Europeans into good and bad according to whether or not they are communist, but rather addresses, from an insular British stance, the wider question of European disarray. The film incorporates a number of inter-related themes: it opens up the troubling question of the wartime divisions that existed both between and within Allied nations; it acknowledges the breakdown of the wartime alliance, as well as relating the tension caused by the spread of communism; and it is also a reminder of Britain's sense of superiority over its European neighbours.

**Vienna: microcosm of Europe**

The most celebrated film about the aftermath of war in Europe is, and was, *The Third Man*, directed by Carol Reed and written by Graham Greene. A film-noir style thriller set in occupied Vienna, this film is for many, like Jeffrey Richards, a masterpiece. For him *The Third Man* was one of the peaks of post-war film-making and remains a flawlessly crafted, timelessly perfect work of art. It was the first of four proposed Anglo-American productions between Korda and the Hollywood mogul David O. Selznick, and the agreement was that they would be made in Britain or Europe and distributed in the US by Selznick. Korda was responsible for first bringing together Reed and Greene when they made *The Fallen Idol* (1948), and its success led to their collaboration on *The Third Man*. Reed at this time was a highly respected director who had achieved a string of popular and critical hits, including *The Stars Look Down* (1939), *The Way Ahead* (1944), and *Odd Man Out* (1947), as well as *The Fallen Idol*. Greene had been involved in cinema as a critic of the *Spectator* from 1935-40, and his career as a screenwriter 'began rather unsatisfactorily in 1937'. He only became deeply involved in the scripting of films with the two Reed collaborations, and the Boulting brothers' *Brighton Rock* (John Boulting, 1948). The third major talent involved in *The Third Man* was Orson Welles, whose powerful characterisation of Harry Lime dominates the film, and who contributed some dialogue, such as the famous 'cuckoo clock' speech, and arguably some direction.

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100 There is some debate as to Welles' directorial influence on the film; David Shipman, for example, argues that Welles hypnotised Reed into his own style. (Shipman, David, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Cinema*, London: Secker and Warburg, 1975: 607.) Others, such as Philip Kemp, consider it Reed's film on the grounds that his distinctive style was already established in *Odd Man Out*. (Kemp, Philip, 'Retrospective' *Sight and Sound*, April 1994: 54,55.)
Kulik writes how since the end of the war Korda had been 'gathering ideas for a film about the aftermath of war in a European city', and after trying his ideas out on Reed and Greene 'they agreed on the background - occupied Vienna'. Greene was despatched to Vienna in February 1948 for inspiration, famously taking with him the kernel of a story idea written twenty years previously on the back of an envelope. From this he wrote a short novel, which he then adapted into a screenplay. Filming started on location in Vienna in September 1948.

Vienna was a choice setting for a film seeking to show the aftermath of war in Europe. For the first couple of years it typified many aspects of the post-war social, political and economic milieu. Like much of the rest of war-ravaged Europe, Vienna had been, as the narrator in the film says, 'bombed about a bit', and the city similarly suffered from acute shortages, a flourishing black-market, and an influx of refugees. Ellwood, for instance, writes about that 'the most basic necessities were lacking, even nails to hold down coffin lids. With the [1945/46] winter approaching no household coal was available ... for clothing the Viennese would have to depend on what could be converted from rags ... in the British zone ... less than 900 calories were said to be available in Vienna in May [1946], with supplies even at that level about to end.' Austria, like Germany, was occupied - until 1955 - by the four victorious powers, and also like Germany, the capital city was deep in the heart of Soviet controlled territory. (Urgent topicality was added to the film as the Berlin Blockade started three months before shooting began.) Vienna, whose size and importance was quite out of proportion to the rest of the country as consequence of its past role as the capital of the defunct Austro-Hungarian Empire, was divided, like Berlin, into four occupied sectors. Unlike Berlin, though, it had an internationally policed centre, the inner stadt, which provided the setting for The Third Man.

The struggle for the political control of Austria encompassed a spectrum of east-west tensions. As Elisabeth Barker has written, 'from 1945 onwards [it was] one of the sensitive points in the overall strategic and political confrontation between the Soviet Union and the west.' It was a situation recognised by the Manchester Guardian, which commented how Vienna 'the centre of the cold war ... the city has become the Lisbon and Stockholm of the old war rolled into one ... more than twenty intelligence and security organisations are believed to be operating in Vienna. Here is a tentative list: quite legitimately the four occupation powers and the Austrian government; then there are the four main political parties, the two Germanies, at least four countries of the Eastern


102 Ellwood, David, Rebuilding Europe: Western Europe, America and Post-war Reconstruction (London: Longman, 1992): 31, 35. By comparison, the population in the British zone in Germany was getting an average of 1,400 calories per day which was 'less than half that available in Britain and was considered as barely above starvation'. (Bark, and Gress, From Shadow to Substance 1945-63: 131.)

block and Yugoslavia, the clandestine Nazis, and a "neutral" group made up of Swiss, Jews etc.\textsuperscript{104}

Unlike most Anglo-American productions of the time, such as The Mudlark (Jean Negulesco, 1950), The Third Man was not merely a Hollywood film made in Britain, but very much a British film. Production histories of the film enjoy re-telling how Reed and Greene artfully resisted changes demanded by Selznick, who wanted to give the film a more patriotically American slant. At one point, for instance, Selznick complained of the high profile of the British in the film: 'the script', he moaned, 'is written as though England were the sole occupying power of Vienna'.\textsuperscript{105} On another occasion he suspiciously declared that Greene and Reed were trying 'to foist a piece of British propaganda upon the entire world.'\textsuperscript{106}

The film is also an unusual example of a British film with a high degree of internationalism, a quality largely attributable to Reed.\textsuperscript{107} Apart from the British, The Third Man gives four other national groups more than token representation. There is a Czech (Anna Schmidt), a Romanian (Popescu), a Russian (Brodski), two Americans (Harry Lime and Holly Martins) and several Austrians (the porter, 'Baron' Kurtz, and Dr Winkel). Germans though, as in The Lost People, are absent. The use of foreign dialogue is also unusual in British films of the period, a quality again attributable to Reed.\textsuperscript{108} The cast is multi-national, with French, British, American, German, and Austrian actors, and the film had an unusual internationalism. As the Manchester Guardian wrote, 'few, if any, other British or American films have seemed so much at home in a thoroughly foreign setting; it is, in part at least, a matter of a particularly judicious and subtle use of German speech and credibly broken English.'\textsuperscript{109}

The Third Man was a legendary critical and commercial success, and it consolidated Reed's position as a pre-eminent British director, ensuring that he 'occupied a pinnacle that no English director other than Hitchcock had attained.'\textsuperscript{110} The film was a world-wide hit and made Selznick financially healthy again.\textsuperscript{111} In Britain it was the absolute box-office winner of 1949, and was a

\textsuperscript{104} Manchester Guardian, 11 March 1950.


\textsuperscript{107} Robert Moss, for example, writes how 'among the many other trademarks that Reed had cultivated by 1949 was an intense internationalism.' (Moss, Robert, The Films of Carol Reed, London: Macmillan, 1987: 192.)

\textsuperscript{108} See, for example, Sarris, Andrew, 'Carol Reed in the Context of his Time', Film Culture, vol 3, 1957: 13.

\textsuperscript{109} Manchester Guardian, 2 September 1949.

\textsuperscript{110} Moss, The Films of Carol Reed: 193.

\textsuperscript{111} Thomson, Showman: 539.
rare example of a film which achieved the endorsement of both the mass audience and the cineastes. The *Daily Mail*, for instance, lauded Reed's achievement by rhetorically asking 'what is the secret of this man who has the approval of the highbrows, the professional adulation of his rivals, and still gives the ninepennies a storming entertainment?'\(^\text{112}\) It won a host of awards taking both the Grand Prix and the Prize for Best Director at Cannes in 1949, the US Directors Guild Quarterly Award in 1949, the Academy Award [Robert Krasker] for best black and white cinematography in 1950, and Second Prize at Copenhagen in 1950.\(^\text{113}\) Reed also won the British Film of the Year Award for the third time running, and Anton Karas' 'Harry Lime Theme' became a global phenomenal and made Karas an international star.\(^\text{114}\)

On a narrative level *The Third Man* is about a young American writer of cheap Western novels, Holly Martins (Joseph Cotten), who arrives in western occupied Vienna to take up a job offered by his childhood friend Harry Lime (Orson Welles), also an American. As far as Martins knows, his friend runs a hospital charity in Vienna, and he is to be employed writing publicity material for it. However, no sooner has Martins arrived than he learns that Lime has been killed in a car accident and is about to be buried. Martins also hears from Major Calloway (Trevor Howard), a British military policeman, that Lime, far from being a philanthropist, was in fact a notorious black-marketeer. Martins cannot accept this allegation, and seeks to clear his friend's name. He meets some of Lime's shifty friends - Popescu, Baron Kurtz and Doctor Winkel - who were all at the scene of the accident, but minor discrepancies in their accounts raise Martins' suspicions about the nature of the 'accident'. Their slant on events also fundamentally conflicts with another witness, the porter at the flats where Lime lived. He claims there were three men at the roadside where Lime was killed, whereas Popescu, Kurtz and Winkel allege there were only two. Martins becomes fixated by the mysterious 'third man', and gradually becomes involved in a shadowy and dangerous criminal underworld which he does not understand. He resists believing that his friend Lime is a murdering and evil racketeer (he trades in stolen, and then lethally diluted, penicillin) until Calloway shows him indisputable forensic evidence.

Towards the end of the film, Lime makes a startling appearance, and it transpires that he faked his death and has since been hiding out in the Russian zone. Martins then has a tussle with his conscience as to where his loyalties lie: should he be socially responsible and help Calloway track Lime down, or remain loyal to his childhood friend? The issue is further complicated because of the spark of love between him and Anna Schmidt. Anna, a lonely and frightened Czech refugee

\(^\text{112}\) *Daily Mail*, 2 September 1949.

\(^\text{113}\) Adamson, *Graham Greene and Cinema*, 46.

living dangerously on false identification papers, was Lime's girlfriend, and despite the knowledge of Lime's evil-doing, she remains faithful to his memory. Consequently, she cannot accept that Martins could even consider siding with the police against Lime. Martins is finally persuaded to act as a decoy for the police after being shown the harrowing sight of the child victims of Lime's poisonous trade. In the ensuing police chase, Lime is pursued into the famous Viennese sewers and shot dead by Martins. After Lime's funeral, Martins waits for Anna at the end of a tree-lined avenue leading from the cemetery, but she walks straight past him as she cannot forgive Martins for causing Lime's death.

Decadence and decay

The central motif of the film is that Vienna, and the Europe it symbolised, has slid into a wartime aftermath of decadence and decay. This is established at the start by the narrator who announces that Vienna in 1949 is 'not the old Vienna before the war with its Strauss music, its glamour and easy charm. ' Today, he says, Vienna is in the classic period of the black market. As the narrator speaks the audience sees dismal, war-torn, streets peopled with shadowy figures and undercover dealers illicitly selling boots and watches, and there is the corpse of a black marketeer, an 'amateur' who could not stay the course 'like a professional'. Chronic shortages have forced Viennese citizens (and middle-class ones at that) to become embroiled in the black-market and racketeering, thus blurring the division between respectability and criminality. As Kurtz says to Martins, 'everybody in Vienna is [in some kind of racket]. We all sell cigarettes and that kind of thing ... I've sold things that would be unthinkable before the war.' References to poverty abound: Anna is pleased that Martins refuses her offer of whisky as she would prefer to sell the unopened bottle; in the Casanova Club a gaggle of prostitutes eye-up Martins, the American tourist with money to spare. Racketeers have introduced an atmosphere of suspicion and danger: when the innocent porter reluctantly agrees to talk to Martins about Lime's accident, he is promptly murdered; when Martins gets too near the truth, he too becomes a target for assassins.

It is not just the material deprivation, though, that has driven Vienna into a twilight existence, but also the consequences arising from the post-war occupation. At the start of the film, gentle fun is poked at the bureaucratic unworkability, and charade, of the joint administration of the inner stadt by the four occupiers. The narrator muses 'what a hope they had, all strangers to the place and none of them could speak the same language, except a sort of smattering of German, but fellahs on the whole did their best you know.' As the narrator speaks, the audience sees the absurd spectacle of American, French, Russian, and British soldiers driving around together in military jeeps

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115 In the original script Anna was Estonian, but was topically changed after Russia's takeover of Czechoslovakia in March 1948. It might also have been a reminder of Munich in 1938.

116 The voice of Reed in the British version, and of Cotten in the American version.

117 Crime and the black-market was also a preoccupation in other films, as will be shown in Chapter Six.
pretending to be an international police force. To audiences steeped in the growing cold war atmosphere, the sight of Soviet troops cooperating with the west must have been ironic. However, although the implication is that Vienna is as much a victim of international politics as it is of the material and moral deprivation caused by the war, the film clearly apportions guilt to the Soviets rather than the British. By deliberately raising the narrative profile of the Soviets, rather than the French or Americans, this theme is stressed. The Soviets are shown to be more concerned with pursuing political interests than establishing law and order, whereas the British are concerned with stamping out the gangsters in a quest to restore normality. The Russians are more interested in catching Anna, the Czech refugee, than criminals like Lime. Indeed the Soviets are prepared to offer Lime sanctuary from the British in exchange for information about political opponents, including Anna. By contrast, the British are sympathetic, even if they are obliged to be seen helping the Russians track her down. When Anna is arrested in a totalitarian-style night-time raid at the instigation of the Soviets by the international posse of police, a British soldier (Geoffrey Keen) cynically observes to Anna that the British have to go along with it because 'it's orders ... we can't go against protocol, and I don't know what protocol is.' Even the hardened Calloway is prepared to help Anna evade Soviet capture. Virtually all the references to the Soviets are contained within the Anna sub-plot, and the impression projected of the Russians is one of duplicity and callousness. Vienna is certainly suffering as a consequence of international politicking, but the root cause of this derives from the malign behaviour of the Russians.

The Third Man's handling of cold war themes is relatively constrained, especially when compared to the excesses of the contemporary cycle of Hollywood 'cold war' films, such as The Iron Curtain (William Wellman, 1948), I Married a Communist (Robert Stevenson, 1949), or The Red Menace (R.G Springsteen, 1949). One scholar has gone as far as to conclude that The Third Man goes against contemporary cold war orthodoxies because 'the Soviets are not portrayed as the cause of evil, Lime is not part of the Soviet Union's schemes', and furthermore, the evil Lime is an American. The film also lacks the moral certainty of cold war films with their unambiguous identification of friends and enemies, and unlike cold war films, The Third Man is immersed in the ramifications and fall-out from the Second World War. To some extent the film also puts the Soviets in a relatively positive light; they are at least seen cooperating with the other allied powers and respecting international protocol; and they could have kidnapped Anna rather than going through the lengthy process of trying to arrest her 'legally' according to international protocol. The

118 The film's portrayal of the Soviets was in fact 'softened' from Greene's original story. For example, the Russian ' heavies' in the original story 'were lightened in the film,' and 'there was to have been a scene showing the Russians kidnapping Anna. (Adamson, Graham Greene and Cinema: 64, 65.) According to Greene, such loaded images were avoided as they threatened to turn the film into a propagandist picture.' New York Times, 19 March 1950.

Third Man's lack of intrusive cold war mores is further evidenced by the fact that reviewers did not make any comments about the film's cold war content.\textsuperscript{120} It is wrong, therefore, to think of The Third Man primarily as a cold war film, as some writers have done.\textsuperscript{121}

In any case, the heart of the film lies not in the specifics of the plot as in its brooding, tense, and uncertain atmosphere, an atmosphere that derives as much from the ravages of the war against Nazism as from the cold war. Reed, and Oscar-winning cinematographer Krasker, create and maintain an image of Vienna as a shadowy, oppressive city of darkened streets, hidden danger, and threatening desolation. They achieved this using what was then fashionable film-noir style, enlisting such techniques as disorientating low-angle camerawork, night-time shooting, and disturbing chiaroscuro lighting. The film-makers sought to emphasise the city's devastation by contrasting its present ruined state with its grand imperial past. This is largely achieved through \textit{mise en scene}; in many scenes, amid the ruins of bombed-out buildings are glorious architectural references to its imperial past - broken statues, Greek columns, huge stately rooms, grand facades and stairways. Anton Karas' jangling zither music (he was discovered by Reed playing in Vienna) adds richly to the haunting texture. Reed enlists numerous other signifiers to suggest that 'decadence', as Moss writes, 'is all-pervasive [and that] the war has shattered the codes that the Viennese once lived by, and has replaced it with a \textit{modus vivendi} that is stripped of ethics or morality.'\textsuperscript{122}

Lime symbolises that condition; he is unremittingly depraved, an evil trader in death who is loyal to no one. To curry favour with the Russians he sacrifices Anna, and would have murdered his old friend Holly if it had been advantageous. For Lime, human lives are just distant 'dots' which can be murdered or exchanged for profit at will. He can be seen as the embodiment of the pre- and post-war totalitarian regimes that dominated the era, as Sarris has argued: 'Lime has renounced God, and identifies himself with all the cynical political leaders who exploit the masses.'\textsuperscript{123} When Lime justifies his activities to Martins in the famous Prater Wheel speech he says that 'governments talk of the people and the proletariat, and I talk about the suckers and the mugs. They have their five year plans and I have mine.' Sarris sees Lime as a 'self-conscious symptom of the time and place in which he lives', and that time and place is an 'awry post-war world of shabby cynicism and political brutality.'\textsuperscript{124} While Lime is established as a grotesque figure of evil, the film's approach to him is

\textsuperscript{120} There was one predictable exception, the communist \textit{Daily Worker}. It complained that 'no effort is spared to make the Soviet authorities as sinister and unsympathetic as possible.' \textit{Daily Worker}, 3 September 1949.

\textsuperscript{121} Marcia Landy, for example, introduces the film as 'one of the most well known of the cold war films'. Landy, Marcia, \textit{British Genres: Cinema and Society, 1930-1960} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991): 182.

\textsuperscript{122} Moss, \textit{The Films of Carol Reed}: 87.

\textsuperscript{123} Sarris, 'Carol Reed in the Context of his Time': 12.

\textsuperscript{124} Sarris, 'Carol Reed in the Context of his Time': 11, 12.
morally ambiguous. It is difficult for the audience, as it is for Anna and Martins, to condemn such a charismatic figure. Dressed extravagantly and immaculately in black, Welles, with his impish grin and smart talk, makes Lime a larger than life character, and all the more so when set against the drab background. Anna, despite the knowledge of Lime’s evil-doing, cannot renounce her love for Lime, and Martins wavers over whether to help Calloway. Furthermore, Martins is not rewarded for having aided Calloway catch Lime as he neither gets the girl, or, as Sarris observes, the endorsement of Calloway who remains contemptuous. Most contemporary reviewers condemned Lime, but there were notable exceptions such as The Times, which prevaricated that 'Harry may have been a particularly loathsome racketeer or he may not'.

There is a moral spine to the film, despite the moral ambiguity that hangs over the film, and this is encapsulated by Major Calloway. He is not a flawless character by any means: he too has grown cynical in the post-war hell of Vienna; he is party to the farcical situations thrown up by the facade of international law enforcement; and he indulges in intrigue himself (getting Anna out of Vienna as the price of Martins' cooperation). But, and it is a crucial but, he is socially and morally responsible, he is incorruptible and honest, and represents those decent qualities for the western occupation. He also displays compassion, not having, for example, any desire to see Anna handed over to the Soviets. So far as the occupying forces go, the film shows it is the Russians who are the villains of the peace. The assumption is fundamentally the same as in The Lost People, which is that the British occupiers are there in the mould of a firm but fair colonial administration.

'But I assure you Vienna was really like that'
As a documentary account of the Vienna in 1948-49 The Third Man is unrealistically bleak. Immediately after the war, the situation, as elsewhere in Europe, was desperate, but by 1948, the city was functioning relatively well, as Greene found when he returned to Vienna with Reed in July 1948. As Adamson has written, he found the city 'completely changed. The black-market restaurants ... were now serving legal if frugal meals. The ruins had been cleared away from in front of the Cafe Mozart. Over and over again he found himself saying to Carol Reed, "But I

125 Sarris, 'Carol Reed in the Context of his Time': 12.
126 The Times, 1 September 1949.
127 There is a certain irony here as the reputation of the occupiers (in Germany if not Vienna) deteriorated in the late forties because of corruption and immorality. (See, for example, Grosser, Germany in Our Time: 47-49). Interestingly, the film is relatively sanitised on this question compared to Greene's novel, which proffers a more revealing profile of the occupiers. Nicholas Wapshott, for example, notes how in the novel there is an 'American soldier running a racket in tyres', and an American Colonel who is a black-marketeer. (Wapshott, Nicholas, The Man Between: A Biography of Carol Reed, London: Chatto and Windus, 1990: 213.) It is also worth recording how Greene later heard about two ex-members of the RAF who had illegally dealt in penicillin in Vienna at the end of the war. New York Times, 19 March 1950.
assure you Vienna was really like that three months ago".\textsuperscript{128}

Austria (in particular the western controlled areas) fared better than Germany and other areas of Europe for a number of reasons. From the spring of 1948, it received generous amounts of Marshall Aid,\textsuperscript{129} and far from being reduced to rubble, the city emerged from the war largely intact. It had attracted minimal Allied bombing, and was captured by the Red Army, little damaged in less than a week.\textsuperscript{130} Further evidence of Vienna's recovery is that it had a tourist trade of sufficient importance for the Tourist Commission to worry about the damaging effects \textit{The Third Man} might have on that business.\textsuperscript{131} Moreover, the Austrian situation was crucially different from the German one, because from the outset Austria had a provisional government of its own which was recognised by all four powers. Although its powers were limited, it was nevertheless 'a stable and relatively efficient democratic government [which] remained in control throughout the ten years of occupation'.\textsuperscript{132} Far from being the utterly demoralised and frightened nation shown in the film, the Austrians displayed remarkable solidarity and prowess in balancing the demands of the Soviet and western powers, and managed to avoid the division of the country. A more accurate reflection of this sturdy, robust quality is to be found in \textit{The Angel with the Trumpet}.

Amid the superb atmosphere of a city in ruins, \textit{The Third Man} contains clues that this evocation is exaggerated. For example, a working Prater Wheel was surely not a luxury to be sustained in a broken city. (As if to counter this, Reed signifies the fairground's paralysis by including a shot of a small child struggling to make a carousel come to life by pushing it!) And the immaculately pollarded trees lining the roadway to the cemetery are hardly signs of a city in utter ruin. More substantially there is the squad of well equipped and well disciplined Austrian policemen (who pursue Lime through the sewer system) whose existence rather contradicts the atmosphere of lawlessness and loss of direction. As the film leaves the viewer with a resounding and lingering image of Vienna as a landscape of bomb-sites, it is surprising to realise that most of the action actually takes place in a cityscape of quite undamaged streets and squares. If it were not for the film-maker's skill at creating disturbing illusions, these streets and squares would look perfectly pretty and elegant. Indeed, a number of films, such as Ealing's \textit{Passport to Pimlico} (Henry Cornelius, 1949) and \textit{Hue and Cry} (Charles Crichton, 1947), do the reverse and make blitzed landscapes and bomb-sites seem cosy and friendly.


\textsuperscript{129} Barker, \textit{Austria 1918-1972}: 181.

\textsuperscript{130}\textit{The War Illustrated}, 11 May 1945: 9.

\textsuperscript{131}\textit{Manchester Guardian}, 11 March 1950.

\textsuperscript{132} Barker, \textit{Austria 1918-1972}: 163.
Significantly, *The Third Man*’s version of Vienna as a city gripped in a *post-bellum* despair and desolation squared with popular conceptions. The *Manchester Guardian*, for example, described it as a thriller about "black-marketeering, intrigue, and murder ... it gives a convincing impression of life among the half-ruins under quadripartite control." Variety wrote that the ‘locale is post-war Vienna, which is controlled by the combined military force of the four occupying powers and revolves around the black-market and all its unsavoury ramifications." And the *Daily Telegraph* applauded the Viennese setting: ‘the fascinating background is the ruined splendour of Vienna under Four-Power occupation. With the population divided into racketeers and police, the streets into rude rubble and delicate baroque, it is a fantastic little world of decadence and decay; here we feel anything might happen, and it does.”

The film’s utterly convincing projection of Vienna is both a credit to the film-makers, and a magnificent example of a legend in the making. *The Third Man* is as mythologising about its setting as *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1942, US) is of wartime Casablanca. It is significant that the accuracy of its image of Vienna was, and still is, accepted without demur. In practice, the ‘reality’ was to some large extent a creation of Greene’s and Reed’s fertile imaginations. Naturally, the film was not intended to be a documentary account of Vienna, but the disparity between the real situation in Vienna circa 1948-1949 and the film’s excessively bleak projection of Vienna, together with the ready endorsement of that view by audiences, is further indication of Britain’s pessimism over the state of Europe.

**Conclusion**

It has been shown that aftermath films with a European ingredient display a shift in their attitudes and subject matter from 1947 to 1950. The underlying trend is that the earlier films are narrowly obsessed with Germans and/or Nazis, but this obsession recedes and virtually disappears, and then is replaced by an interest in the wider European picture. The shift of emphasis is best illustrated by the two high profile, keynote films of the period, *Frieda* and *The Third Man*. The former film was topical on the problem of what to do with the ex-enemy, and the latter film, released over two years later, is a complex essay on the condition of post-war Europe. The evolving concerns of these European-themed aftermath films mirrored shifting attitudes towards Europe as


134 *Variety*, 7 September 1949.


136 The endurance of the legend is evidenced by a Viennese tourist guide’s weary comment in 1993 that all English-speaking visitors have to see the sewers where Welles was cornered; ‘I think a lot of British and American tourists are quite surprised when they realise that Vienna isn’t in black and white’. Bill Powell, *Guardian Weekend*, 28 August 1993: 33.
the Soviet Union replaced Germany as the future threat to European stability.

Within this chronological context, individual films served up their own particular ideas, values and assumptions. *Frieda* is a touching liberal polemic for a constructive and humanitarian approach to Germany, which by implication of its ideological project to persuade also stands as witness to the intense hatred felt towards Germany in the immediate wake of the war. It evidences two of the most contentious issues surrounding the Germans: apportioning blame, and the lingering fear that the Nazi spirit lived on. While the film articulates the ongoing fear that Germans are warmongers, it also suggests that Germans, fanatical Nazis apart, are potentially good and can be re-educated to the ways of democracy. It was a message in the same spirit as the policy of re-education that was being pursued by the government. Other films, such as *It's Not Cricket, Snowbound*, and *Counterblast*, had no such constructive or liberal points to deliver, and were instead part and parcel of the popular anti-German hostility, sensationaliy portraying German characters as unreconstructed Nazis plotting to continue the war.

In a different vein is *Portrait from Life* which offers an indication of how attitudes towards Germany were softening by the end of 1948. Compared to the other Nazi films, *Portrait from Life* is a much calmer, more dispassionate, expression of the German problem. Rather than showing Nazis conspiring to build a Fourth Reich, it has a tired Nazi who struggles only for survival. Moreover, the film is also populated with good Germans, and contextualises its story within the desperate situation of Germany itself. *The Angel with the Trumpet* similarly suggests that the Nazis are a spent force.

The two films with horizons beyond Germany, *The Lost People* and *The Third Man*, were both about the problems facing Europe in the aftermath of the war. *The Lost People* projects post-war Europe (from the perspective of the exasperated, rather superior, British onlooker) as a volatile, hopelessly fragmented collection of warring factions unable to agree about anything. *The Third Man* has a similarly pessimistic outlook with its imaging of post-war Europe in sinister and ambiguous political and moral terms. In both films the legacy of the Second World War is inextricably tied up with the emergence of the bipolarisation of Europe, and the dashed hopes of European harmony. Between them, the films serve up a wearied, disillusioned tilt on Europe, which was a fitting expression at a time when Britain lived in both the desolate shadow of the Second World War and the uncertain prospect of another.
Chapter Six
The Aftermath of War at Home: change, disillusion and discontent

Introduction
With the end of the European war in May 1945 the long awaited transition back to peacetime conditions began, a process that accelerated after Japan's defeat in August 1945. A major part of this operation was the demobilisation of over four and a half million people from the military services, but despite the eager anticipation to get back to normal, it was a prospect that generated uncertainty and anxiety. This was partly because of memories of the unemployment and disillusion which followed in the wake of the Great War, and partly because six years of living under wartime conditions had established a pattern of life with its own certainties, vested interests, and familiarities which would be unbalanced by the wholesale dismantling of the war machine. After years of living an institutionalised existence which provided all the physical necessities of life, a sense of purpose, and its own framework of discipline and values, demobbed servicemen faced the prospect of re-learning how to live with the freedoms and responsibilities of civilian life. They had to re-enter the jobs market, find housing, come to terms with the drabness and grinding frustration of shortages, learn to deal with the black-market, reconstruct family relationships, and cope with any physical and psychological wounds.1

The predominant fears marring the eager anticipation of freedom were, as Paul Addison has suggested, related to housing and jobs.2 By 1945 there was a chronic housing shortage; enemy bombing had destroyed 700,000 homes and damaged a third of the remaining stock. Such was the scarcity of accommodation that it became the issue which concerned voters most during the 1945 election.3 With jobs, the underlying fear was the spectre of an economic slump and mass unemployment resulting from the winding down of the munitions industry. As a Home Intelligence report indicated: 'widespread apprehension is reported; people dread and expect mass unemployment, of which present unemployment and rumours of impending discharges are regarded as a foretaste. Particular anxiety is expressed by, or on behalf of, people in war industries (Twelve Regions) who see their jobs coming to an end; demobilised men (Seven Regions); miners, Bevin Boys, Civil Defence workers, land girls, seamen.'4

The massive task of demobilising millions from conscripted war work was 'a delicate and

4 Home Intelligence weekly report no. 210, 3-10 October 1944, quoted in Addison, The Road to 1945: 248.
potentially explosive affair'. Addison goes on to argue how after the Great War unacceptably long delays in demobilisation had led to mutinies and social unrest, and it was with this in mind that Ernest Bevin, wartime Minister of Labour, 'set in motion a great variety of schemes to ease the transition from war to peace.\(^5\) Priority of release was determined by age and length of service rather than on the basis of occupational skill and 'last in, first out', which had led to so much resentment at the end of the Great War.\(^6\) The government went to great lengths to smooth the passage of demobilisation and the journey back to Civvy Street. Ex-servicemen received a generous lump sum payment to tide them over until they found employment, and they were kitted out with a set of civilian clothes. Help and advice were on hand through regional Resettlement Offices, and a variety of government and Services-sponsored training schemes were available, as were grants for those wishing to start their own business or take a university degree. Wartime legislation gave conscripted soldiers the right to take up their old jobs, and in the opinion of Addison, Bevin had 'done his level best to ensure that it was almost impossible for a demobbed person in search of a job not to get one.\(^7\)

For all Bevin's good intentions and meticulous planning though, just how successful was the demobilisation programme? Bearing in mind the vast scale of the operation and the straitened economic circumstances, Bevin masterminded the operation reasonably smoothly and avoided the catastrophes of 1918. As Alan Bullock has written, 'several million men and women moved from the forces and war industry to peace-time occupations without any repetition of the breakdown which followed the 1918 war. Bevin's double achievement, the mobilisation and demobilisation of an entire nation, was complete.\(^8\) But while there was no repeat of the post-Great War disasters, on a personal level it was frequently a depressing and bewildering time. Harry Hopkins neatly quips that for many demobbers it often seemed that 'the great lottery of war had merely been succeeded by the great lottery of peace.\(^9\) The social costs of that lottery is a dimension that historians have tended to overlook, particularly when compared to the massive volume of material on the politics, politicians and economics of the day. It is a point made by Barry Turner and Tony Rennell in their recently published *When Daddy Came Home*, the only history so far devoted to this theme.\(^10\)

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5 Addison, *Now the War is Over*: 19.


7 Addison, *Now the War is Over*: 24.


Inspired by the recollections of those who lived through the war's aftermath, the authors unexpectedly found that it was a chaotic period of widespread disillusion, acrimony, and stress, so much so that fifty years on it remains for many of the surviving participants, and children of participants, a contentious and sensitive issue.

This chapter sets out to explore how aftermath films dealt with the momentous transition from conditions of war to peace. Easily the most commercially successful film on the topic was one from Hollywood, *The Best Years of Our Lives* (William Wyler, 1946, US). A lengthy and finely crafted film about the return of three ex-servicemen back to their mid-western hometown, it was 'a phenomenal money-spinner' and the biggest box-office draw of 1948. Although the setting and the story was American, there was a sense that it had a relevance and meaning to any nation that was similarly recovering from the war. *Variety*, for instance, commented that the film 'has a fundamental story which will sell around the world.'

There is no single British (or other Hollywood) film that so successfully and evocatively encapsulated the experience of the homecoming of ex-servicemen as *The Best Years of Our Lives*, but there are fourteen British films which touched on the subject one way or another. There are films which took the demobilised serviceman (and they are all male) and his homecoming as the main thrust of the film, building a storyline around the pains and pleasures encountered back in Civvy Street once the war is over. Films in this narrative mould include two comedies, *It's Hard to Be Good* (Jeffrey Dell, 1948) and *George in Civvy Street* (Marcel Varnel, 1946), a musical-drama, *I'll Turn to You* (Geoffrey Faithful, 1946) and the drama *Elizabeth of Ladymead* (Herbert Wilcox, 1948). More films feature the ex-serviceman in a key role but in narratives not specifically about demobilisation and resettlement as a topic. Revealingly, these films all belong stylistically to the cycle of violent, morbid, and pessimistic gangster and 'psychological' films (they might very loosely be termed British 'film-noirs') that were so characteristic a product of the late forties, for

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11 Kinematograph Weekly, 16 December 1948. Its box-office success in 1948, rather than 1947 (it was released in the spring of 1947) is explained by the fact that its original release was limited to London only, and it was not released nationwide until April 1948.

12 Variety, 27 November 1946.

13 Numerous films were made by Hollywood on the topic of the homecoming of ex-servicemen, but none were as successful as *The Best Years of Our Lives*. Examples include: *Crossfire* (George Marshall, 1946, US); *Till the End of Time* (Edward Dmytryk, 1946); *Homecoming* (Mervyn LeRoy, 1948, US).

14 The Years Between (Compton Bennett, 1946) could also be included as it deals with the problems of a husband and wife readjusting to each other after years of absence. However, as the film is predominantly set in the actual war years and its narrative concern is not so much about the ramifications of those changes as establishing that they had happened, it is considered in the chapter on home-front films.

example *The Third Man* (Carol Reed, 1949), as discussed in the previous chapter. Many of these films, it will be argued, characterise the ex-serviceman as troubled personalities drawn to crime and lawlessness. The main film discussed in this category is Alberto Cavalcanti's *They Made Me a Fugitive* (1947).

**George Formby returns to Civvy Street**

The urgent issue of demobilisation was an eminently suitable subject for George Formby. His idiosyncratic films had, after all, been more often than not rooted in contemporary events. *Keep Fit* (Anthony Kimmins, 1938), for instance, 'poked fun at the thirties "Health and Beauty" craze', and no sooner had the war broken out than Formby was fighting the Nazis in *Let George Do It* (Marcel Varnel, 1940). Demobilisation was also an appropriate theme for Formby as he had had close wartime associations with the army through his countless touring performances (a contribution to the war effort which won him an OBE in 1946), and so it was fitting that Formby should base a comedy around the troops' eagerly awaited release. Designed to catch the moment, *George in Civvy Street* went into production shortly after mass demobilisation got under way in June 1945, and was released in July 1946, by which time over three and half million service personnel had been demobbed, a figure that was to rise to nearly four and a half million by the end of the year. The film's conception, production and release period, then, overlapped the time when demobilisation was at its height.

Formby, who made his first film in 1934, was at the summit of his phenomenal screen career between 1938 and 1944. He plummeted rapidly thereafter, and *George in Civvy Street*, his twentieth film, was a flop of such magnitude that it ended his screen appearances forever. Richards argues that Formby's star crashed because, like Churchill, he was too closely identified with the 'dark days of 1940, and like Churchill, he was rejected as the public looked to a new world once the war ended.' The rejection was also part of a general trend away from the music hall tradition, which was perceived as old-fashioned and integral to the cultural fabric of the discredited thirties. Another reason for the film's miserable performance was that in qualitative terms it was, and still is, by common consent Formby's worst film. Randall and Seaton's hagiography of Formby, for example, regrets that *George in Civvy Street* 'must rank as the poorest of Formby's films, a sad

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18 By contrast, there was no equivalent Gracie Fields vehicle in the late forties as, unlike Formby, she had had a bad press in the war years as a consequence of her departure to Canada in 1940. Aldgate, Anthony, and Richards, Jeffrey, *Britain Can Take It: The British Cinema in the Second World War* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986): 82.
19 Murphy, *Realism and Tinsel*: 193.
climax to an illustrious film career. The film's shortcomings lay not with Formby's own performance, which is consistent with his other films, but with a poor script and supporting cast. Weaknesses aside, *George in Civvy Street* nevertheless has the basic ingredients of a typical Formby picture, as *Today's Cinema* duly noted at the time: 'the production in general has much in common with previous George Formby comedies providing similar scope for the star's characteristic singing, strumming and fooling.' Formby's character George is identical with his preceding film characters which had made him so famous. In *George in Civvy Street* he confronts the puzzling problems and tight situations thrown up by the aftermath of war, and is as usual irrepressibly cheerful and cheeky, hopelessly shy with girls, an innocent at large who despite the odds stacked against him comes out on top by the end.

The film opens with George and his fellow servicemen jam-packed on an ocean liner making the sea journey home. George leads them in a breezy sing-song (which must have carried echoes of Formby's Entertainments National Service Association work) sentimentalising how long they have been away. 'Well,' sums up George, 'it's been a grand war, but I'm not sorry it's over.' Once on land, they are channelled through a demobbing depot and kitted out with 'civvy' clothes (the plentiful range of styles and sizes on offer bearing little relation to the sad lack of choice in real life). One or two men grumble about their new suits and future prospects but George only sees the bright side, and with a song and a joke tries to raise everyone's spirits. Dressed in new clothes and loaded up with souvenirs of war, George and his demobbed pal Fingers (Ronald Shiner) set off to George's home village somewhere in rural England.

Back home in the village he finds that his family's pub, the Unicorn, is now rundown, having lost its trade to the Lion pub on the other side of the river. The remaining hour or so of the film frames George's familiar antics within a tale about the ensuing rivalry between the two pubs as George tries to regain his old customers. George wins in the end, although it is an unfair battle as the Lion's unscrupulous manager Jeb (Frank Drew) is prepared to use crooked tactics to try and put George out of business. Another twist to the battle is George and Jeb's competition for village girl Mary Colton (Rosalyn Boulter). There is an effective allusive fantasy sequence drawn directly from Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, with sets and costumes modelled on John Tenniel's Victorian illustrations. George dreams himself into the sequence as the March Hare and witnesses the lion and the unicorn locked in combat 'fighting for the Crown.'


22 According to some historians Formby's films had been declining ever since he left Ealing Studios for Columbia in 1941. Murphy, for example, argues that Columbia 'proved less adept at getting the formula right'. Murphy, *Realism and Tinsel*: 195.

23 *Today's Cinema*, 12 April 1946.

Through the film's stylised cultural filter of slapstick humour, fantasy and corny songs, the film engaged with some of the trials facing the demobbed serviceman. For the first part of the film the settings and situations - the sea voyage back to Blighty; the sense of anticipation at throwing off the shackles of army life; the process of being demobilised; the amusement at no longer having to salute officers - are recognisably founded in the reality of experience. Once George arrives home the element of fantasy is stepped up: the picturesque rural setting with its cosy village pubs, happy eccentrics, and plentiful supply of food and drink, was a million miles from the urban, drab, and rationed Britain that most ex-servicemen encountered. But below this pleasant countenance was a sharp message for ex-servicemen.

Implicit to the story is the fact that society had, from the ex-servicemen's point of view, unexpectedly altered for the worse during the war years. Instead of returning to the comfort of the familiar landscape he left behind, George finds it disturbingly transformed. He discovers his home is sadly neglected and inhabited by strangers, the family business on which he depends is on the verge of bankruptcy, and he can no longer be certain of his old sweetheart Mary's affections. The old landlord of the Lion has died and been replaced by an opportunistic and greedy outsider, and consequently the age-old harmony between the Lion and the Unicorn has turned sour. 'The village is no longer the friendly community he left, having become infiltrated by predatory crooks and spivs (a scenario, incidentally, that prefigured later Ealing films in which traditional communities are threatened by outsiders, such as *The Titfield Thunderbolt*, Charles Crichton, 1952).

George's bewilderment at the changes echoed a common source of frustration for ex-servicemen, namely the disparity between their expectations of finding home life much as they had left it, and the new conditions that awaited them. As a BBC broadcast warned, a large part of the ex-servicemen's 'trouble' was 'expecting life to be as it was', and how 'the difference between reality and their dreams ... is so hard to reconcile.' The changes that George has to contend with offered points of identification to demobbers: George's difficulties in re-establishing the love of his old flame after the alluring presence of a competitor touched on fears about infidelity; George's near loss of his home and livelihood echoed uncertainties over employment and housing. More such detailed parallels could be laboured, but a far more substantial and striking theme is the film's projection of a society riven by criminality and self-interest, and the suspicion and resentment felt in some quarters towards the demobbed soldier. It was not a theme commonly found in earlier wartime films, although a notable exception is *Waterloo Road* (Sidney Gilliat, 1945). It will also be recalled from Chapter Four that *The Years Between* (Compton Bennett, 1946) offered little sympathy to the returning soldier.

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23 'Civvy Street', Stone, E. Laurie, *Calling the West Indies*, produced by Edmott, E.R., BBC, 16 March 1946, quoted in Turner and Rennell: 70.
George in Civvy Street, then, picks up on the largely forgotten fact that ex-servicemen were not universally greeted as returning war heroes in the immediate aftermath of the war, and that there was widespread antagonism between demobbers and the civilian population. The tension was enough for The Listener to call for a greater tolerance and understanding between the two groups: "any suggestion of a continuing 'two-nations' society - civilians and ex-servicemen - would be a disaster. United in war, we must strive to maintain at least something of that unity in the days ahead." The reluctance of the civilian population wholeheartedly to flag-wave the achievements and sacrifices of those who had fought was founded in the fact that civilians too had suffered in the front-line. In previous wars there had been a clearer delineation between soldiers and the general population: soldiers went off to war and experienced the dangers and traumas of the front-line while civilians stayed at home in relative safety and comfort. In the war against Hitler, the civilian population had also suffered, many having literally been in the firing line, and all having had to endure years of hardship and sacrifice. Why, it was widely believed, should ex-servicemen expect, or be given, especially sympathetic treatment? As Turner and Rennell put it, "civilians were not easily persuaded that soldiers who had come through without visible injuries deserved any special privileges, or special treatment. After the euphoria of the welcome home there was little sympathy for ex-servicemen who did not immediately knuckle down to the practicalities of life." For demobbers, the negative attitudes of many civilians towards them was a source of disillusion and anger. From their point of view they often felt they had sacrificed more than civilians as they had had to give up their freedom, been forced to live in foreign lands, and been subjected to army discipline, training and combat.

There are numerous accounts by ex-servicemen of a sense of let down and resentment that civilians failed to understand what they had been through. Addison, for instance, quotes one demobber's recollection of disillusion on his return to Salford: 'nothing had changed, same old pubs on the corner, same old corner shops, same old terraced streets ... Everything was just the same, dismal, grim, people were fed up, tired out, and when you went in the pub you got the same atmosphere: 'Oh, here they are, here's the lads with the demob money', and they seemed to feel a kind of resentment to the servicemen that was returning.

For some ex-servicemen there was also the uneasy feeling that during their absence civilian society, as George found, had become greedy and self-interested with a flourishing black market and

26 See, for example, Turner and Rennell, When Daddy Came Home, Chapter 3.
27 The Listener, 22 March 1945, quoted in Turner and Rennell, When Daddy Came Home: 171.
28 Turner and Rennell, When Daddy Came Home: 57.
29 Rochford, James, quoted in Addison, Now the War is Over: 24.
escalating crime (a topic that will be explored shortly). One ex-serviceman for instance, recalled how in his seaside town business seemed to be run on 'chicanery and spivery', and to another 'it seemed to me that it was the age of the spiv and the get-rich-quick type of person who was ready to do anybody else down if they had the opportunity. Another demobber, disillusioned by the restrained welcome he received, recalled that 'we disembarked, not expecting any particular acclamation, but at least we hoped to find the work of the fighting forces overseas had been realised and appreciated by our women folk. What did we find? That any expectations we had of picking up the threads of our domestic life were lost in a wild fandango of pleasure-mad, sensation-seeking civilians. And somewhere in this chaos were our womenfolk. The ex-serviceman's perception of civilian society as going to pieces was all the more disappointing, and difficult to cope with, because it so contrasted with the values of community, team spirit, and interdependence, that hallmarked service life. As Turner and Rennell remark: 'a returned serviceman, generally tired, used to depending on his mates and with a reasonable sense of values, could find the going [in Civvy Street] tough.'

A strong theme in *George in Civvy Street* is this sense of a clash between the decent values of community as embodied by ex-servicemen like George, and the greedy self-interest of many civilians as personified by Jeb. The opposing values are reinforced by peripheral characters and sub-plots: whereas George's handful of supporters are lovable eccentrics with no interest in wealth, Jeb's supporters are criminals and thugs motivated by profit. When George faces defeat in the wake of Jeb's foul tactics, it is no coincidence that George is saved by his old army pals who selflessly and loyally turn up to help their old comrade.

The lion and unicorn motifs were also, of course, highly symbolic. Not only is the fabled greed of the Lion suitably associated with Jeb, but in mythology the two creatures are at loggerheads, as they are in the Lewis Carroll version used in the fantasy scene. Furthermore, the lion and the unicorn stood as a proud symbol of Britain (or at least England and Scotland, the two creatures representing the union of the previously warring countries), thus inviting the speculation that the battle between Jeb and George served as a metaphor for wider, nationwide conflicts and tensions, or to put it another way, that George and Jeb and the values they represented were 'fighting for the

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30 Henley, Thomas, Paington (not dated), quoted in Turner and Rennell, *When Daddy Came Home*: 46.
31 Egerton-Savory, Arthur, quoted in Addison, *Now the War is Over*: 24-25.
33 Turner and Rennell, *When Daddy Came Home*: 46.
34 George Orwell, for example, used it as the title for his best-selling wartime polemic on the nature of Englishness. (Orwell, George, *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius*, London: Penguin, 1982. First published 1941.)
crown' of Britain. As George is naturally the recipient of audience sympathy, when he wins so do the values of community and fair shares over those of sectional interest and selfishness. (Appropriately the film-makers altered Carroll's ending to fit in with this. In the book the outcome of the fight is inconclusive whereas the film presents the unicorn as the clear winner.)

The suggestion in *George in Civvy Street* of the existence of substantial tensions within British society, foreshadowed to some extent similar themes in two later films, *It's Hard to be Good* (1948), and *Passport to Pimlico* (Henry Cornelius, 1948). According to Marcia Landy, *It's Hard to be Good* 'pinpoints a number of issues even as it abandons them - the relationship between war and profiteering ... the interrelationship between the public and private spheres.'35 Ealing's accomplished comedy, *Passport to Pimlico*, captures the contemporary conflict between the desire for an unfettered free market and the scrapping of controls, and the continuation of collective and community effort, with the fair-shares and common purpose that it implied. By creating an imaginary sovereign state (Burgundy) outside of the economic control of Britain, the comedy skilfully works through the advantages and disadvantages of dumping controls in favour of free enterprise. In the end the film comes down on the side of wartime-style collectivism. When trade restrictions are scrapped, Burgundy becomes overrun by unwelcome spivs and crooks; and when the British authorities besiege Burgundy, its inhabitants rediscover the community spirit when they stand united against the blockade. The message of the film is clearly, as Richards and Aldgate have argued, that rationing and restriction are better than the unrestrained growth of free enterprise.36 While the film comes down on the side of wartime collectivism, it also raises the whole issue of the social tensions that went with the ending of the war and the return to normal conditions. As Charles Barr, who has examined the film in some detail, has observed, 'in a modern consumer society, people's interests and priorities conflict too much for unity to be more than a sham. *Passport to Pimlico* catches this issue at exactly the critical time when these conflicts are starting to make themselves felt.'37

Implicit in Barr's comment, is that the wartime consensus lasted into the late forties, before it began to break down, but *George in Civvy Street* strongly hints that profiteering and self-interest were already entrenched by the end of the war, despite the propaganda rhetoric that universal self-sacrifice and collective effort was the order of the day. The film adds evidence to Addison's argument that 'to judge by the recollections of some of those returning home, Britain in 1945 or 1946 was far from the land of exalted popular idealism sometimes hinted at in the political

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histories.  

Demobilisation and marital relations

Released a couple of weeks after George in Civvy Street was I'll Turn to You, the third in a series of low-budget "hit" musical-dramas produced by Butchers, the formula being to wed a sentimental story to 'generous musical treatment in the popular manner'. The popular ballad 'Till Turn to You' was used as the hook for a topical story about the homecoming of a demobilised soldier and the problems he and his family encountered in picking up the threads of their lives. As the Monthly Film Bulletin noted, 'this timely film deals with a rehabilitation problem, and will have a special appeal for people demobbed from the services.'

It has not been possible to view a copy, but judging by reviews and the film's own publicity it stridently took on board some of the most troublesome problems associated with the return to normality. The chronic housing shortage, for example, is central to the plot. When the wife, Aileen (Terry Randall), hears that her husband, Roger (Don Stannard), is returning from duty in the Far East, she embarks on the almost hopeless quest to find a them and their baby a home. All she can find are some blitz-damaged and cramped rooms, the depressing conditions soon leading to friction between them. It was a particularly timely commentary on the lack of accommodation as in the summer of 1946, when the film was being exhibited, there was a spontaneous and much publicised wave of squatting in empty buildings, including disused military camps. As Addison has written, despite these camps frequently not having running water or electricity, they offered squatters an attractive 'escape from cramped quarters shared with relations, or from tiny furnished rooms'.

Readjusting back into civilian employment was often an ordeal for ex-servicemen: those trying to re-enter their old workplaces could find that their old jobs had simply disappeared, or that their old employer was reluctant to re-hire them. Those demobbers who were able to take up their old employment often found the work frustratingly dull or undemanding as somebody who had enjoyed a demanding position of authority in the services was not likely to find it easy to resettle into lowly work. It was an issue centre-staged in I'll Turn to You. The young ex-RAF pilot is

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38 Addison, Now the War is Over: 24.
39 Kinematograph Weekly, 18 April 1946. The first two films were I'll Walk Beside You (Maclean Rogers, 1943) and For You Alone (Geoffrey Faithful, 1945).
40 Today's Cinema, 16 April 1946.
42 Film Publicity: BFI microjacket.
43 Addison, Now the War is Over: 67.
reinstated in his old job but rapidly becomes severely frustrated by its menial status and low wages, and is forced to leave. As the film's publicity puts it, at work he 'finds himself back where he had been, six years before, a learner with eleven months' experience, and gradually his impatience gets him down' until finally his employers advise him to get out of the business. It was a key theme in *The Best Years of Our Lives*: after an acclaimed career as a bomber pilot, Dana Andrews cannot easily slip back into his pre-war job as a menial soda-jerk, and his war experience accounts for nothing in the eyes of employers.

*I'll Turn to You* also tackles the topical problem of peace-time troubles of wartime marriages. Evidently the marital relationship of the protagonists deteriorates, the cause being attributed to the war. According to Sue Aspinall the film 'suggests that marital conflict is due to the difficulty of adjusting to the humdrum nature of married life after the excitement of the war, during which the husband was a pilot and the wife had a rich boy-friend.' Marital troubles were a staple of the post-war hangover as years of separation and living under different wartime conditions could make the re-establishment of personal relationships a fraught and lengthy affair. War was a formative experience changing many an individual's habits and personality, and the process of re-acclimatising to each other could take some time. Re-establishing relationships could also be complicated by a partner's extra-marital activities, as hinted at in *I'll Turn to You*, as well as in several Hollywood films, such as *The Best Years of Our Lives* and *Homecoming*. The vast majority of marriages survived, although not necessarily happily, but many did not, the number of divorce petitions rising in the immediate post-war years to a peak of 47,041 in 1947.

Another timely theme in *I'll Turn to You* is the ex-pilot's profound sense of let-down. Unable to cope with the squeeze of pressures - inadequate accommodation, unsatisfactory employment, marital tension - he feels resentful and becomes 'bitterly disillusioned with himself.' His desperation is such that he walks out on his marriage and responsibilities, although the family is reunited at the end. The film's portrayal of the ex-pilot's rather bitter homecoming suggests, like *George in Civvy Street*, that demobilisation and readjustment could be a turbulent experience. Rather than enjoying the anticipated material and emotional fruits of victory, demobbers faced unpredicted hardships and difficulties.

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44 Film publicity: BFI microjacket.
47 Addison, *Now the War is Over*: 17.
48 Film publicity: BFI microjacket.
The remaining film to consider which treats demobilisation and readjustment as a narrative topic is Herbert Wilcox's *Elizabeth of Ladymead*. As referred to in previous chapters, Wilcox was renowned at the time for his uncanny ability to produce commercial hits, those hits invariably having more in common with the kind of 'escapist' entertainment values of Hollywood than the 'realist' qualities so revered by critics. *Elizabeth of Ladymead* was released in February 1949 after the fourth highly successful 'London' film *Spring in Park Lane* (1948), and before the last one *Maytime in Mayfair* (1949). *Elizabeth of Ladymead*, though, did not enjoy anything like the success of the 'London' films, and was a rare example of Wilcox getting it wrong (which is perhaps why he does not mention it in his famously boastful autobiography).49

Reviewers were also wrong-footed, as they predicted it would be a money-spinning proposition for exhibitors, if only because of the reputations of Wilcox and the huge star value of Anna Neagle.50 Its relatively poor performance can be accounted for by virtue of its lacking the easy charm and sparkle of Wilcox's other films: the storyline becomes monotonous; there is no Michael Wilding who had proved himself so popular as the romantic partner for Neagle in earlier films; and one of Neagle's multiple roles is an irresponsible trollop, a characterisation universally disliked by critics.

As far as they were concerned, Neagle's star persona in the late forties51 disqualified her from playing anything but warm-hearted, endearing women. The *Daily Film Renter* revealed to its readers that 'the great surprise of the film is to see Anna Neagle in an unsympathetic role. This is the draining 1920 sequence, in which she plays a callous, Cowardesque bright young thing, whose infidelity results in her soldier-husband's suicide. Family audiences may be shaken by this particular episode.52

Whereas Wilcox generally steered clear of direct social comment (exceptions including the plea for the sympathetic treatment of illegitimate wartime babies in *Piccadilly Incident*, 1946), *Elizabeth of Ladymead* self-consciously set itself the task of showing the impact of war on the status and expectations of women, and the effect this had on marriage. It does so by repeating, in four self-contained episodes, the return in the war's aftermath of the same soldier-husband to his wife in the wake of four successive wars, the Crimean War, the Boer War, and the two world wars. Neagle plays the wife, Elizabeth of Ladymead, in each episode, while the husband and peripheral characters are played by different actors. The film starts in the post-Second World War episode

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49 Wilcox, Herbert, *Twenty Five Thousand Sunsets* (London: The Bodley Head, 1967). Neagle does give the film a brief mention in her autobiography, recording what a 'fascinating exercise' it was to make, but that the public found it 'disappointing', perhaps because Michael Wilding was not featured. (Neagle, Anna, *Anna Neagle Says There's Always Tomorrow*, London: W.H. Allen, 1974: 156-157.)

50 For instance, *Kinematograph Weekly*, 23 December 1948; and the *Daily Film Renter*, 22 December 1948.

51 Early on in her career she had played disreputable characters, such as Nell Gwyn in *Nell Gwyn* (Herbert Wilcox, 1934).

52 *Daily Film Renter*, 22 December 1948.
with Elizabeth then dreaming herself into the earlier settings, only to re-awaken back in the post-
1945 present. An original screenplay by Frank Harvey, the idea of the film is to show how
homecoming soldier-husbands expect their wives to be same as when they left them, but find they
have confusingly changed, the extent and nature of that change depending on the social and
political climate surrounding each war. Common to all four wars is the assumption that war was an
emancipating experience for women, as reviewers all duly acknowledged: the *Daily Film Renter*,
for one, described how the film 'illustrates feminist challenge to masculine dominance following
[war].' What is instructive is the comparative way the film projects the shift in women's
perceptions after each war, and the implication of this for contemporary audiences in 1949.

In the aftermath of the Crimean War, the woman is unmistakably designed to attract audience
sympathy at the expense of the homecoming soldier. In his absence, Elizabeth has developed a
yearning to play a more constructive role in her marriage on the return of her husband. Her
aspirations are modest, and her husband's view that women without men are helpless and that
women should always acquiesce in the wishes of their husbands would have seemed laughably
backward and unreasonable to contemporary audiences. During the Boer War, Elizabeth assumes
greater power and responsibility; she efficiently runs the estate while her husband is away, and gets
increasingly involved with radical politics. On his return, the husband is perturbed at Elizabeth's
unexpected proficiency in estate management but can just about come to terms with it. What is
totally unacceptable to him though, is her involvement in politics, and he forbids her from
attending any more political meetings. She defies him, even though this defiance threatens to wreck
the marriage. The implication of this episode is that Elizabeth, by threatening the marriage, has
gone too far in her pursuit of an independent life, a theme developed to a paranoid degree in the
next, post-Great War, instalment In this instalment her husband returns to find Elizabeth has
completely gone to the dogs having become the 'Cowardsque' decadent, unfaithful, and drunken
wife that drives her husband to suicide. Women, the film says, got completely out of control
during and after the Great War.

In the two framing sequences set in the aftermath of the Second World War the husband comes
home to find that Elizabeth has become transformed into a self-assured, competent woman who
forcefully argues that she is no longer 'going to be pushed around like a piece of furniture.'
However, after dreaming herself into the three past wars, she realises the harm that aggressively
independent women can wreak on marriage, and responsibly tones down her aspirations, just
mildly arguing for a 'right to a say in the future.' As a result, husband and wife reach a compromise
and look to a future together as a team. (The idea of husband and wife working together as a team
articulated the kind of relationship Neagle and Wilcox enjoyed in real life.) In effect, compromise
is the order of the day as the film acknowledges that women are entitled to a new level of

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53 *Daily Film Renter*, 22 December 1948.
independence so long as it is modest, and carries the health warning that in the past women went too far, with dire results. It was the kind of pragmatic, common sense message that suited the times, although Neagle later recalled that the film was 'perhaps ... a little ahead of its time. It had a touch of Women's Lib. about it in places.'

The ex-serviceman as gangster, deserter, and psychotic

Films which do not treat demobilisation as a topic, but feature the ex-serviceman as a major character are in a quite different vein from those so far discussed, as their ex-servicemen characters are invariably drawn into crime and lawlessness, whether by choice, fate, or mental breakdown.

The most common type of film in which the ex-serviceman plays a key role is the gangster film. A distinctive product of the late forties, this tranche of brooding, bleak, and often brutal films which take the criminal underworld as their subject, has been designated by Murphy as the 'Spiv Cycle'. According to Murphy, the cycle began in 1945 with Waterloo Road and ended in 1950 with Night and the City (Jules Dassin, 1950), with production peaking in 1947-1948. Previously regarded as the preserve of Hollywood, by the end of the forties the gangster film was as much associated with the domestic as the American film industry as the Daily Film Renter noted: 'black-market crooks are getting as familiar a sight on the British screen as Chicago gangsters used to be.' While the films had British settings many imitated the codes and conventions of Hollywood gangster pictures. Some Hollywood gangsters are ex-servicemen: in the 1930s First World War veterans became criminals in films like The Roaring Twenties (Raoul Walsh, 1939, US), and after 1945, World War Two veterans get tangled up in violence and law-breaking in films such as Crossfire and Blue Dahlia (George Marshall, 1946, US).

The British cycle of gangster films cashed in on the contemporary fascination with crime, with its barrage of sensationalist news stories about the activities of spivs and racketeers. They portrayed gangsterism and sex to a hitherto unprecedented degree, and were allowed to do so by the easing of censorship standards by the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC). As discussed in Chapter One (pages 20 - 23), it was not that the BBFC was leading a progressive policy of liberalisation, but rather that it accepted that films would echo the troubled circumstances of the post-war world, even if it was uncomfortable with the level of violence sanctioned. This position was illustrated in a letter from the President of the BBFC, Sir Sidney Harris, to the British Film Producers Association warning against the

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54 Neagle: 157.

55 Murphy, Realism and Tinsel, Chapter 8.

56 Daily Film Renter, 26 June 1947, in a review of Dancing with Crime (John Paddy Carstairs, 1947).
growing prevalence in films of brutal and sadistic incidents and the choice of themes which necessitate such undesirable features. This development no doubt to a certain extent reflects the aftermath of a war, when violence became the familiar accompaniment of daily life, and, on the most charitable view, may represent an attempt to portray on the screen some of the more unpleasant features and characters of the post-war period. On the general ground that an art should, with certain limits, be allowed to express the salient mood of a period, stories and incidents have been permitted which might not have been acceptable in another period.57

The post-war cycle of gangster films are a text book example of how films absorb and relay the contemporary concerns of the society that made them, their obsession with lawlessness and social transgression chronologically and thematically paralleling society's fixation with such issues. As historians have documented, in the last half of the forties there was a near moral panic because of the suspicion that crime was endemic and that society was losing its grasp of moral values.58 As the panic receded by the early fifties, so the gangster film lost its currency, and according to Murphy ended in 1950 with the box-office failure of Night and the City59 and the concomitant success of The Blue Lamp (Basil Dearden, 1949) which celebrated the role of the police rather than the gangster. The replacement of the gangster hero by the policeman hero suggested, as Murphy argues, that by 1950 'people were getting as sick of racketeering and the black market as they were of rationing and austerity, the climate was right for a favourable reassessment of the forces of law and order.60

The fixation with declining morals and lawlessness was more a reaction to perceptions than realities though, as Britain was far from being the anarchic and God-forsaken land evoked by many alarmist commentators. Crime was certainly more widespread than in the pre-war decade, but the rise had occurred during the war years and actually declined slightly between 1945 and 1950, before rising again in 1951.61 Moreover, the majority of offences were associated with property - larceny, breaking and entering, receiving - rather than with crimes of violence and assault.62 For all

59 Murphy, Realism and Tinsel: 164.
60 Murphy, Realism and Tinsel: 165.
61 Hennessy, for instance, writes how a 69% increase in indictable offences had occurred between 1938-45, and how in the years from 1945-50 there was a decrease 'both in terms of indictable offences (-3.6%) and per head of population (-4.8%), though 1951 turned out to be the peak year in early postwar crime.' Hennessy, Never Again: 445.
62 Hennessy notes that the wartime increase in crime 'occurred in property crimes such as larceny (+ 62%), breaking and entering (+ 120%) and receiving (+ 195%)'. Hennessy, Never Again: 445.
the anxiety and alarm then, 'the streets of British cities in 1945 were almost certainly safer places
than they had been in 1845 and were scarcely more dangerous than in 1935.\textsuperscript{63} If the country was
relatively law abiding, the question arises as to why there was such an emotive over-reaction to the
crime that did occur. One explanation was that the sensationalist and lurid press coverage (not to
mention its spin off in films) exaggerated the extent of the crime problem out of all proportion to
the real situation. As criminologist Terence Morris argues 'it was because crime readily featured as
a newspaper staple that references were made to a 'crime wave' when the matter was debated in
Parliament, or when judges pronounced on what they perceived to be an astonishing increase in the
incidence of a particular type of offence.\textsuperscript{64}

Another reason for the obsession with crime and morality was that it was a symptom of, or
metaphor for, other post-war anxieties. It is a line of argument used by Peter Hennessy, who asserts
that the level of interest in crime served 'as a popular barometer of national well-being', and in the
late forties the crime barometer registered 'a sensation that standards and civil culture generally
were declining in ways which spoke volumes about the national fibre.\textsuperscript{65} The feeling was that the
upheavals of war had caused immeasurable, perhaps irreparable, social and moral damage, and
symptomatic of that was post-war lawlessness. Juvenile delinquency seemed to suggest that a
generation of youngsters was out of control thanks to the wartime dislocation of family life. (The
very phrase 'juvenile delinquency' was itself coined at the time, a fact indicative of how it was seen
as a new phenomenon.) Thousands of deserters appeared to be roaming the cities posing, or so it
was believed, a threat to law and order because, devoid of identity cards and ration books, they
were compelled to steal to survive.\textsuperscript{66} It was a problem that rumbled on throughout the aftermath
years, and one which newspapers eagerly exploited: in December 1945, for instance, the \textit{Daily Express}
ran a front page story about 'large numbers of deserters living by preying on the public.\textsuperscript{67}
Deserter were also blamed for the apparent increase in violent and armed robbery. In 1947, for
instance, a \textit{Daily Herald} leader alleged that 'all the criminals carrying arms today are Service
deserters',\textsuperscript{68} and in 1948 the paper carried the sensational news that a deserter had murdered a
policeman.\textsuperscript{69}

\textsuperscript{63} Morris, Terence, \textit{Crime and Criminal Justice Since 1945} (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989): 89-90, quoted in Hennessy:
445.

\textsuperscript{64} Morris, \textit{Crime and Criminal Justice Since 1945}: 89-90, quoted in Hennessy, \textit{Never Again}: 445.

\textsuperscript{65} Hennessy, \textit{Never Again}: 445.

\textsuperscript{66} Angus Calder, for example, has written how 'it was estimated after the war that some twenty thousand unpardoned
deserters were at large. Without a ration book, there was not much alternative to crime.' (Calder, Angus, \textit{The

\textsuperscript{67} \textit{Daily Express}, 15 December 1945.

\textsuperscript{68} \textit{Daily Herald}, 1 January 1947.

\textsuperscript{69} \textit{Daily Herald} 16 February 1948.
Racketeering and gangsterism were also perceived to be an indulgence of those still restless from the excitement of war, who found it difficult to readjust to the conditions of peace. As David Hughes has argued, there should have been an intermediate state - a promise, an exuberance - which sustained the excitement of war without carrying the risks. There wasn't and this produced tensions which some people released in a volley of blanks over the weekend territorial landscapes, some poured into the spate of war-books and barbaric films, and others got rid of, rather more satisfactorily, in crime. Crime indeed reproduced the conditions of war at minimum risk and with substantial promise of benefit. Furthermore, chronic shortages and rationing were seen to have sparked off, as the Daily Express trumpeted, 'a new crime wave' with thieves stealing 'goods which are hard to get, whether they be eggs and poultry or cars and jewels.' Not only did the shortages provide untold opportunities for the professional criminal, but also made law-breakers out of the most law-abiding of citizens, as Hughes writes: 'it was possible to feel, as never before, that all were spivs.' Crime, in other words, was no longer just the preserve of a minority of outlaws but involved the public as a whole, and led some commentators to fear there was a national crisis in moral standards. Gangster films were similarly perceived in some quarters as evidence of the degenerating standards of civil culture; while the popular audience had a thirst for such front-page, raw action entertainment, middle-class critics often saw them as undesirable on the grounds of their brutality, debased morals, and glorification of the criminal. Leonard Mosley of the Daily Express was one, regretting that British producers had chosen to make this 'sordid type of picture' with the 'moral standards of a barnyard'. These films were especially disappointing for such critics at a time when there was a strong crusading spirit among middle-class improvers to 'raise the moral and cultural standards of the general public'.

A critic particularly disturbed by gangster films was Sight and Sound's Arthur Vesselo. His review of They Made Me a Fugitive, Cavalcanti's picture about an ex-serviceman who joins a gang of racketeers, is worth quoting at length because it evidences a number of the points made above. It illustrates the perceived atmosphere of a debilitating social malaise, and how this was seen as a disturbing consequence of the war, even drawing a parallel between They Made Me a Fugitive and the melancholic films produced by Germany in the wake of the Great War that so expressed its dysfunctional state. As will also be seen, Vesselo recognised the notion of crime as a metaphor for wider social disorder. He began his review by first describing the film's unrelieved 'sordidness,
corruption and violence' and continued to write that

it is the mood that is wrong, a mood bearing all the emblems of post-war depression and spiritual confusion. The RAF officer, out of place in civilian life and straying into racketeering for an adventurous livelihood, is an unconscious personification of decent humanity demoralised by war and unfitted for peace; and his wild but helpless twistings and turnings in the dark trap in which he finds himself are sinister reflections of our own state today... [The film] might have come straight out of a German studio of the 'twenties. Half-a-dozen other recent British films, superficially perhaps not quite so obviously in this class, have nevertheless an unpleasant undertone, a parade of frustrated violence, an inversion and disordering of moral values, a groping into the grimier recesses of the mind, which are unhealthy symptoms of the same kind of illness.75

As Vesselo's critique also intimates, seemingly any gangster and spiv film could be interpreted as a pessimistic metaphor for, or symptom of, the aftermath of war.76 However, as this thesis is restricted to films with a narrative bearing on the war, only those crime films which have a storyline connecting war and crime are considered here. Six such films have been identified, which in order of release: They Made Me a Fugitive; Dancing with Crime (John Paddy Carstairs, 1947); Night Beat (Harold Huth, 1948); Man on the Run (Lawrence Huntington, 1949); A Stranger at My Door (Brendan J. Stafford, 1950); and Cage of Gold (Basil Dearden, 1950).77

Man on the Run dramatised the headline issue of desertion, as Variety noted: 'it spotlights the deserter problem, which is currently of intense topical interest.'78 During the period that Man on the Run was made and released there was an increasingly heated public debate on how to deal with the problem of unpardoned deserters, 'this miserable hangover of war' as one MP put it.79 The contentious issue was whether they should be caught and punished or forgiven and offered an

75 Sight and Sound, Autumn 1947: 120. (Also quoted in Murphy: 156.)
76 Examples include: Odd Man Out (Carol Reed, 1946), a bleak tale about a fugitive Irish terrorist, which was described as a 'study in gloom, in defeat' by The Times, 31 January 1947; and It Always Rains on Sundays (Robert Hamer, 1947), a slice of life melodrama about a convict on the run in East London, about which Variety wrote: 'gloom, and more gloom, creeps into every foot of this film. For those to whom misery and art are synonymous, this may be entertainment.' 3 December 1947.
77 It should also be noted that there are any number of other films, both crime and non-crime, containing references to the war as a cause of criminality. In The Blue Lamp, for instance, a voiceover explains that a juvenile delinquent was 'typical of many a girl, showing the effects of a childhood home broken and demoralised by war'; and Good Time Girl (David MacDonald, 1948) features two GI deserters-turned-gangsters. Another film with a gangster theme is The Third Man (Carol Reed, 1949). It will be remembered from the last chapter that is a tale of lawlessness in the ashes of post-war Europe featuring that most charismatic of all the cinematic racketeers, Harry Lime. As it is European in scope, and has already been evaluated, it is ignored here.
78 Variety, 1 June 1949.
79 Daily Express, 30 March 1950.
amnesty. The film’s poster advertisements sought to sell the film on the back of the controversy by posing the question: ‘What should be done with the thousands of men living underground nearly four years after the end of the war? Should an amnesty be granted?’

The film’s story revolves around a deserter (Derek Farr) who, despite his illegal status, has managed to earn an honest living, but gets falsely accused of an armed hold-up in which a policeman is killed (the gangsters also being deserters). By the end of the film he succeeds in proving that he is innocent of that crime, but still guilty of desertion, and he is sentenced to finish his outstanding service obligation in Germany. The film appears to have had serious pretensions, calling for a more lenient attitude towards deserters. Today’s Cinema, for instance, noted that the film ‘makes a sympathetic commentary on deserters in general, though insisting on surrender and fresh start as their only solution’, and the Monthly Film Bulletin recorded the film's 'lengthy moralising on the highly controversial subject of clemency for deserters.'

Night Beat, Dancing With Crime, and They Made Me a Fugitive all deal with demobbed servicemen getting caught up with gangsters, whereas Man on the Run deals with deserters involved in crime. Such was the apparent rush of these films that a reviewer of Night Beat noted how 'ex-commandos who turn to racketeering seem to be qualifying for first place in the latest crime melodramas.' Night Beat started out as a film with quality aspirations but ended up as a particularly crude effort deserving of the universal slating it received. It is a tale about the adventures of two demobbed commandos, both friends (one played by Ronald Howard, son and biographer of Leslie Howard), who join the police force, but whose different personalities lead them in different directions. One is level headed and gets promoted, the other is temperamental and, after some ill deeds, is forced to resign. Both get involved in an underworld of murderous intrigue, seedy nightclubs, and unsavoury romances.

The film engaged with a number of contemporary preoccupations; both ex-squaddies, for instance, become rapidly disillusioned after failing to find the kind of responsible and well paid job they expect (they join the police as a last resort). Another issue Night Beat touched on, as did George in Civvy Street, was the existence of spivs who not only avoided war work but also prospered in the war. As a comment on the obsession with crime, the most revealing aspect of Night Beat is that it

80 See, for example, the Daily Express, 30 March 1950, 31 March 1950.
81 Film publicity: BFI microjacket.
82 Today’s Cinema, 22 April 1949.
84 Daily Film Renter, 19 January 1948.
85 See, for example, Kinematograph Weekly, 22 January 1948; Daily Herald, 16 January 1948.
was originally intended to be 'a film about West End night life viewed from the point of view of the police' (a sort of premature *The Blue Lamp*), but somewhere along the line it was 'transformed into another of those gangster melodramas.' The implication is that in 1947 the activities of lawbreakers were thought better box-office than the activities of law enforcers: the law enforcer as hero had to wait until the beginning of 1950 with the release of *The Blue Lamp*.

*Dancing With Crime* was regarded as a 'slick popular production' of its type. A solidly made and modestly successful film, it is another story in the format of two old friends demobbing at the same time, but who go off in different directions. One, played by Richard Attenborough, seeks to earn an honest crust and takes up taxi driving, the other is attracted to easy money and crime. The dishonest one gets murdered early on, and the honest one spends the rest of the film trying to expose the gangster culprits, a crusade which takes him into the brutal and disordered underworld of nightclubs and gangsters. Suffice to observe of this film that it is another example of a film that sensationalised crime and drew on the theme of the ex-serviceman as restless and unable to resettle easily back into a quiet life. As *The Times*, for example, stated, *Dancing With Crime* was 'another film which illustrates the present preoccupation of British studios with the black market and the more sinister and dubious way of living indulged in both by ex-servicemen and those who never wore a uniform.'

The most accomplished of the ex-serviceman-turned-gangster films is *They Made Me a Fugitive*. Adapted from Jackson Budd's pulp novel *A Convict Has Escaped*, published in 1941, it is at core a formulaic tale about a man framed for a crime he did not commit, and who subsequently escapes from prison and as a fugitive seeks to exact revenge on those who set him up. The fugitive, Clem Morgan (Trevor Howard), is an ex-RAF pilot with a 'fine war record', who has grown hardened and cynical on the experience. Back home, he cannot relate to civilian life and craves excitement, finding solace in alcohol and black-market crime. He joins a gang of racketeers led by Narcy (Griffith Jones) but things rapidly start to go wrong when Narcy, a particularly unpleasant and vicious spiv, starts to covet Clem's girl and resents his refusal - on moral grounds - to deal in cocaine. Narcy decides he wants Clem out of the way, and gets him accused of the manslaughter of a policeman during a warehouse raid, resulting in a fifteen year sentence of hard labour in Dartmoor prison. Clem later escapes from prison, and the bulk of the film revolves around his attempt to track down Narcy and his henchmen.

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86 *Daily Express*, 16 January 1948.
87 *Daily Film Renter*, 26 June 1947.
88 *The Times*, 11 August 1947.
Cavalcanti frequently imbues They Made Me a Fugitive with a cinematic artistry that raises it well above the average gangster film. Cavalcanti, an original and unusual film talent, was something of a fugitive himself, spending his life on the move around the world searching for sympathetic filmmaking conditions, a pursuit that prompted David Thomson to ask 'Is Cavalcanti a nomad or an idealist for ever being edged out of compromising establishments?' He began his film-making career in the avant-garde atmosphere of Paris in the twenties, and in 1934 crossed the channel and joined the documentary movement, and was then recruited by Ealing Studios at the start of the war, remaining there until 1946 when he left to make They Made Me a Fugitive. Once in Britain he soon established a reputation as a pioneering film-maker in the realist mould, and by the late forties had established for himself a permanent place among top-flight British directors.

The impact that They Made Me a Fugitive had on his reputation was mixed, attracting both praise and outrage. Of those hostile to the film, Vessel's already quoted comments were typical; they registered the craftsmanship of the film, but were profoundly upset by its violence, sadism, and dubious morality, and were appalled that someone of Cavalcanti's reputation should have made it. Of the positive reviews the Manchester Guardian thought that Cavalcanti had made 'a welcome return to form' with a 'plausible and serious thriller', although the reviewer had some reservations about stylistic weaknesses, such as the 'pure knockabout ending'. Other good reviews included the New Statesman which summed up the film as being 'both enjoyable and exciting'; and popular writer Maurice Speed snappily reckoned it 'an excellent little thriller'. From a commercial angle, the trade press liked the film and predicted it would go down well with audiences: for instance, Variety noted that 'it cashes in on topical headlines and should play to hefty grosses'; and Kinematograph Weekly declared that 'the masses should revel in its macabre thrills and verbal slapstick'. Audiences did revel in the film as it was a notable box-office success.

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91 Barr, Ealing Studios: 14.
92 Leader Magazine, 8 January 1949.
93 Murphy overstates the hostility to the film, selectively omitting reviewers that liked it. Murphy, Realism and Tinsel: 153-155.
95 New Statesman, 28 June 1947.
96 Speed, F., Maurice, Film Review, 1947: 73.
97 Variety, 2 July 1947.
98 Kinematograph Weekly, 26 June 1947.
99 Josh Billings, for instance, lists it as a Notable Box-office Attraction. Kinematograph Weekly, 18 December 1947.
The distinctive quality that Cavalcanti brought to They Made Me a Fugitive was its visual style. With what the Manchester Guardian described as 'his fine eye for the details and the poetry of urban realism', Cavalcanti drew on his Paris and documentary experience and created dark, gloomy images of a low-life landscape in a powerfully realistic manner. London is portrayed as a city of desolate and rainswept cobbled streets and quaysides, peopled by gangsters, with the occasional prostitute and policeman lurking in the shadows. There is a sequence set in Dartmoor prison, in which Cavalcanti utilises montage and the voiceovers of inmates to create a claustrophobically threatening and sinister environment. When Clem escapes, Cavalcanti photographs some fine long shots of him being pursued by police and dogs in silhouette as dawn breaks over the moors. Also, despite his reputation as a realist, Cavalcanti indulges in a number of (effective) expressionistic shots, such as the sequence of Narcy's rooftop fall to his death, seen from his point of view.

The film is notable for the violence and brutality of the extraneous twists and turns of the plot that pad out the film. One of the women gets barbarically beaten up by Narcy, another is threatened with torture if she does not co-operate, the torture being a thrashing with a studded belt wielded by a heavily built henchman who relishes the prospect. When Clem is on the run he seeks refuge and food from an ordinary looking house on the edge of the moors, but instead of surprising a normal household he encounters a psychotic middle-class housewife who offers to feed and clothe him in exchange for his killing her alcoholic husband. Clem refuses and leaves, and the audience is then treated to the sight of the woman murdering her husband at close range as he wobbles inebriated down the stairs in his pyjamas, a murder she then attributes to Clem. The film's ending is gloomy; in his death-throes Narcy maliciously refuses to confess to the police that Clem is innocent, and so Clem faces the prospect of finishing his term of hard labour for a crime he did not commit. It is not only a tragedy for him and his girl, who have both earned the audience's sympathy, but implies the failure of the police and the judiciary to remedy a miscarriage of justice. While the death of Narcy and the penalty paid by Clem (albeit for the wrong crime) ostensibly proffers a respectable 'crime does not pay' moral, it is hardly convincing. Indeed, the moral ambiguity of the film upset some critics, such as Mosley who argued that 'though justice triumphs in the end and the sordid villains get their deserts, you feel they would have got away with it if the censor hadn't been looking.'

Unusually for an adaptation, the film version is actually more gruesome than the original novel. In the novel, for instance, once Clem refuses to murder the alcoholic husband he leaves and that is the end of the matter; the housewife does not become a cold-blooded murderer, as in the film. Another example of the novel's less pessimistic outlook is the portrayal of the police as immediately

100 Manchester Guardian, 28 June 1947.

responsive to Clem's claims of framing, and they then efficiently prove his innocence. This not only puts the police in a better light, but also allows the story a brighter, hopeful ending.

The novel was not only reworked to heighten the disordered atmosphere, but the plot, protagonist and chronology were also altered to accommodate contemporary preoccupations about the nature of post-war gangsterism. In the book the fugitive is a law-abiding South African serviceman who unwillingly gets involved with racketeers, but the film updates the character to a British ex-serviceman who - this is the most telling alteration - deliberately seeks a life of crime. The alterations were designed to make the film highly topical, as its advertising indicated: one poster boasted how the film was the 'sensation of the hour, straight off the front page on to the screen'.

Although the film sensational exploits the immediacy of the subject, it does not attempt to explore the question why an honourable ex-serviceman like Clem should drift into crime. For Variety, this was a shortcoming, which suggested that a 'line or two at the beginning indicating why a decent ex-serviceman like Clem falls for a gangster's life, could have lifted the story to a higher sociological plane.

In a way though, no explanation was necessary as crime was simply fashionable, and the flawed, restless war hero who drifted into racketeering had become a newspaper, literary and cinematic cliche. Turner and Rennell, for instance, remark that 'the disillusioned hero, unable to find a place in a society that seemed to him to be cruelly indifferent to his fortunes, became a stock figure in post-war literary output.'

Clem's profile in They Made Me a Fugitive as a disillusioned war hero is established in the opening scenes. In the first scene, Narcy tells his gang about Clem, a possible new recruit, describing him as an ex-serviceman who finds 'life a bit tame since he was demobbed'. In the next scene Narcy and Clem meet (in a shady nightclub, typically) to set up their potential partnership, and Clem is stereotypically portrayed in the mould of the troubled ex-serviceman. He is drunk, unshaven, cynical, hard-boiled and hopelessly 'Bored! Bored!' (He needs 'another war', someone jokes.) The only explanation of Clem's motives is his throwaway comment that 'the only reason I'm a fat headed damn fool and not a hero is because I went on doing what the country put me in uniform to do, after they'd taken the uniform back.' Whether or not Clem teams up with Narcy and enters a career of racketeering is left to chance, with a tossed coin deciding his fate. It is a symbolically poignant touch, suggesting the kind of fatalistic, live-for-the-present attitude that

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102 Kinematogroph Weekly, 12 June 1947. Thanks to former student Phil Hogg for finding this, and making other comments on the film and novel.

103 Variety, 2 July 1947.

104 Turner and Rennell, When Daddy Came Home: 182. Interestingly enough, although Hollywood projected the image of the ex-serviceman turned gangster after the Great War, there was no British equivalent. The ex-serviceman as restless and prone to criminal behaviour was not part of British post-Great War culture. See, for instance, Connolly, Mark, 'The Commemoration of the Great War in the City and East London, 1916-1939', unpublished Ph.D thesis (University of London, 1995).
prevailed during the war years, and lingered on after the fighting had stopped. Clem personified the restlessness that Costello identified when he wrote that the 'brutalising and dislocative effects of war had left many individuals reacting to the cessation of hostilities as another interruption in the transient pattern of existence to which they had become accustomed. Millions of demobilised servicemen had grown used to an adventurous existence which did not reach beyond tomorrow. It took months and even years for many of them to accustom themselves again to a routine civilian existence.\textsuperscript{105}

If gangster films were symptomatic of post-war depression and disillusion, so too were the batch of disturbing 'psychological' thrillers and melodramas that also appeared in the late forties. Like the gangster film, the 'psychological' film was a new departure for the British industry, both following in the wake of Hollywood's film-noirs, and echoing the growing status of psychiatry and psychology. 

*Crossfire*, for instance, is a tale about an ex-serviceman who is a murderer, a 'psychopathic villain ... seething with feelings of inferiority, resentment and anti-semitism.'\textsuperscript{106} In a review of the film, the *Daily Film Renter* highlighted the connection between the war and mental disorder when it observed that the film 'is at pains to illustrate that soldiers in the flat aftermath of war, with victory won and nobody left to hate, are inclined to transfer their capacity for hatred either to themselves, or to others.'\textsuperscript{107} Murphy describes British films in this mould as 'morbid burrowings', and argues that while they are too diffuse to be contained in a single genre, they all share an interest in 'psychological disturbance, in sex, violence, the exotic.'\textsuperscript{108} Two films from the corpus, *Mine own Executioner* (Anthony Kimmins, 1947) and *Silent Dust* (Lance Comfort, 1948), foreground the ex-serviceman and 'morbidly burrow' into the less palatable aspects of the war and its aftermath. Unlike the gangster films, these films delve back into the protagonist's wartime experiences (through flashbacks) as a means of psychologically explaining the murderous and transgressive post-war behaviour of the veterans.

*Silent Dust* has already been examined in some detail in Chapter Three (pages 95–97), the context being the film's unusually powerful evocation of front-line combat in the flashback sequences of the war. Set in 1947, the flashbacks to the war years explain why the central character, army officer Simon Rawley, became a deserter and survived on the run for three years by resorting to racketeering and gangsterism. The film indicates that Rawley was a rotten wastrel before the war, and thus mitigating the idea of the war as a totally corrupting force, and that desertion and crime

\textsuperscript{105} Costello, *Love, Sex and War*: 358.


\textsuperscript{107} *Daily Film Renter*, 31 December 1947.

\textsuperscript{108} Murphy, *Realism and Tinsel*: 169.
were not typical of normal soldiers. 109

Mine Own Executioner, which was released in February 1948, was a small budget production for Korda’s London Films, the first of six made by Anthony Kimmins. 110 Based on Nigel Balchin’s popular novel of the same name, 111 it was adapted by the author himself and remains faithful to the original book. The film takes psychology itself as its subject, weaving a dramatic story around the private and professional life of a psychologist (also freely referred to as psychoanalyst and psychiatrist). Balchin was himself a professional psychologist who first worked as a pioneering industrial psychologist in the 1930s, and was then recruited by the War Office during wartime. Writing in his spare time, Balchin drew on his professional experience for material, and an interest in psychologically disturbed individuals, including those damaged by war, is found in many of his books, such as The Small Back Room, 112 which was made into a film a year after Mine Own Executioner.

In general Mine Own Executioner was regarded as an interesting and intelligent film despite some production weaknesses. Richard Winnington, for instance, acknowledged that the film was not technically brilliant and lacked an ‘over-riding poetry’, but praised the film for delivering ‘an intelligent translation of an intelligent contemporary novel’, 113 Speed thought the psychological problem it dealt with was ‘real and the approach intellectual ... this is one of the best films that Britain has produced for quite a while’, 114 and for the trade, Kinematograph Weekly described it as ‘exciting and thoughtful, but somewhat loosely knit psychiatric thriller’ and recommended it for ‘better-class audiences’. 115 It seems to have done moderately well at the box-office. 116

The plot is centred around lay psychologist Felix Milne (Burgess Meredith). A first class practitioner in the eyes of his colleagues and patients, he is prone to self-doubt, is a bully to his wife, and is infatuated with his wife’s best friend, Barbara (Christine Norden). He is, as the title

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109 Silent Dust also incorporates other aftermath concerns: it deals with the death of servicemen and bereavement; the issue of how to memorialise those that died; how the experience of war and separation changed people.


112 See pages 72–77.


114 Speed, Film Review, 1948: 15.


116 Billings does not mention it in his annual survey, but Murphy notes it as more popular than The Small Back Room (Realism and Tinsel: 174), which was a financial failure.
implies, his own worst enemy. Woven into the story of his personal angst are the problems of a new patient, Adam Lucian (Kieron Moore), a heroic ex-fighter pilot whose war service has left him with an unbalanced mind and a game leg. To find the sub-conscious root of the problem, Milne drugs him and it transpires via a vivid flashback that he was shot down over Burma, captured by the Japanese and subjected to diabolical cruelty, including the wanton smashing of his leg. Against the odds he escaped back to Britain. Back home he is fine for the first few months but then becomes violent and tries to murder his ever-loving wife. Diagnosing him as a potentially dangerous schizophrenic, Milne does his best for Lucian but, distracted by Barbara, cannot avert a tragedy: back home, Lucian hallucinates and kills his wife, believing her to be a Japanese camp guard. He then finds his way on to the ledge of a high building, and Milne climbs up a fireman's ladder to persuade him to come down. The attempt fails as Lucian shoots himself in the head and crashes down to the crowds below. At the inquest afterwards, Milne is more or less exonerated, but is so disillusioned that he decides to give up his work until re-inspired by his wife's confidence in him and the sight of a child patient who needs his help.

There are parallels in the story with The Small Back Room: each film has a flawed character, Sammy Rice and Milne, who by the end of the story achieve a kind of redemption. Both characters are troubled by a lack of self-confidence and take out their anxieties on the women they love; they both have the confidence and admiration of colleagues yet remain unsure of their competence; they reluctantly get caught up in unseemly political intrigue (Milne gets caught up in the politics of the institute's funding). Their abilities to cope are severely tested by professional demands (with Rice to defuse the bomb, with Milne to deal with the schizophrenic flier), and both emerge at the end with restored faith in themselves and their work. In The Small Back Room, Rice could topically be interpreted as a psychological and physical victim of the war, his foot blown off in action. It might be speculated that Milne's own aggressive behaviour also derives from war service, as although there is no mention in the film of his military past, the original novel does mention that he was an ex-gunner.

Lucian's mental disturbance is primarily portrayed as a consequence of his wartime experiences, but stops short of completely attributing it to the war. The horrors he endured at the hands of the Japanese certainly precipitated the mental breakdown, but the ultimate cause is vaguely, in both film and novel, attributed to some imprecise childhood experience that led to a distrust of women. It is a stance not dissimilar to Silent Dust, with its avoidance of the possibility that the terror of front-line combat could alone push a serviceman into cowardly and lawless behaviour. Whether or not these were just gestures towards Freudian theories about childhood, or an inability to confront fully the psychological damage inflicted by the war (it could also be argued that the psychological consequences of the war were avoided by not overtly developing the characters of Rice and Milne as war victims) is debatable.

117 See pages 60–61.
Mine Own Executioner, in its melodramatic way, related some truths about ex-combatants. According to Costello there were 277,077 British servicemen who returned home mentally and physically maimed by the war. The psychological scars, continues Costello, 'often took longer to heal than physical wounds', with many men 'disturbed by bouts of impotence or sadistic over-aggressiveness,' traits exhibited in varying degrees by Milne and Rice. The majority of the mentally scarred coped well enough in the sense they did not deteriorate into chronic psychological disorder, but some, like Lucian, did. In fact the particular experiences that contributed to Lucian's mental collapse were firmly rooted in reality, which is not surprising given Balchin's professional background as a psychologist. Paul Fussell, for instance, relates how 'starvation and thirst among prisoners of the Japanese ... drove many insane', and at least one Burma veteran 'had nightmares and would suddenly wake up during the night and run towards the wardrobe thinking Japanese snipers were firing at him. Psychiatrist T. F. Main, one-time advisor to the Director of Military training, recorded in the Journal of Mental Science the case history of an ex-PoW who after repatriation developed 'violent feelings of destructiveness and murderous wishes', and was soon classified as schizophrenic.

Cases of mental disorder, especially if they led to unlawful behaviour, often hit the headlines. Turner and Rennell, for example, cite cases of sexual violence and the occasional murder committed by deranged 'returning heroes' and observe how such cases generated eager news coverage, and was 'the stuff of drama', as Silent Dust and Mine Own Executioner indicate.

**Conclusion**

**Conclusion**

After seeing The Way Ahead (Carol Reed, 1944), the respected film about the training of civilians into an efficient fighting force (which was emotively shown to the press on D-Day), the critic C. A.

118 Costello, Love, Sex and War: 359.

119 Costello, Love, Sex and War: 360. Curiously, in Balchin's book (but not the film) there is a brief mention that Milne himself is an ex-gunner but the intriguing theme of how his war experience might have affected his behaviour is not developed. If it was, it might be speculated that his aggressiveness towards his wife was a consequence of his war experience!

120 The visual symbolism of the fire ladder and high building in Mine Own Executioner could be interpreted as suggestive of Milne's impotence. After a difficult struggle to get up to the peak of the ladder/building, Milne cannot achieve climax/satisfaction because his objective, to rescue Lucian, is thwarted when he shoots himself. Thanks to Tony Aldgate for this line of thinking.


122 Gillett, J., Liverpool (not dated), quoted in Turner and Rennell, When Daddy Came Home: 83.


Lejeune asked in her review whether British film-makers were planning a film 'about the way ahead beyond the way immediately ahead', as some day the war would be over and there would be the 'gravest reorientation in history.' She hoped that film-makers would 'apply to the adjustment of a nation at peace the same specialised attention they have applied to the encouragement of a nation at war. I hope that somewhere, in some office, at this moment, some man of good sense is planning a film to show how a good soldier can be turned back into a good citizen.' Three years later, in 1947, she was 'still hoping.' She was to be disappointed, as no such seminal film was made by a British studio: the nearest films got to what realist critics, such as Lejeune, wanted was Hollywood’s *The Best Years of Our Lives*. British film-makers, however, did not ignore the massive question of mass demobilisation and social readjustment. Four films were made which focused on the topic, and in at least another six films ex-servicemen play a crucial role.

Films which foregrounded the process of demobilisation and readjustment included *Elizabeth of Ladymead*, which suggested how the war had impacted on women, and the reactions to this of the returning husband. In terms of its ideological project, it modestly advocated to audiences some degree of greater independence for women, but not too much, as in the past this had led to disaster. *I'll Turn to You* was regarded as a film that pluckily dramatised the most difficult and intransigent problems associated with the hard slog back to normality. It tackled the topical issues of appallingly inadequate housing, the rebuilding of marital relations, the frustrations of finding satisfying employment, and rapid onset of disillusion experienced by so many ex-servicemen. George Formby's skit on demobilisation, *George in Civvy Street*, is a more substantial critique of the situation than at first meets the eye. Beneath the film's sunny facade lurked a downbeat message for the ex-serviceman. On his return home, George encounters unexpected and unwelcome changes, not least of which is the disorientating presence of profiteers and spivs who resent his return and try to rip him off. The film engaged with many an ex-serviceman's reaction on homecoming that civilian society had become self-seeking and greedy, and resentful of returning soldiers. Essentially, the idea that ex-soldiers faced a tough ride back in Civvy Street is the justification for George's relentless optimism and unbreakable cheerfulness. In the same way dig Formby had raised audience's spirits in the depressed thirties and the dark days of the war, he sought to do the same in 1946. The film also alludes to fissures in society between those, like George, who value the wartime ideals of community and co-operation, and those like Jeb who put personal profit above all else. It is a telling comment, as it challenges the idea that Britain emerged from six years of war with a high degree of social unity and common purpose.

George's close shave with fraudsters is also indicative of the late forties obsession with crime that generated so many gangster films, many of which prominently feature ex-servicemen in key roles. As has been shown, these films associate ex-combatants (both demobbers and deserters) with

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lawlessness. Some of them, like Clem in *They Made Me a Fugitive*, choose crime of their own free will; in others, like *Dancing With Crime*, they unwillingly get drawn into it. Whatever the precise details of the plot though, the key point is that the films imply the depressing inevitability of the ex-serviceman's affinity with danger and gangsterism. In doing so, these gangster films dramatised the widespread feeling that ex-soldiers found it difficult to readjust from the excitement of war to a peaceful civilian existence. It was the stuff of headlines, and newspapers revelled in sensationalist stories about the lawbreaking activities of demobbers and deserters, and likewise for novelists and playwrights the disillusioned ex-combatant become a common character stereotype. The gangster films discussed here were the cinematic expression of this topical aftermath theme.

In a similar mould are *Silent Dust* and *Mine Own Executioner*, which, like gangster films were inspired by contemporary preoccupations (as well as by Hollywood), share violent and disturbing undercurrents, and feature ex-servicemen as brutal and murderous. But whereas gangster films fabricate a tale based around the criminal underworld, these films site the ex-serviceman within the family and respectable society, and 'psychologically' explain the causes of the ex-serviceman's transgressive behaviour. They do this by recreating their wartime experiences and showing how these experiences precipitated their descent into violence. Even though the logic of the narrative mitigates the war from being the sole cause of their anti-social behaviour, these films nevertheless acknowledge that front-line combat could spark off a mental breakdown (*Mine Own Executioner*), or be conducive to propelling a serviceman into racketeering (*Silent Dust*).

Apart from the comparatively upbeat *Elizabeth of Ladymead* (although by Wilcox's standards, this film too is lacking in fairy-tale charm and romance), film-makers painted a somewhat gloomy, desolate image of post-war demobilisation and readjustment. There is a glaring lack of films portraying demobilisation or any other aspect of post-war readjustment in an optimistic light, looking forward to a bright post-aftermath future. What is also noticeable is the lack of any heroic, triumphal rhetoric about the war itself, or valiant justifications for the present hardships in terms of it being a small price to pay for the defeat of evil. Rather, the contrary happens: the films tend introspectively to rake over the worst aspects of the war's hangover, a trend most noticeable in those films not specifically about demobilisation but featuring ex-servicemen in major roles. Of all the films in which ex-servicemen could have made an appearance, they only turn up in films with bleak and brutal undercurrents, films which were recognised at the time as notoriously symptomatic of a post-war depression and social malaise.
Summary and conclusion

By surveying and mapping out the entire body of films that dealt with the Second World War and its aftermath, and examining in depth a representative selection, this thesis has demonstrated that the war and its consequences were ever-present topics on British cinema screens during the five years from the beginning of 1946 until the end of 1950. In those first few years after victory, British film-makers made a substantial number of films (34 in total, or nearly one in every nine films made) which directly or indirectly addressed the war. Aside from these films which chronologically and thematically revisited the conflict, there was a cycle of films (23 in total) that dealt with the war's aftermath, whether as a topic or as a backdrop. Cinemas also re-screened a host of wartime war films, and showed many imported Hollywood war and aftermath films. These findings put paid to the conventional notion that in the immediate aftermath of war the British film industry ignored the subject of war. A reason for the widespread assumption that the subject of war disappeared from cinema screens in the immediate post-war years, was that critics tended to only recognise films about the war if they were realist-style combat films. As this type of war film was less common in those years (as film-makers dealt with other aspects of the war), it was not surprising they have been overlooked.

This thesis has also laid to rest the concomitant claim that the audience en masse wanted to avoid films about the war in the years after victory. It has been shown that cinemagoers' taste was fragmented and unpredictable, and that for every piece of evidence suggesting audience resistance to war films, there was plenty of evidence suggesting the opposite, that there was a buoyant demand for war-related films. This is most obviously witnessed by the fact that nearly half of the war films released in those years were notable box-office successes, including two that were smash hits, The Courneys of Curzon Street and Piccadilly Incident. Hollywood war and aftermath films also did well at the box-office, especially The Best Years of Our Lives. The popular interest in war topics has also been indicated by drawing attention to the plethora of plays, books and newsreels that were written and produced about the war in those years (findings which further challenge the argument that popular culture in general avoided the war in its aftermath). Firmly anchored in the concerns and preoccupations of the day, the creation of so much popular cultural commentary on the war self-evidently testified to the overwhelming presence of the war in the national consciousness. It was an age, as Peter Hennessy has written, 'dominated by the shadow of war, its accomplishments and shortcomings constantly measured against the hopes and expectations of 1945 when, this time, Britain really was going to be a land fit for returning war heroes to live, work and raise a family in.'

The war offered a vast source of narrative possibilities which film-makers eagerly exploited, and

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the war surfaced in a range of film styles and genres. Not only could they make films about well known wartime episodes, but with the war over they could tap into a gamut of new 'now it can told' stories about previously secret or unknown wartime activities, and pay tribute to those involved. Fresh story opportunities were also opened up by the turbulent and uncertain circumstances of the post-war world as the country returned to normal, and Europe seemed to be sliding into further conflict. Film-makers could approach these topics with relative freedom as they were no longer constrained by the demands - stylistic, ideological and thematic - of wartime propaganda, and they enjoyed an unprecedented degree of freedom from interference by the censor. If they dared, film-makers could raise awkward questions and controversial issues about the war and its aftermath. It was also, at least until the end of the decade, an exceptional 'golden age' of film-making creativity and energy. The British film production industry had enjoyed a good war and entered the post-war period with new found respect and financial success. British film-makers had proved they were among the best in the world, audiences attendances were at an all time high, and the cinema was regarded as a cultural and economic institution of national importance. And even after the financial crash in 1948, the industry remained an important volume producer of films, even if the quality and artistic dynamism began to fade.

By examining the films within the contemporary social, political, and economic context of their production and consumption, this thesis has explored how, and why, films interpreted and reworked the war and its aftermath for post-war audiences. An eclectic and rapidly evolving body of films, they engaged with the fluctuating and fluid reactions and responses of a society coming to terms with the experience of the war, living with its hangover, and in the process of making the massive readjustment back to peacetime conditions.

For contemporary cinemagoers, the films projected a wide range of wartime and aftermath topics and themes, and did so from a variety of dramatic and comic approaches. There were films about the wartime role of scientists and secret agents (School for Secrets, The Small Back Room, Odette), and about the experience of serving in the army (Private Angelo, They Were Not Divided). Other films revisited the experience of the wartime home-front (The Weaker Sex, Piccadilly Incident, No Room at the Inn), and there was a tranch of films which dealt with the consequences and impact of the conflict, both at home and abroad (George in Civvy Street, They Made Me a Fugitive, Frieda, The Lost People, The Third Man).

In tone and mood there are cross currents of bitter-sweet emotions and attitudes towards the experience. Many films (The Weaker Sex, The Courtneys of Curzon Street, Piccadilly Incident), express a quiet, satisfied sense of relief that the fighting was over, and a restrained patriotic pleasure and pride in the defeat of Nazism. Comic portrayals (I See a Dark Stranger, This Man is Mine, Private Angelo) are in a similar vein but with a sharper edge as they were prepared to identify and satirise some of the absurdities, contradictions, and chaos thrown up by the war. In a
spirit of progressive social comment, a couple of films deliberately explored how the war had affected the status and expectations of women (*The Years Between, Elizabeth of Ladymead*), and another put the case for greater tolerance of Germans (*Frieda*). There are films which moodily rake over the ashes of the less-honourable aspects of the war effort (*The Small Back Room, No Room at the Inn, Silent Dust*). This kind of cheerless outlook is also found in most of the films which focused on the aftermath of the war with their tendency to foreground negative themes (*They Made Me a Fugitive, The Third Man, The Lost People*).

Across the broad range of topics covered by the films, an underlying shift in the topical interests of films occurs. In the late forties there is a decline in the volume of films about the war, and a corresponding increase in the number of films about the war's impact and consequences. One reason why war films remained relevant and popular with audiences was because their narrative interests adjusted with the changing requirements of cinemagoers. Films about the war years were, at the time, less relevant to audiences than films that dealt with the problems and issues associated with its aftermath. By 1950, when the country had overcome the worst of the economic and social havoc wrought by the war, aftermath films faded away, a short-lived cycle of films that only had significance to audiences living through the immediate post-war years. As aftermath films became outdated, so a new generation of films about the military battle appeared on screens in 1950 (Hollywood combat films appearing a year earlier in 1949), which satisfied a growing demand for films which relived the fighting.

Despite the darker forces present in some films, there are no anti-war films, or films which suggest the futility of the conflict. No films were made whose purpose was to project the reality of the horrors, brutality and violence of warfare, whether under fire at home or on battlefields abroad. But that is not to say the reality of the war was not represented in the films. Taken as a whole the films expressed the multi-dimensional reality of a population whose own experiences were as varied as were the people involved. Indeed, for many people the war generated a powerful mixture of reactions producing some of the happiest, and some of the worst, days of their lives. On the one hand was the sense of excitement, of adventure, and the pleasurable sense of everyone pulling together, and on the other hand were the upheavals and dislocations, the frustration, the boredom, the tragedy. For audiences, another reality of those films was that they offered an essentially English interpretation of the war as an alternative to Hollywood. This was important, as even though British studios turned out a plethora of war films, cinema screens were still dominated by Hollywood films and an American version of the war. (Exactly how Hollywood films compared and contrasted to British ones, and how they engaged with domestic audiences, is a subject for further research.)

In terms of the underlying ideological values and assumptions of the films, there is a discernable rightward shift in the stance of the films between 1946 and 1950, a shift which intuitively echoed a
retreat from the progressive spirit of the war. In effect, the aftermath years were a transitory period in the cultural rewriting of the war. They bridged the gap between the leftist approach of wartime propaganda films and the increasingly conservative interpretation of the war that took hold in 1950. The war films of 1946 (The Captive Heart, School For Secrets) are imbued with the idealistic rhetoric of the People's War with all its emphasis on collective effort, and by 1950 this has largely been written out, and the process begun of re-writing the war as a victory for the middle-classes and the heroism of individuals (The Wooden Horse, Odette, They Were Not Divided). Similarly, whereas the earlier films had a willingness to acknowledge some of the challenging issues associated with the war effort, the 1950 films were disinclined to complicate or tarnish the portrayal by dwelling on any troubling, problematic issues. These films signposted the way the war would be fought on cinema screens throughout the fifties. Made in the safe knowledge that Britain had survived the consequences of the war and went on to prosper, they could recount how Britain won the war with gusto and confidence, and redefine the meaning of the war as a victory for traditional patriotic values.

Wartime and fifties films, although separated in terms of their assumptions and preoccupations, have a commonality: both cycles are idealised, mythic, versions of the war that portray Britain as universally patriotic, purposeful, and self-sacrificing, and both versions were dominant forces in shaping the meaning of the war to their respective audiences. A striking characteristic of the imaging of the war in the late forties, is the relative absence of such idealised views. Filling the vacuum between the two cycles of myth-based accounts, are the group of pessimistic and darker films which offered cinemagoers a brief glimpse of the less salubrious, sinister, and complex undertones of the war. It was a projection of the war peculiar to those years, and it was as if the myth-makers were briefly caught off guard and an alternative history of the war was allowed on to cinema screens, and for a short time to dominate the medium.
Appendix One: British war and aftermath films released in Britain, 1946-1950

* denotes films which did notably well at the box-office: source Billings
+ denotes films reissued (all in 1949)

### War films

<table>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Film 1</th>
<th>Film 2</th>
<th>Film 3</th>
<th>Film 4</th>
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<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td><em>The Captive Heart</em></td>
<td>Lisbon Story</td>
<td><em>Meet the Navy</em></td>
<td>Night Boat to Dublin</td>
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<td>The Overlanders*</td>
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<td>Piccadilly Incident*</td>
<td>School For Secrets</td>
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<td>+I See a Dark Stranger</td>
<td>Theirs is the Glory*</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>This Man is Mine</td>
<td>+The Years Between*</td>
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<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Courtenays of Curzon Street*</td>
<td>Green for Danger*</td>
<td>A Matter of Life and Death*</td>
<td>School for Danger</td>
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<td>Teheran</td>
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<td>While the Sun Shines</td>
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<td>Woman to Woman</td>
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<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>Against the Wind</td>
<td>No Room at the Inn*</td>
<td>The Weaker Sex*</td>
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<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>Bless 'em All</td>
<td>Landfall</td>
<td>Private Angelo</td>
<td>The Small Back Room</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>What a Carry On!</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Whisky Galore</td>
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<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>But Not in Vain</td>
<td>The Cure for Love*</td>
<td>The Hasty Heart*</td>
<td>Morning Departure*</td>
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<td>Odette*</td>
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<td>They Were Not Divided*</td>
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<td>The Wooden Horse*</td>
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### Aftermath films

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Film 1</th>
<th>Film 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>George in Civvy Street</td>
<td>I'll Turn to You</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Dancing with Crime</td>
<td>Frieda*</td>
<td>They Made Me a Fugitive*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>Counterblast</td>
<td>The Flamingo Affair</td>
<td>It's Hard to be Good</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Mine Own Executioner</td>
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<td>Night Beat</td>
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<td>Portrait from Life</td>
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<td>Snowbound</td>
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<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>Children of Chance</td>
<td>Elizabeth of Ladymead</td>
<td>It's Not Cricket</td>
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<td>The Lost People</td>
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<td>Man on the Run</td>
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<td>Passport to Pimlico*</td>
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<td>Silent Dust*</td>
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<td>The Third Man*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Angel With the Trumpet</td>
<td>Cage of Gold</td>
<td>A Stranger at my Door</td>
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### War films as listed by Pronay

(WJFFRT, 1988, vol. 8, no. 1, 52.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Film 1</th>
<th>Film 2</th>
<th>Film 3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>The Captive Heart</td>
<td>Piccadilly Incident</td>
<td>The Years Between</td>
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<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Eyes that Kill</td>
<td>Castle Sinister</td>
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<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>Against the Wind</td>
<td>Bless 'Em All</td>
<td>But Not in Vain</td>
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<td></td>
<td>It's Hard to Be Good</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Whisky Galore!</td>
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<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>Angel With the Trumpet</td>
<td>Children of Chance</td>
<td>Conspirator</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The Lost People</td>
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<td>Private Angelo</td>
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<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Lilli Marlene</td>
<td>Odette</td>
<td>They Were Not Divided</td>
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<td>(The Woman With No Name was released in 1951, so it is discounted in total here.)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The Wooden Horse</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Total 34 films  
Total 23 films  
Total 19
Appendix Two: British and Hollywood wartime war films reissued in Britain, 1946-1950

+ denotes films reissued more than once

### British reissues

1946

- The Bells Go Down (Basil Dearden, 1943)
- Candlelight in Algeria (George King, 1943)
- Crooks’ Tour (John Baxter, 1940)
- The Goose Steps Out (Will Hay, 1942)
- The Lamp Still Burns (Maurice Elvey, 1943)
- My Ain Folk (Einar Berger, 1944)
- Nine Men (Harry Watt, 1943)
- Ships with Wings (Sergei Nolbandov, 1941)
- Somewhere on Leave (John E Blakeley, 1942)
- Tomorrow We Live (George King, 1942)
- The Young Mr. Pitt (Carol Reed, 1941)

1947

- The Big Blockade (Charles Frend, 1941)
- Demobbed (John E Blakeley, 1944)
- The First of the Few (Leslie Howard, 1942)
- The Ghost of St. Michael’s (Maurice Elvey, 1941)
- The Ghost Train (Walter Forde, 1941)
- I’ll Walk Beside You (Maclean Rogers, 1943)
- In Which We Serve (Noel Coward, 1942)
- A Matter of Life and Death (Powell and Pressburger, 1946)
- Millions Like Us (Launer and Gilliat, 1943)
- Secret Mission (Harold French, 1942)
- Three Silent Men (Daniel Birt, 1940)
- 2000 Women (Frank Launer, 1944)
- Under Your Hat (Maurice Elvey, 1940)
- Waterloo Road (Sidney Gilliat, 1944)

1948

- A Canterbury Tale (Powell and Pressburger, 1944)
- Cottage to Let (Anthony Asquith, 1941)
- The Day Will Dawn (Harold French, 1942)
- The Demi-Paradise (Anthony Asquith, 1943)
- The Gentle Sex (Leslie Howard, 1943)
- I’ll Walk Beside You (Maclean Rogers, 1943) Third reissue.
- In Which We Serve (Noel Coward, 1942) Second reissue.
- The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp (Powell and Pressburger, 1943)
- Night Train to Munich (Carol Reed, 1940)
- San Demetrio, London (Charles Frend, 1943)
- Somewhere in England (John E Blakeley, 1940)
- Towny Pipit (Bernard Miles, 1944)
- They Met in the Dark (Karel Lamac, 1943)
- The Way Ahead (Carol Reed, 1944)
- We Dive at Dawn (Anthony Asquith, 1943)
- Went the Day Well? (Cavalcanti, 1942)

1949

- Coastal Command (Jack Holmes, 1942)
- Journey Together (John Boulting, 1945)
- My Ain Folk (Germaine Burger, 1944)
- One of Our Aircraft is Missing (Michael Powell, 1942)
- Pimpernel Smith (Leslie Howard, 1941)
- The Silver Fleet (Vernon Sewell, 1943)
- Somewhere in Camp (John E Blakeley, 1942)
- Undercover (Sergei Nolbandov, 1943)
- Variety Jubilee (Maclean Rogers, 1943)

1950 None

Total 50 films

### Hollywood reissues

1946

- None

1947

- Caught in the Draft (David Butler, 1941)
- Eagle Squadron (Arthur Lubin, 1942)
- Escape (Mervyn LeRoy, 1940)
- So Ends Our Night (John Cromwell, 1941)

1948

- Escape to Glory (John Brahm, 1940)
- Foreign Correspondent (Alfred Hitchcock, 1940)
- Mrs Miniver (William Wyler, 1942)
- Northwest Passage (King Vidor, 1940)

1949

- The Long Voyage Home (John Ford, 1940)
- North Star (Lewis Milestone, 1943)

1950 None

Total 10 films
Appendix Three: Hollywood post-war war and aftermath films released in Britain, 1946-1950
* denotes films which did notably well at the box-office: source Billings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>War films</th>
<th>Aftermath films</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1946</strong></td>
<td><strong>1946</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>The House on 92nd Street (Henry Hathaway, 1945)</td>
<td>The Blue Dahlia (George Marshall, 1946)*</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Last Chance (Leopold Lindberg, 1945)</td>
<td>Cornered (Edward Dmytryk, 1945)</td>
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<tr>
<td>O.S.S. (Irving Pichel, 1946)*</td>
<td>Forever in Love (Delmere Daves, 1945)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Out of the Depths (D. Ross Lederman, 1946)</td>
<td>From This Day Forward (John Berry, 1946)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rendezvous 24 (James Tinling, 1946)</td>
<td>The Man Who Walked Alone (C. Cabanne, 1945)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tars and Spars (Alfred E. Green, 1945)</td>
<td>Somewhere in the Night (J. L. Mankiewicz, 1946)</td>
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<tr>
<td>To Each his Own (Mitchell Leisen, 1946)</td>
<td>Strange Triangle (Ray McCarey, 1946)</td>
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<tr>
<td>What Next, Corporal Hargrave? (Richard Thorpe, 1945)</td>
<td>The Stranger (Orson Welles, 1946)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1947</strong></td>
<td><strong>1947</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Beginning or the End? (Norman Taurog, 1947)</td>
<td>Till the End of Time (Edward Dmytryk, 1945)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clock and Dogger (Fritz Lang, 1946)</td>
<td>Tomorrow is Forever (Irving Pichel, 1945)</td>
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<tr>
<td>High Barbaree (Jack Conway, 1947)</td>
<td>Too Young to Know (Fred De Cordova, 1945)</td>
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<tr>
<td>13 Rue Madeleine (Henry Hathaway, 1946)</td>
<td>Welcome Home (Jack Moss, 1945)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1948</strong></td>
<td><strong>1948</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>A Foreign Affair (Billy Wilder, 1948)*</td>
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<td>Berlin Express (Jacques Tourneur, 1948)</td>
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<td>Beyond Glory (John Farrow, 1948)</td>
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<td>Crossfire (Edward Dmytryk, 1947)</td>
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<td>Desire Me (not credited, 1947)</td>
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<td>High Wall (Curtis Bernhardt, 1947)</td>
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<td>Homecoming (Mervyn LeRoy, 1948)</td>
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<td>Saigon (Leslie Fenton, 1947)*</td>
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<td>Sealed Verdict (Lewis Allen, 1948)</td>
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<td>The Unfaithful (Vincent Sherman, 1947)*</td>
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<td>I Was a Male War Bride (Howard Hawks, 1949)*</td>
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<td>Intrigue (Edwin L Marin, 1947)</td>
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<td>John Loves Mary (David Butler, 1948)</td>
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<td>My Own True Love (Compton Bennett, 1948)</td>
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<td>Rogues' Regiment (Robert Florey, 1948)</td>
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<td>The Street With No Name (Will Keighley, 1948)</td>
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<td><strong>1949</strong></td>
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<td>Command Decision (Sam Wood, 1949)</td>
<td>After Midnight (Mitchell Leisen, 1950)</td>
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<td>Fighter Squadron (Raoul Walsh, 1948)*</td>
<td>The Big Hangover (Norman Krasna, 1950)</td>
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<td>Home of the Brave (Mark Robson, 1949)</td>
<td>The Men (Fred Zinnemann, 1950)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Task Force (Delmer Daves, 1949)</td>
<td>The Search (Fred Zinnemann, 1948)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1950</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total 46 films</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Battleground (William Wellman, 1949)</td>
<td>Tokyo Joe (Stuart Heisler, 1949)</td>
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<td>The Boy With Green Hair (Joseph Losey, 1948)</td>
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<tr>
<td>East of the Rising Sun/Malaya (Richard Thorpe, 1949)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sands of Iwo Jima (Allan Dwan, 1950)*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Three Came Home (Jean Negulesco, 1950)*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Twelve O'Clock High (Henry King, 1949)</td>
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<tr>
<td>When Willie Comes Marching Home (John Ford, 1949)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Total 25 films

Total 46 films
Appendix Four: Survey of war and aftermath books published in Britain, 1946-1950

This is not an exhaustive survey but a list of titles that surfaced during the research. It is only intended to give an impression of the potential volume of war-related literature published in the years under review.

1946
David, D.L., *This Man is a Spy* (Rich and Cowan).
Gollancz, Victor, *In Darkest Germany* (Gollancz).
Hackforth-Jones, Gilbert, *Through the Storm* (The Book Club).
du Maurier, Daphne, *The Years Between* (Doubleday).
Roberts, Andrew, *Scheme for One* (The Book Club).

1947
Charles, Theresa, *Happy Now I Go* (Longmans, Green).
Harris, Arthur, *Bomber Offensive* (Collins).
Montgomery, Field Marshall, *Normandy to the Baltic* (Hutchinson).
Muggeridge, Michael (ed.), *Ciano's Diary, 1939-43* (Heineman).
Reynolds, Quentin, *Seventy Thousand to One* (Cassel).
Shulman, Milton, *Defeat in the West* (Secker and Warburg).

1948
Baron, Alexander, *From the City, from the Plough* (Jonathan Cape).
Schimanski, Stefan (ed.), *Leaves in the Storm: A Book of Diaries* (Lindsay Drummond)

1949
Guest, John, *Broken Images* (Longmans, Green and Co.).
Strensall, T., *The Story of the Battalion of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry 1939-1946* (Strensall).
Williams, Eric, *The Wooden Horse* (Collins, seventeen impressions by 1951).
1950
Richardson, Anthony, *Wingless Victory* (Oldhams).
Shute, Nevil, *A Town Like Alice* (Heinemann).
Wheatley, Dennis, *V for Vengeance* (Hutchinson).
Weeks, R., *Organisation and Equipment for World War Two*.
Young, Desmond, *Rommel* (Collins).

Total 56 titles
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Boland, Bridget, *Cockpit*, in Trewin (ed.), *Plays of the Year*. First performed 1948.


Brivati, Brian, and Jones, Harriet (eds), *From Reconstruction to Integration: Britain and Europe Since 1945* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1993).


Brunsdon, Charlotte, and Moseley, Rachel, "She's a foreigner who's become a British subject": *Frieda*, in Burton, Wells, O'Sullivan Tim (eds), *Liberal Directions*.


Clarke, T.E.B., *This is Where I Came In* (London: Michael Joseph, 1974).


Deighton, Anne, 'Britain and the Cold War, 1945-55: An Overview', in Brivati, and Jones, *From Reconstruction to Integration*.


Durgnat, Raymond, 'On The Small Back Room' in Christie, Ian (ed.), *Powell, Pressburger, and Others*.


Eyles, Allen, 'Rank and Film', in Lloyd, *Movies of the Forties*.


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Grosser, Alfred, Germany in Our Time: A Political History of the Post-war Years (London: Pall Mall Press, 1971).


Higson, Andrew, "Britain's Outstanding Contribution to the Film". The Documentarist Tradition, in Barr, All Our Yesterdays.


Hinxman, Margaret, 'The British Board of Film Censors', in Films in 1951.


Lambert, Gavin, 'As They Go', *Sequence*, Summer, 1950.


Lovell, Terry, 'Frieda', in Hurd, *National Fictions*


Mayring, Eva, A., 'British Policy in Occupied Germany: Democratisation and Social Democracy', in Brivati, and Jones, *From Reconstruction to Integration*.


McFarlane, Brian, 'A Literary Cinema? British Films and British Novels', in Barr, *All Our Yesterdays*.


Monahan, James, 'The Year's Work in the Feature Film', in Manvell, *The Year's Work in the Film*.


Morgan, Kenneth, 'The Second World War and British Culture', in Brivati, and Jones, *From Reconstruction to Integration*.


Murphy, Robert, 'The British Film Industry: Audiences and Producers', in Taylor, *Britain and the Cinema*.


Murphy, Robert, 'Under the Shadow of Hollywood', in Barr, *All Our Yesterdays*.

Murphy, Robert, 'Victim', in Jeromski, *The International Dictionary of Filmmakers*.


Noble, Peter, *British Film Yearbook* (London: Skelton Robinson British Yearbooks, circa 1945/46 – no publication date).


Petley, Julian, 'The Lost Continent', in Barr, *All Our Yesterdays*.


Powell, Bill, *Guardian Weekend, 28 August 1993*.


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Pronay, Nicholas, 'To Stamp Out the Whole Tradition', in Pronay, and Wilson, The Political Re-education of Germany and Her Allies.

Pronay, Nicholas, and Wilson, Keith (eds), The Political Re-education of Germany and Her Allies (London: Croom Helm 1985).


Rea, Paul, 'Individual Encounters with Darkness and the Shadow in The Third Man', in Aycock and Schoennecke, Film Literature.


Richards, Jeffrey, 'National Identity in British Wartime Films', in Taylor, Britain and the Cinema.

Richards, Jeffrey, 'Them and Us', in Lloyd, Movies of the Forties.

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Robertson, James, C., The British Board of Film Censors: Film Censorship in Britain, 1896-1950 (London: Croom Helm, 1985).


Sarris, Andrew, 'Carol Reed in the Context of his Time', *Film Culture*, vol. 3, 1957.


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*Monthly Film Bulletin*
*Parliamentary Debates*
*Penguin Film Review*
*Picturegoer*
*Preview*
*Screen*
*Sequence*
*Sight and Sound*
*Today's Cinema*
*Variety*
*The War Illustrated*

Newspapers

*Daily Express*
*Daily Herald*
*Daily Telegraph*
*Daily Worker*
*Guardian Weekend*
*Manchester Guardian*
*New York Times*
*News Chronicle*
*News of the World*
*Observer*
*The Times*

Other sources

British Film Institute Library and Special Collections
British Newspaper Library
British Library
Imperial War Museum Film Archive
National Film and Television Archive, British Film Institute
Queen Mary Library
Tower Hamlets Library
Filmography

British War and Aftermath Films, 1946-1950
All films are dated by year of release (dates in brackets indicate copyright/completion date if different from release year). Films have been viewed unless otherwise stated. The total number of films is 57.

Details adapted from: Quinlan, David, British Sound Film 1928-1959 (London: Batsford, 1984); Speed, Maurice, Film Review (London, MacDonald, 1946-1951); and the Monthly Film Bulletin.

Key
- pc Production company
- p Producer
- d Director
- sc Script/screenplay
- a Adapted from a novel/play (28 in total)
- ph Photography
- lp Leading players
- * Films which did notably well at the box-office.


Courtneys of Curzon Street, September 1947. pc Imperadio. p/d Herbert Wilcox. sc Nicholas Phipps. ph Max Greene. lp Michael Wilding, Anna Neagle. An inter-generational saga about an army family, it is a war film by historical parallel.


Elizabeth of Ladymead, February 1949 (1948). pc Imperadio. p/d Herbert Wilcox. sc Frank Harvey. a Play by Harvey. ph Max Greene. lp Hugh Williams, Anna Neagle, Bernard Lee. Focuses on social change caused by war and the impact on homecoming soldiers.


George in Civvy Street, July 1946. pc British Columbia. p Marcel Varnel, Ben Henry. d Varnel. sc Peter Fraser, Ted Kavanagh, Max Kester, Gale Pedrick. ph Phil Grindrod. lp George Formby, Rosalyn Boulter, Ronald Shiner. George Formby as an ex-serviceman returning to the problems of Civvy Street.


I See a Dark Stranger, August 1946. pc Individual. p Frank Launder, Sidney Gilliat. d Launder. sc Launder, Gilliat. ph Wilkie Cooper. lp Trevor Howard, Deborah Kerr. Wartime comedy-drama based around misguided Irish girl who wants to help the Germans.


The Lost People, September 1949. pc Gainsborough. p Gordon Wellesley. d Bernard Knowles. sc Bridget Boland. a Play by Bridget Boland. ph Jack Asher. lp Dennis Price, Mai Zetterling, Richard Attenborough. Set in German displacement camp, it depicts post-war antagonisms between European races and creeds.


Meet the Navy, September 1946. pc British National. p Louis H. Jackson. d Alfred Travers. sc Lester Cooper, James Seymour. sc Based on successful forces stage show. ph Ernest Palmer. lp Lionel Murton, Margaret Hurst, John Pratt. Not viewed. Musical set in wartime.

Mine Own Executioner, February 1948 (1947). pc London Films. p Anthony Kimmins. d Kimmins, Jack Kitchin. sc Nigel Balchin. a Novel by Balchin. ph Wilkie Cooper. lp Burgess Meredith, Kieron Moore, Dulcie Gray. Story about a troubled psychologist and his ex-RAF patient whose mental problems were triggered by his experience as a PoW.

Morning Departure, April 1950 (1949). pc/p Jay Lewis. d Roy Baker. sc William Fairchild. a From a play by Kenneth Woollard. ph Desmond Dickinson. lp John Mills, Richard Attenborough, Helen Cherry. Story about a navy submarine sunk during exercises. Set after the war, but to all intents and purposes this qualifies as a war film.*


Piccadilly Incident, October 1946. pc Associated British. pd Herbert Wilcox. sc Nicholas Phipps. ph Max Greene. Ip Anna Neagle, Michael Wilding. Romance set in London blitz.*


Private Angelo, August 1949. pc Pilgrim. p Peter Ustinov. disc Ustinov, Michael Anderson. a Novel by Eric Linklater. ph Erwin Hillier. Ip Peter Ustinov, Godfrey Tearle, Mafia Denis. Satire on wartime army service.

School for Danger, March 1947 (1946). p RAF Film Unit. d Wing Commander E. Baird. Kinematograph Weekly (13 February 1947). About secret operations in wartime France. Strictly speaking it is a documentary, but as it was treated as a feature film it has been included here.


Theirs is the Glory, October 1946. pc General Film Distributors p Castleton Knight d Brian Desmond Hurst. Historical reconstruction of the battle Arnhem a year after the event in the ruins of Arnhem itself. The film was treated as a feature film and is therefore included here.*


