

The 'Next Great War'

Eric Linklater's Responses to the Crises of the 1930s

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**The 'Next Great War':
Eric Linklater's Responses to the Crises of the
1930s**

Adam GILBERT

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of the Highlands and Islands for the degree of Master of Research.

Robert Adam Fletcher Gilbert

10 July 2023

Abstract

By evaluating the significance of Eric Linklater's literary responses to the crises of the 1930s, the thesis endeavours to make a valuable contribution to the understanding of a pivotal yet still misinterpreted period of history and to the appreciation of literature. It remedies the relative critical neglect of Linklater's perceptive, diverse and witty thirties writing which reacted to a deteriorating international climate marked by political strife and an increase in conflicts leading to the nadir of the Second World War. The thesis reveals the depths of profundity beneath the often humorous surface of Linklater's work, how his use of comedy is at times the most apt way to respond to the absurdity of totalitarianism and war, but at other points misses the mark, and how ultimately his writing had to become more earnest in order to express sincerely his growing moral outrage as the decade neared its terrible climax. The parallel shift Linklater undertook from being part of the Scottish Renaissance and a political Scottish nationalist in the early 1930s through a transitional period when he could be highly critical of Britain before finally committing himself to the British cause with the advent of WWII at the decade's end is also determined. This evolution is contended to reflect Linklater's authorial development and has a wider importance in charting the changing contemporary cultural and political climate, particularly but not exclusively in Scotland, as the approaching menace of WWII looms ever closer. The insights offered by his writing in response to the crises of 1930s and its literary merit prompt the thesis to argue for greater recognition of Eric Linklater as an outstanding Scottish and British author.

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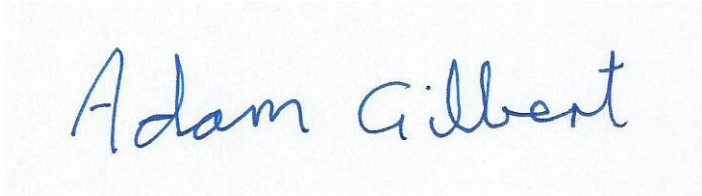
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The Director of Supervision was Dr Alison Chand. The Supervisors were Dr Ian Blyth from the University of the Highlands and Islands, and Professor Alan Riach of the University of Glasgow.

Declaration

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.



Adam Gilbert

Introduction

The opening of Eric Linklater's 1938 novel *The Impregnable Women* encapsulates the deteriorating global situation of the 1930s and anticipates the Second World War:

As though the crust of civilization was wearing thin and rotten, it had in a dozen places, one after another, with a strange suddenness broken down to emit the violence, the stench, and destructive flame of war. It is true that most of these wars had been minor affairs, localized in their native areas by the policy or indifference of neighbouring powers. They had lasted for several months, sometimes for a year or two, and presently flickered and blown out, doing no good to either set o[f] combatants, but little discernible harm to the rest of the world except to aggravate its fear of the future.

The cause of this eruptive condition was much debated. To many people all the lesser wars were part of the conflict between Fascism and Communism [...] Meanwhile the economists – whose reputation was not what it had been – declared that war was the result of a natural demand for new markets, often aggravated by an irresistible need for raw materials. [...] Certain ethnologists saw it as an expression of racial ambition, while psychologists spoke of inferiority complexes [...] But whatever the root cause may have been, a growing contempt for international law was certainly contributory to it.

[...] Even to the most stolid sort of people it seemed not unlikely that the series of lesser wars would culminate in another Great War; and pessimists, and others who prided themselves on their habit of clear thinking and their ability to face facts, considered it quite inevitable.¹

¹ Eric Linklater, *The Impregnable Women* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1938), pp. 11-13. A similar theme and use of imagery is present in George Orwell's *Coming Up for Air* which appeared a year later in 1939: 'I can see the war that's coming [...] There are millions of others like me. Ordinary chaps that I meet everywhere [...] have got a feeling that the world's gone wrong. They can feel things cracking and collapsing under their feet', George Orwell, *Coming Up for Air* (London: Penguin, 2020), p. 181. Stanley Baldwin had also remarked in a 1923 House of Commons speech about 'how thin is the crust of civilisation on which this generation is walking', Stanley Baldwin, *On England and Other Addresses* (London: Philip Allan, 1926), p. 229.

Linklater is commenting contemporaneously on a point in history now summarised by Richard Overy as 'not just a time of crisis, but indeed a morbid age' when the Great Depression, political extremism, authoritarian regimes, expansionism, precursor conflicts, and the lasting consequences of the first 'Great War' all contributed to a progressive breakdown in international relations culminating in WWII.² The aim of this thesis is to evaluate critically the significance of these crises of the 1930s in the writing of Eric Linklater from the middle to the end of the decade and to showcase how Linklater's distinctive authorial voice gives illustration to thoughts, feelings and deeper meanings that, demonstrating the potential of literature, add colour, humanity and greater understanding to the existing historiography. Much of Linklater's major work of this period, notably the article 'Growing Like a Tree' (1934), the short stories 'The Revolution' (1934), 'His Majesty the Dentist' (1935) and 'Kind Kitty' (1935), the essay *The Lion and the Unicorn* (1935), and the novels *Magnus Merriman* (1934), *Ripeness is All* (1935), *Juan in China* (1937), *The Impregnable Women* (1938) and *Judas* (1939), explores the worsening international emergency. Key facets Linklater addresses include the challenge posed by the radical ideologies of fascism and communism, the related rise of totalitarian countries, imperialism, pacifism, women's rights and the British policy of appeasement. The thesis will examine comprehensively the diverse and frequently amusing yet often profound and moving ways in which Linklater contemplates these vital issues to determine the insights he offers into the crucial, confused and easily misunderstood historical period formed by the crises of the 1930s.

² Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain and the Crisis of Civilization, 1919-1939* (London: Penguin, 2010), p. xiii.

The Crises of the 1930s: A Political and Historical Review

In order to understand better the crises of the 1930s which are central to the Linklater texts examined by the thesis, a review is provided here of the relevant history and politics of what W.H. Auden termed ‘a low dishonest decade’.³

The 1930s saw “a sinister transformation” of the entire international atmosphere’ and there are two standout catalysts for this deterioration in global relations.⁴ The still recent traumatic memory of the First World War haunted the 1930s, and Chapter IV discusses the conflict’s influence on Linklater’s *The Impregnable Women*. The repercussions of WWI in the changed European map and accompanying national resentments were also a major trigger for how ‘From the horrors of the First War, Europe drove pell-mell towards the worse horrors of the Second’.⁵ While the 1920s, excepting ‘a few isolated outbursts of dissension’, had been ‘years of relative calm, marked by what appeared to be a sense of political stability, economic recovery and promising self-confidence’, the following decade began with the Great Depression, an economic slump originating in the US in 1929, in which ‘the world economy plunged into the greatest and most dramatic crisis it had known since the industrial revolution’.⁶ The resulting ‘three years of severe economic dislocation and social distress’ exacerbated the residual problems left from WWI and ‘any study of war origins must take account of the fact that the watershed between the two wars – the point at which the post-war era gave way to another pre-war era – coincided with the onset of the depression’ when ‘the international economic and political order broke down simultaneously’.⁷

³ W.H. Auden, ‘September I, 1939’, in Robin Skelton, (ed.), *Poetry of the Thirties* (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. 280-283, p. 280.

⁴ Victor Mallia-Milanes, *The Origins of The Second World War* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987), p. 3.

⁵ Angus Calder, *The People’s War: Britain 1939-1945* (London: Pimlico, 2008), p. 23.

⁶ Mallia-Milanes, *The Origins of the Second World War*, p. 2; Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994), p. 35.

⁷ Ruth Henig, *The Origins of The Second World War 1933-1939* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 11; Robert Boyce, ‘World Depression, World War: Some Economic Origins of the Second World War’, in Robert Boyce & Esmonde M. Robertson, (eds.), *Paths to War: New Essays on the Origins of the Second World War* (Basingstoke & London: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 55-95, p. 55.

The general 'climate of desperation that favoured extremist parties and policies' was particularly marked in Germany where the two factors of economic recession and the hangover from WWI combined with incendiary effect.⁸ The Great Depression's impact on the nascent German democratic republic was aggravated by 'theoretically indefinite "reparations" (payments for the costs of the war incurred by the victors)' levied after defeat in WWI in the 'penal peace' imposed by the Allies in what is known as the Treaty of Versailles.⁹ In addition, the Treaty 'had "humiliated" Germany by assigning her sole responsibility for starting the war, gutted her armed forces' and also 'seized her colonies and amputated parts of her territory', which meant the 'Versailles settlement could not possibly be the basis of a stable peace' and 'was doomed from the start'.¹⁰ The resulting resentment in Germany was a significant driving force in the rise to power of the far-right National Socialist German Workers' Party (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*), more commonly and henceforth referred to as the Nazis, led by Adolf Hitler who became German Chancellor in 1933 and soon established himself as a ruthless dictator. As Benito Mussolini had seized control of Italy in the 1920s establishing 'a prototype for barbarism', this meant there were now two fascist dictatorships at the heart of Europe.¹¹

Alongside the fascist authoritarian regimes was the equally totalitarian yet communist Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Soviet Union). WWI contributed to the Russian Revolution which resulted in the Russian Empire becoming the Soviet Union and creating the template for a communist state. Following the Russian Civil War and the emergence of Joseph Stalin as a hard-line dictator, the Soviet Union overcame serious internal problems to become a major power by the end of the 1930s. A dominant characteristic of the decade and contributory factor towards WWII is, therefore, political extremism with fascism at one pole and communism at the other. This caused considerable contemporary anxiety about further countries turning fascist or communist, with active movements for both in Britain. Chapters I

⁸ Boyce, 'World Depression, World War', p. 56.

⁹ Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, p. 33.

¹⁰ Tim Bouverie, *Appeasing Hitler: Chamberlain, Churchill and the Road to War* (London: Vintage, 2020), p. 45; Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, p. 34.

¹¹ Calder, *The People's War*, p. 23.

and II of the thesis deal with Linklater's reaction to the rise of communism and fascism.

The global map was dominated by extensive colonial empires, particularly those of Britain and France. While Britain was 'still nominally the most powerful country in the world in the 1930s –the proud centre of an empire covering a quarter of the globe', the 'British Empire was overextended and by the mid-1930s in existential danger'.¹² The rival emerging or resurgent powers of Japan, followed by Italy, then Germany, and finally the Soviet Union sought their own imperial expansion. The attitude of Linklater's writing to imperialism is considered in Chapters I, III and IV.

The League of Nations was hoped to be the post-WWI embodiment of 'a new set of international principles' as the 'days of brazen imperialism and gunboat diplomacy were meant to be over and the age of international law had supposedly dawned'.¹³ Chapter II covers how Linklater shared this optimism by proposing a form of collective security for small nations in the mid-1930s. The League, however, 'groped towards failure from the start' as 'First Japan, then Italy, then Germany tore up the rules for international conduct'.¹⁴ The initial death knell for the League was not enforcing any meaningful measures when Japan 'shredded the pretences of the League' by 'attacking China with impunity' as it took advantage of internal disorder, exacerbated by the Chinese Civil War, to conquer Manchuria.¹⁵ Continued tensions between Japan and China form the backdrop for *Juan in China* as examined in Chapter III. Japan's expansion also sparked the Soviet-Japanese Border War, an 'unofficial but substantial war on the Siberian-Chinese border' between 1932-1939.¹⁶ When in October 1935, as discussed further in Chapter I, the Italians invaded Abyssinia (Ethiopia), a member of the League of Nations, the League 'denounced Italy as the aggressor and imposed economic sanctions'.¹⁷ The League's attempt to

¹² Bouverie, *Appeasing Hitler*, p. xiii & p. 28.

¹³ Bouverie, *Appeasing Hitler*, p. 74.

¹⁴ Calder, *The People's War*, p. 23; Richard Overy with Andrew Wheatcroft, *The Road to War* (London: Vintage, 2009), p. 417.

¹⁵ Calder, *The People's War*, p. 23.

¹⁶ Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, p. 38.

¹⁷ Alan Farmer, *Britain: Foreign and Imperial Affairs 1919-39* (Sevenoaks: Hodder & Stoughton, 1992), p. 82.

censure Italy had little effect as their takeover of Abyssinia that included the use of chemical weapons was largely complete by May 1936, after which the League's sanctions were lifted. This failure proved to be 'a death blow to the League of Nations, which had again failed to deter or halt an aggressor' and undermined any notion of international law being respected or enforced.¹⁸

An increasingly emboldened Hitler, already openly defying arms limitation treaties, sent German troops in March 1936 to reoccupy the demilitarised border region of the Rhineland, which 'violated not just the Treaty of Versailles but also the Treaty of Locarno'.¹⁹ Although 'In retrospect, many politicians and commentators claimed that this was the point at which Hitler should have been challenged', the 'popular sentiment in both Britain and France was that any action which might lead to hostilities and to war should be avoided'.²⁰ Instead the British government continued to follow the 'policy of appeasement' which 'had become the guiding principle in British foreign policy by the early 1920s' by adopting a *laissez-faire* attitude towards German rearmament.²¹

War did erupt in Europe with the Spanish Civil War of 1936 to 1939. The pro-government Republicans comprised of 'socialists, communists, Trotskyites, anarchists, and separatists' were eventually defeated by the 'traditionalist and fascist' Nationalist rebels led by General Franco.²² Foreign support made the conflict a proxy war, as the Nationalists were aided by Italy and Germany while the Soviet Union backed the Republicans. The other major European powers of Britain and France 'pursued the mirage of "non-intervention"', as the respectively right and left-leaning democratic governments continued to show weakness and indecision compared with their totalitarian counterparts.²³ Linklater's own predicament over the Spanish Civil War is covered in Chapter I.

¹⁸ Farmer, *Britain: Foreign and Imperial Affairs 1919-39*, p. 83.

¹⁹ Henig, *The Origins of The Second World War*, p. 25.

²⁰ Henig, *The Origins of The Second World War*, p. 25.

²¹ Bouverie, *Appeasing Hitler*, p.131.

²² Hugh Bicheno, 'Spanish Civil War (1936-39)', in Richard Holmes, (author), Charles Singleton & Spencer Jones, (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to Military History*, Oxford Reference Online, www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198606963.001.0001/acref-9780198606963-e-1212 [accessed 17 April 2022].

²³ Calder, *The People's War*, p. 23.

The Anti-Comintern Pact formalised an alliance between Germany and Japan in November 1936, with Italy joining the following year. Japan's invasion of China in 1937 began the Second Sino-Japanese War, which is detailed further in Chapter III. In Europe, a resurgent and ever more aggressive Germany annexed Austria in the Anschluss on 12 March 1938. It is amidst this background of increasing international tensions and foreboding of another major war that Linklater published *The Impregnable Women* in the summer of 1938.

Europe was then taken to the brink of war in September 1938 by Hitler's claim to the Sudetenland, the borderlands of Czechoslovakia inhabited predominantly by ethnic Germans. At one point 'it seemed almost certain that Britain would fight in defence of Czechoslovakia', but war was averted by the Munich Agreement of 30 September 1938.²⁴ The deal meant Britain and France acquiesced to Germany's annexation of the Sudetenland in exchange for a commitment not to expand further into Czechoslovakia, which represented a 'retreat before German blackmail'.²⁵ The reaction of Linklater to British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's appeasement of Hitler with *Judas* is evaluated by Chapter V.

The British government's neutral stance weakened with Chamberlain's announcement on 6 February 1939 of 'a British commitment to support France in Europe militarily' before the Munich Agreement and the policy of appeasement were destroyed when Hitler broke his pledge by Germany occupying the Czech part of Czechoslovakia in March 1939.²⁶ Germany made further territorial demands for the Free City of Danzig and the Polish Corridor which had separated East Prussia from the rest of Germany after WWI. Since the 'British government were determined to find an issue that would let them state clearly to Hitler that he would no longer be able to expand in Europe on his own terms', this led to 'a tragi-comedy of good intentions going astray' where 'the British government – with France in its wake – found itself tied into binding military commitments to a stubborn and reckless Polish

²⁴ Calder, *The People's War*, p. 22.

²⁵ Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, p. 37.

²⁶ Overy with Wheatcroft, *The Road to War*, p. 126.

regime under Beck'.²⁷ This support was 'not because Poland in itself was a cause worth fighting for, but because German violence was thought to represent a profound threat to Western political interests, to the values of Western civilization and to the balance of power on which the Western position rested'.²⁸

British public opinion had grown increasingly pro-war and Chamberlain's government, 'under pressure from the French, who were unhappy about a guarantee only for Poland', extended its pledge of support to Romania and 'after the Italian invasion of Albania in the second week of April, to Greece as well'.²⁹ Efforts to establish a Soviet-Franco-British alliance collapsed because the Poles who 'feared the Russians as much as, if not more than, the Germans' had 'categorically refused to allow the Soviets to enter their territory'.³⁰ The United States remained neutral and this 'withdrawal of the world's largest economy from an active role in world affairs contributed to the power vacuum of the 1930s which tempted the aggressor states to embark on their violent programmes of expansion'.³¹ Germany and Italy augmented their alliance with the Pact of Steel accord of 22 May 1939. With the major powers already pursuing extensive programmes of rearmament, a large-scale European war was looking increasingly likely.

The German invasion of Poland became inevitable when the 'complete bombshell' Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of non-aggression between the presumed natural enemies of Germany and the Soviet Union was concluded on 23 August 1939.³² This treaty secretly carved up Poland and divided much of the rest of Eastern Europe between the two powers as Hitler sought to regain territory Germany lost after WWI and to expand further under the Nazis' bogus racist and genocidal creed of *Lebensraum* (living space) while Stalin grasped the opportunity for the Soviet Union to reinstate the boundaries of the preceding Russian Empire.

²⁷ Overy with Wheatcroft, *The Road to War*, p. 16; Paul Kennedy 'Appeasement', in Gordon Martel, (ed.), *The Origins of the Second World War Reconsidered: The A.J.P. Taylor Debate after Twenty-five Years* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 140-161, p. 142.

²⁸ Overy with Wheatcroft, *The Road to War*, p. 19.

²⁹ Overy with Wheatcroft, *The Road to War*, p. 131; Henig, *The Origins of The Second World War*, p.35.

³⁰ Bouverie, *Appeasing Hitler*, p. 358.

³¹ Overy with Wheatcroft, *The Road to War*, p. 348.

³² Bouverie, *Appeasing Hitler*, p. 364. Bouverie is quoting from the 'Hore-Belisha Papers, Diary, 21 August 1939, HOBE 1/7', Bouverie, *Appeasing Hitler*, p. 450.

The Second World War is generally considered to have begun when the German forces attacked Poland on 1 September 1939, with Britain and France declaring war against Germany two days later and the Soviet Union invading Poland on 17 September. In retrospect, we can trace a steadily deteriorating world situation where political extremism and expansionism, intensified by a worldwide economic crisis and further compounded by the consequences of border changes and punitive measures following WWI, appear to lead inexorably towards WWII. The prime aggressors were Germany and Japan with the more opportunistic Italy bearing some culpability, while the Soviet Union was also complicit. Britain and France, the two strongest European democracies, actively tried to prevent war yet failed by dithering in the face of the challenge, while the 'coming power' US 'had retreated into isolationism'.³³ The picture was of course much more confused and unpredictable as a result of shifting international alliances, inscrutable intentions and general volatility for Linklater when writing contemporaneously. It is this complex historical and political background of the crises of the 1930s and Eric Linklater's compelling responses to them which form the research question answered by the thesis.

A Critical Biography of Eric Linklater

Another key objective of the thesis is to redress the frequent neglect and sometimes misunderstanding of Linklater by the academic community, even in Scotland. One of the reasons 'for the relatively low profile of Linklater's reputation today', suggest MacGillivray, Gifford and Hall, is 'the chameleon-like nature of his life and work'.³⁴ To make sense of Linklater's equally compelling life and work, this section offers a critical biography.

Linklater was born in 1899 to a father from Orkney and an Anglo-Swedish mother in the Welsh port of Penarth, but, as his son Andro notes, 'Undeterred by this

³³ Bouverie, *Appeasing Hitler*, p. xiii.

³⁴ Alan MacGillivray, Douglas Gifford & Simon Hall (Linklater), 'Lewis Grassie Gibbon and Eric Linklater', in Douglas Gifford, Sarah Dunnigan & Alan MacGillivray, (eds.), *Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh, 2002), p. 615.

accident of birth, he decided at the earliest opportunity to be an Orcadian'.³⁵ Despite sometimes giving impressions to the contrary, Linklater only spent childhood holidays in Orkney and did not live permanently in Scotland until he was fourteen when his family moved to Aberdeen. He survived being shot in the head in World War I and, argues Hart, 'War is the main strand of Linklater's autobiography; he sees it as tragic folly emblematic of the absurd resilience of human destiny'.³⁶ After WWI, Linklater graduated in English from Aberdeen University, worked as a journalist on *The Times of India* in Bombay, returned to teach at Aberdeen, then spent two years as a Commonwealth Fellow in the US, before finally becoming a professional writer. While Linklater wrote poetry, drama, essays, histories and biographies, this thesis concentrates on his prose fiction because, as Allan Massie observes, 'it is his novels which will live' for 'they sing with life and with zest'.³⁷

His debut *White Maa's Saga* (1929) was later described by Linklater as a 'typical first' novel for being 'a romantic and unsuccessful treatment of matter with which I was fairly well acquainted' in its juxtaposition of student life in the thinly disguised Aberdeen of 'Inverdoon' and a rural existence in Orkney.³⁸ Also published in 1929 was *Poet's Pub*, which Linklater regarded as a 'deliberate second' novel because it was 'a small and artificial comedy' written 'with the set purpose of instructing myself in the management of a story'.³⁹ Although these first two novels were, according to Parnell, 'not badly received', the lighter comic style and what Douglas Gifford describes as 'Anglocentric whimsies' of *Poet's Pub* resulted in some reviewers, Linklater complained, 'Bawling me out for being flippant – just because I did a bit of belly-aching in my first, they expect me to go on belly-aching all my life' in an early example of the confusion caused by what would become his characteristic refusal to write the same book twice.⁴⁰

³⁵ Andro Linklater, 'Introduction', in Eric Linklater, *The Goose Girl and Other Stories* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1991), pp. vii-xi, p. viii.

³⁶ Francis Russell Hart, *The Scottish Novel: From Smollett to Spark* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 254.

³⁷ Allan Massie, *101 Great Scots* (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1987), p. 282.

³⁸ Linklater, *Man on My Back*, p. 199.

³⁹ Linklater, *Man on My Back*, p. 199.

⁴⁰ Michael Parnell, *Eric Linklater: A Critical Biography* (London: John Murray, 1984), p. 95 & p. 93; Douglas Gifford, 'Introduction', in Eric Linklater, *Magnus Merriman* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1990), pp. v-xii, p. vi. Parnell's source for the latter quote is a 17 December 1929 letter from Linklater to Phoebe Gilkyson.

Linklater's breakthrough came when his third novel, 1931's *Juan in America*, a picaresque satire set in the US, became a best seller and received effusive praise exemplified by J.B. Priestley's description of 'a magnificent frolic'.⁴¹ With the exception of Harold Nicolson's recognition as 'a serious and sympathetic criticism of American conditions', the novel's more portentous qualities were generally overlooked.⁴² This set the pattern for how, Gifford notes, 'Linklater was to be disappointed all his life about not being taken seriously by critics'.⁴³ After enjoying the celebrity status *Juan in America's* success had given him in London, Linklater returned to Scotland to be briefly at the heart of the Scottish Renaissance, establishing friendships with major Scottish literary figures including George Blake, James Bridie, Lewis Grassie Gibbon, Neil Gunn, Hugh MacDiarmid, Compton Mackenzie and Edwin Muir. Linklater intended *The Men of Ness*, his 1932 novel about Orcadian Vikings told in the style of the Norse Sagas, to be his great offering to the Scottish Renaissance, but it made little impact. He was also active in the parallel Scottish nationalist political scene and contested the 1933 East Fife by-election for the National Party of Scotland (NPS).⁴⁴ Having finished in last place and soon become disillusioned with the NPS, Linklater sent up the party and his political misadventure in 1934's *Magnus Merriman* with the Scottish Renaissance now providing an additional satirical target.⁴⁵ *Magnus Merriman* restored Linklater's fortunes and, like *Juan in America*, received critical acclaim for its humour while the perceptive insights Linklater offered into contemporary Scottish politics and culture went largely unnoticed. After marriage to Marjorie MacIntyre in 1933, Linklater finally made Orkney his home from 1934 onwards. The English setting and characters of Linklater's next novel *Ripeness is All* (1935) reveal how he had drifted away from the Scottish Renaissance in another example of his unwillingness to repeat himself. The other novels and short stories of the mid to late 1930s reflecting the crises of the

⁴¹ Parnell, *Eric Linklater*, p. 99. Parnell gives his source as 'Now and Then, no. 38, Spring 1931', Parnell, *Eric Linklater*, p. 355.

⁴² Parnell, *Eric Linklater*, p. 99. Parnell's source is 'Daily Express, 17.3.1931', Parnell, *Eric Linklater*, p. 355.

⁴³ Gifford, 'Introduction', pp. v-xii, p. v.

⁴⁴ The National Party of Scotland merged with the Scottish Party in 1934 to form the Scottish National Party (SNP).

⁴⁵ For more on Linklater's Scottish nationalist phase and *Magnus Merriman* see Adam Gilbert, "'Magnus's dream of a resurgent Scotland was elusive as a unicorn": Scottish Nationalism in Eric Linklater's *Magnus Merriman*', in *Northern Scotland*, 12:2 (2021), pp. 155-173.

decade examined by the thesis further demonstrate Linklater's authorial focus shifting to take more of a British and international view.

In WWII, Linklater served with the Royal Engineers in Orkney where he helped found *Orkney Blast!*, a pioneering service newspaper, before working for the Public Relations Department of the War Office and being attached to the Eighth Army as a historian in the Italian Campaign. His impressively prolific and varied wartime publications included the autobiography, *The Man on My Back* (1941), official war histories like *The Defence of Calais* (1941), a series of 'conversations' set in Elysium beginning with *The Cornerstones* (1941), which reached an enormous worldwide audience on BBC radio, and the Carnegie Medal winning children's novel *The Wind on the Moon* (1944).

After the war, Linklater and his family relocated in 1947 to a small estate at Nigg in Easter Ross called Pitcalzean where he lived as a 'Highland gentleman' until near the end of his life in 1972 when he moved to Aberdeenshire.⁴⁶ By choosing to live in Orkney and the Highlands, Linklater deliberately made himself geographically distant from Scottish and British literary centres, and his centre-right politics further detached him from what Liam McIlvanney deems 'the urban, leftist bias of contemporary Scottish culture'.⁴⁷

Although published by the literary London house of Jonathan Cape, Linklater was never considered cutting-edge due to his more traditional form and style of writing compared to avant-garde contemporaries, such as the modernists, in his earlier career. He then appeared outmoded after the war alongside a younger generation such as the Angry Young Men, which meant, Allan Massie describes, 'by the mid-1950s' Linklater 'was, if not in the wilderness, at least on its fringes'.⁴⁸

Linklater's postwar novels are arguably his most consistently accomplished and tend towards darker themes. Set in the violent confusion of wartime Italy, *Private Angelo* (1946) is generally acknowledged as a career highpoint. It was 'absurd' that

⁴⁶ Parnell, *Eric Linklater*, p. 257.

⁴⁷ Liam McIlvanney, 'Damn their Celtic twilight: Eric Linklater and a broader vision of Scottishness', *Times Literary Supplement*, 5080 (11 August 2000), p. 14.

⁴⁸ Allan Massie, 'From Shetland with truth', *The Spectator*, 18 August 2007, p. 27.

Linklater 'had the misfortune to go out of fashion when he was at the height of his powers', contends Massie who hails the grandly sweeping *The Dark of Summer* (1956) as 'one of the finest novels of the century' and suggests it may be 'undervalued' because it 'is a work of exquisite craftsmanship, and some are ready to dismiss craftsmanship as mere professional dexterity'.⁴⁹ The 'indifference' towards *Position at Noon* (1958), which encompasses modern British history through successive inglorious generations of the Vanbrugh family, left Linklater 'deeply disappointed' because he felt 'in conception, as well as in execution, it is the wittiest novel I have written, and wit is a quality that I value and expect to be valued'.⁵⁰ While *Laxdale Hall* (1951) and *The Merry Muse* (1959) hark back to Linklater's prewar comedies and demonstrate his 'frequent willingness to write light-hearted fiction', titles such as *Mr Byculla* (1950), *The House of Gair* (1953), *The Faithful Ally* (1954), *Roll of Honour* (1961), *A Man over Forty* (1963) and *A Terrible Freedom* (1966) justify MacGillivray, Gifford and Hall claiming 'the later novels show' that 'Linklater could be a deeply serious writer'.⁵¹ A perception, however, that Linklater might, observes McIlvanney, be 'Dismissed as an entertainer (a label he readily welcomed)' because he was an amusing and literary yet middlebrow writer lacking any great gravitas was already established.⁵²

This condescending critical attitude is encapsulated by David Craig describing Linklater as 'a spinner of yarns with a noticeably literary style, a fondness for showy verbal flights', but 'None of his books made me want to reread it, or entered into me as a permanently illuminating myth, or defined for me anything that mattered to me' because 'They passed the time, they executed a sprightly doodle or two in the margins of history (my own and my country's), and there it ended'.⁵³ Alan Bold claims that by 1936 Linklater's 'major work was already behind him for he had written a picaresque classic and some wildly funny books', but after WWII 'published nothing to equal *Juan in America*', with his final novels 'lacking the coruscant wit of his

⁴⁹ Massie, *101 Great Scots*, p. 281; Allan Massie quoted in Eric Linklater, *The Dark of Summer* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1999), back cover; Allan Massie, 'Introduction' in Linklater, Eric, *The Dark of Summer* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1999), pp. vii-xii, p. viii.

⁵⁰ Eric Linklater, *Fanfare for a Tin Hat* (Macmillan: London & Basingstoke, 1970), p. 326.

⁵¹ MacGillivray, Gifford & Hall (Linklater), 'Lewis Grassie Gibbon and Eric Linklater', p. 618.

⁵² McIlvanney, 'Damn their Celtic twilight'.

⁵³ David Craig, 'Eric's Hurt', *London Review of Books*, 7:4 (1985).

youth'.⁵⁴ In *Scotland's Books*, Robert Crawford dismissively pronounces that 'the often stylish and jaunty work of Eric Linklater' was written 'for a middlebrow audience' and 'many an individual Linklater book, like his oeuvre as a whole, is uneven'.⁵⁵

There have, however, been other voices over the years persistently claiming Linklater to be severely underappreciated. These include Anthony Burgess who described Linklater in 1963 as 'one of the finest craftsmen of the century, shamefully undervalued'.⁵⁶ Francis Russell Hart of the University of Massachusetts treated Linklater as a major Scottish novelist in his 1978 study *The Scottish Novel: From Smollett to Spark* and lamented 'the ease with which critics underrate his prodigious talent and confuse his creativity with potboiling or frivolity'.⁵⁷ Michael Parnell's 1984 biography, *Eric Linklater: A Critical Study*, was an attempt to garner the attention and respect he believed Linklater merited. Esteem from fellow Scottish writers is apparent with George Mackay Brown hailing Linklater as 'one of Scotland's best storytellers ever', while Allan Massie is well qualified to judge Linklater's 'strong claims to be considered Scotland's best novelist since Stevenson'.⁵⁸ Approval of Linklater from modern academics is demonstrated by MacGillivray, Gifford and Hall jointly hailing Linklater as one of 'the greatest novelists of the modern Scottish Renaissance', with Liam McIlvanney concurring that 'Linklater deserves a high place among twentieth-century Scottish novelists'.⁵⁹

Although a good deal of recent interest in Linklater has been as a Scottish author, his writing has mixed Scottish credentials. While much of his work is set wholly or partially in Scotland, including 'Kind Kitty' and *The Impregnable Women*, he was also entirely at ease with English locations and characters, as is apparent from *Ripeness is All*, and ventured to more exotic climes including China with *Juan in China* and first-century CE Judea for *Judas*. This combination of a Scottish and

⁵⁴ Alan Bold, *Modern Scottish Literature* (Harlow: Longman, 1983), p. 183 & p. 189.

⁵⁵ Crawford, *Scotland's Books*, pp. 593-595.

⁵⁶ Anthony Burgess, *The Novel To-day* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1963), p. 31.

⁵⁷ Hart, *The Scottish Novel*, p. 247.

⁵⁸ Parnell, *Eric Linklater*, p. 349; Massie, *101 Great Scots*, p. 280. Parnell's source is given as 'Orcadian, 12.3.1974', Parnell, *Eric Linklater*, p. 360.

⁵⁹ MacGillivray, Gifford & Hall (Linklater), 'Lewis Grassie Gibbon and Eric Linklater', p. 581; McIlvanney, 'Damn their Celtic twilight'.

cosmopolitan outlook justifies Massie's summary that Linklater 'achieved a body of work which was essentially Scottish, yet never narrowly nor exclusively so'.⁶⁰ Hugh MacDiarmid earlier described Linklater as a 'blessing' amidst 'the terrible lack of wit' in 'Scottish authors to-day', yet dismissed him shortly before Linklater's death in 1974 as 'having nothing to do with contemporary Scottish literature'.⁶¹ For Liam Mcllvanney writing in 2000, however, 'this dismissal of Linklater remains ironic, for it is he - and not MacDiarmid - who ought to speak most clearly to our contemporary preoccupations with diversity and plurality', meaning that 'Linklater might legitimately be seen as a pioneer of those commentators who speak, not of Scotland, but of multiple "Scotlands"'.⁶² Despite Linklater's dalliance with nationalist politics, his subsequent distancing of himself from the movement and support for Britain, particularly around WWII, present difficulties for any effort to appropriate him for the current Scottish independence campaign. As the thesis will uncover, he also viewed the international crises of the 1930s from a predominantly British rather than distinctly Scottish perspective. Any balanced assessment of Linklater must, therefore, conclude that he embraced a tandem Scottish, at times Orcadian, and British identity in his writing, reflecting the duality of Scotland being part of the United Kingdom yet also a nation in its own right.

While Linklater once enjoyed a high public profile in Scotland with frequent media appearances including advertisements for whisky, he has fallen from the public consciousness to the extent that, Mcllvanney summarises, 'he is little read, seldom taught, and treated with impatient brusqueness in the literary histories'.⁶³ Although the more recent works *Scottish Literature* edited by Gifford, Dunnigan and MacGillivray, and Alan Riach's *Scottish Literature: an introduction* have given Linklater greater recognition, his work remains deserving of further critical attention and wider public awareness. The examples set by Julian D'Arcy in *Scottish Skalds and Sagamen* and Simon W. Hall with *The History of Orkney Literature*, both drawn from doctoral theses, prove Linklater rewards serious academic scrutiny. They were restricted in scope, however, since D'Arcy is concerned with Old Norse influence on

⁶⁰ Massie, *101 Great Scots*, p. 282.

⁶¹ Hugh MacDiarmid, *Lucky Poet* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1994), p. 152; Mcllvanney, 'Damn their Celtic twilight'.

⁶² Mcllvanney, 'Damn their Celtic twilight'.

⁶³ Mcllvanney, 'Damn their Celtic twilight'.

modern Scottish Literature and Hall with Orcadian writing, and both examine multiple authors. These more limited previous studies are expanded upon by the thesis to provide a dedicated and thorough academic reappraisal of a pivotal but hitherto overlooked phase of Linklater's career when his writing and worldview evolved to meet the challenges, outlined in the preceding section, posed by the crises of the 1930s.

Methodology

The thesis is rooted in a textual-analytical approach focused on the primary sources of Linklater's writing. While a biographical reading is not the aim of the thesis, aspects of Linklater's life will be considered when they enhance understanding of his literary work, with the main sources being Linklater's two volumes of autobiography, *The Man on My Back* (1941) and *Fanfare for a Tin Hat* (1970), alongside Michael Parnell's *Eric Linklater: A Critical Study*. The resulting material is enhanced by reference to the relatively small amount of secondary criticism devoted to Linklater and the broader contextual framework of scholarship on the 1930s. This integrated critical approach enables the thesis to provide a comprehensive understanding of an important period of Linklater's writing and its place in terms of the wider Scottish and British historical, socio-political and literary backdrop during the build-up to WWII.

Overview of Chapters

The thesis is composed of five chapters. The first chapter examines Linklater's abhorrence of communism and fascism as expressed in his mid-thirties writing and the controversy this provoked. Chapter II interprets how the two short stories 'The Revolution' (1934) and 'His Majesty the Dentist' (1935) portray the descent of a fictional country into first communism and then fascism as an expression of Linklater's conservatism and opposition to totalitarian regimes. The third chapter contends that Linklater's 1937 novel *Juan in China* trivialises the danger posed by Japanese imperialism through its facetious anticipation of the Second Sino-

Japanese war and typifies general Western indifference to China's plight. In Chapter IV, Linklater's 1938 novel *The Impregnable Women* is appraised as his attempt to prevent the major European conflict he now foresaw by imagining a Franco-British war and appropriating the female sex-strike from Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* to deliver an anti-war message. Lastly, Chapter V analyses the 1939 novel *Judas* as an expression of Linklater's disgust, using Judas' betrayal of Jesus as an allegory, towards British appeasement of Hitler in the Munich Agreement and documents how he came to regard war against Nazi Germany as being inevitable and necessary.

In this way, the thesis provides a comprehensive critical assessment of Eric Linklater's responses to the crises of the 1930s in order to illuminate how his work adds to our understanding of a decisive historical epoch and answer the call put out by MacGillivray, Gifford and Hall that 'the time is ripe for a re-evaluation which sees him as the major Scottish writer that he is'.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ MacGillivray, Gifford & Hall (Linklater), 'Lewis Grassie Gibbon and Eric Linklater', p. 618.

Chapter I

A Moderate in an Era of Fascist and Communist Extremes

An insight into Eric Linklater's reaction to 'the rise and triumph of authoritarianism on both Right and Left' in the 1930s, with the ascendancy of Italian and German fascism alongside the communist Soviet Union, is provided by the retrospective description in his 1956 novel *The Dark of Summer* of watching 'with bewilderment and increasing fear the dreadful, the inexplicable growth of mass emotion, regimented nationalism, and apocalyptic leadership in Russia, Italy, and Germany'.¹ In this 'time of great uncertainty', Worley describes how 'the competing ideologies of communism and fascism offered alternative futures to the apparent malaise of liberal democracy and capitalism' and 'many young intellectuals were attracted to the possibilities opened by the new political creeds'.² Linklater, however, firmly opposed them by proudly declaring in 1935 that 'I hate Fascism, Communism, and all other political or economic systems that cripple and reduce the stature of individual men for the mythical benefit of an imaginary totality'.³ His assessment in 1939 of the effect of totalitarianism was that 'in the dictator-states, the normal desire for freedom – freedom of speech, of political choice, of religious freedom – has been so mutilated that individual liberty is now regarded as a romantic conception of nineteenth-century Liberalism, and a lost cause'.⁴ Since Brown explains how 'Communism and fascism' may be 'poles apart in their intellectual content', but 'are similar' in how 'both have emotional appeal to the type of personality that takes pleasure in being submerged in a mass movement and submitting to superior authority', we can judge Linklater to be the opposite type of personality who, for the same reasons, rejects them.⁵ This chapter examines how Linklater expressed his disdain for the extremist ideologies of communism and fascism through the novels *Magnus Merriman* (1934) and *Ripeness*

¹ Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. xvii.; Eric Linklater, *The Dark of Summer* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1999), p. 4.

² Matthew Worley, 'Communism and Fascism in 1920s and 1930s Britain' in Tony Sharpe, (ed.), *W.H. Auden in Context*, Cambridge University Press (05 February 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139018180.017> [accessed 25 June 2023], pp. 141-149, p. 148.

³ Eric Linklater, *The Lion and The Unicorn* (London: Routledge, 1935), pp. 19-20.

⁴ Eric Linklater, 'We Must Fight for It', in *News Chronicle*, 29 June 1939, p. 4.

⁵ James A.C. Brown, *Techniques of Persuasion: From Propaganda to Brainwashing* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), p. 105.

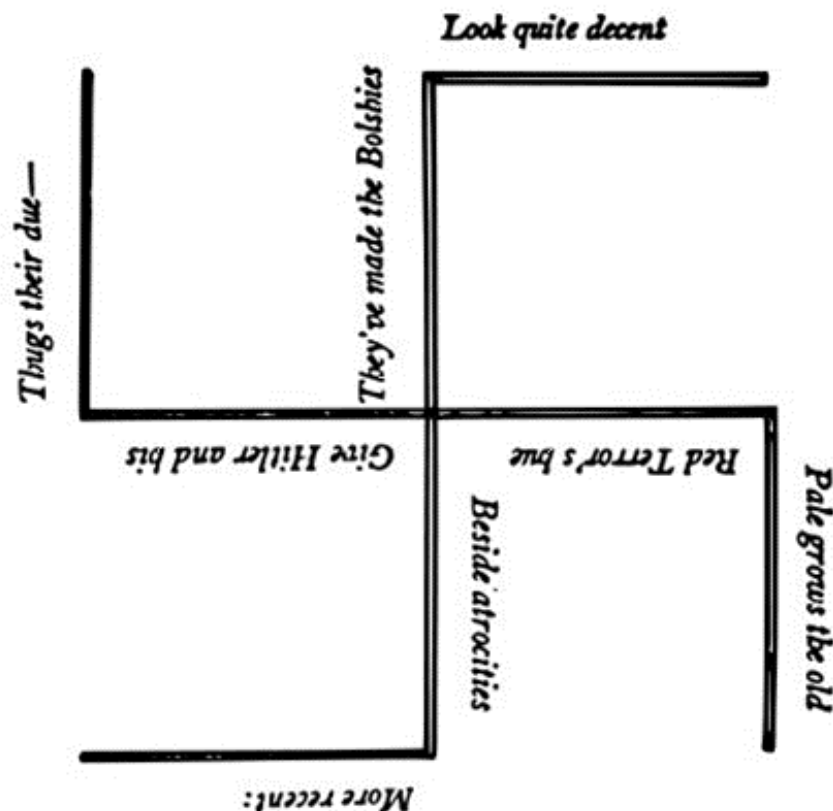
is All (1935), the article 'Growing Like a Tree' (1934), the essay *The Lion and The Unicorn* (1935) and the short story 'Kind Kitty' (1935). It also considers the fallout and wider implications of Linklater's political stance which brought him into confrontation with Nazi publishing authorities, left him conflicted over the Spanish Civil War, and meant he was often controversial in the British and Scottish cultural climate of the mid-1930s.

Linklater's objection to communism was first elucidated with ribald humour in 1934's *Magnus Merriman*. The eponymous Magnus aggressively echoes Linklater's own views when he declares 'To hell with Communism!', describing it as 'a damned Oriental perversion, a funk-hole for weaklings, an attempt to turn the world into an ant-hill!', and when an acquaintance extols how 'Communism liberates the individual from himself,' Magnus replies 'more rudely than ever' with 'So does castration'.⁶ In *The Lion and The Unicorn*, a book-length essay on the relationship between Scotland and England, Linklater dismisses communist rhetoric about capitalist exploitation with his description of 'the moral indignation that palliates the brutality and futility of Communism' suggesting a gulf between the righteousness of communism in theory and its disreputability in practice.⁷ The fundamental opposition of Linklater towards communism is, therefore, on the grounds that it emasculates individual identity and merit, while also being oppressive and ineffectual.

Linklater's revulsion at Soviet communism was soon eclipsed by his horror towards German fascism as illustrated in his 1935 novel *Ripeness is All*. In having a character create 'a diagrammatic style of poetry-writing', Linklater playfully claimed 'I invented concrete poetry', with one example taking the form of 'a word-embroidered swastika':

⁶ Eric Linklater, *Magnus Merriman* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1990), pp. 58-59.

⁷ Linklater, *The Lion and The Unicorn*, p. 148.



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This, claimed Linklater, ‘illustrates the perturbation aroused in many people, who had previously thought that Russian Communism represented the uttermost degradation of human practice, by the emergence in Germany of a terrorism that threatened to eclipse even the dreadfulness of Soviet rule’.⁹ Since *Ripeness* is an otherwise parochial British comic novel, summarised by Douglas Gifford as ‘Wodehousian frolics in English rectories’, the intrusion of this antagonism towards the Nazis and Soviets is incongruous and is explained by Linklater as reflecting how ‘in the temper of the time I could not avoid some comment on the politics of those years’.¹⁰

The intrusion of Linklater’s abhorrence of fascism into otherwise unrelated writing is further apparent in ‘Kind Kitty’ (1935), described by Sydney Goodsir Smith as ‘one of Eric Linklater’s best short stories’.¹¹ Both Smith and Hugh MacDiarmid

⁸ Linklater, *Fanfare*, pp. 149-150; Eric Linklater, *Ripeness is All* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), p. 297. The character is a rather dated caricature of an implied homosexual modernist poet and the similarity of his name, Stephen Sorely, to Stephen Spender may be an intentional allusion.

⁹ Linklater, *Fanfare*, pp. 149-150.

¹⁰ Gifford, ‘Introduction’, p. vi; Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 149.

¹¹ Sydney Goodsir Smith, *Kynd Kittock’s Land* (Edinburgh: M. Macdonald, 1965), p. 6. Smith is acknowledging Linklater’s previous reinterpretation in an introductory note to his own appropriation of ‘The Ballad of Kynd Kittock’.

compared Linklater's satire to that of medieval Scots makar William Dunbar, and 'Kind Kitty' draws on Scottish literary heritage by appropriating elements of 'The Ballad of Kynd Kittock', which Linklater attributes to Dunbar.¹² Taking inspiration from how the original Kittock 'deit of thrist, and maid a gud end' (died of thirst and made a good end), as quoted in the epigraph of 'Kind Kitty', Linklater's Kitty is an Edinburgh alcoholic who generously provides a binge for her similarly marginalised friends after which she dies.¹³ She then, broadly following 'The Ballad of Kynd Kittock', proceeds to trick her way past Saint Peter into an underwhelming heaven in which she keeps Our Lady's hens and finds the beer 'poor in quality' before at last finding her 'proper place' in an inn just outside the gates of heaven 'where the ale is still good'.¹⁴ Whilst in heaven, Kitty views the world below:

She had never known till then what evil there was upon the earth. But looking down, through the clear light of Heaven, she saw lies and tyranny and greed, misery like a dying donkey in the sand and greed like a vulture tearing its vitals. She saw hunger and heard weeping. She saw a fool in black uniform who had made his own people drunk with lying words and threatened all Europe with war. She saw bestial stupidity consume the horde of humanity like vermin on a beggar's skin. And then she found that she was not alone on the little foreland, for in a cleft of the rock was the Son of Man, weeping.¹⁵

The figure Kitty discerns can be interpreted as a fascist leader because of the association of fascism with black uniforms and his manipulation of the masses and warmongering being reminiscent of Mussolini and Hitler.¹⁶ To the post-Holocaust

¹² Hart, *The Scottish Novel*, p. 245; Andro Linklater, 'Introduction', p. xi. In addition to his epigraph to 'Kind Kitty', Linklater also attributes 'The Ballad of Kynd Kittock', which he calls '*Ballad of Kind Kitty*', to Dunbar in *Fanfare for a Tin Hat* on p.134. Dunbar's authorship of 'The Ballad of Kynd Kittock' or 'Ballad of Kynd Kittok' is, however, considered doubtful, with leading Dunbar scholar Priscilla Bawcutt not including it as part of his canon in William Dunbar, *The Poems of William Dunbar Volumes 1 & 2*, edited by Priscilla Bawcutt, (Glasgow: The Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1998).

¹³ Eric Linklater, 'Kind Kitty', in Eric Linklater, *God Likes Them Plain* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1935), pp. 137-156, p. 137; William Dunbar, 'Ballad of Kynd Kittok', in William Dunbar, *The Poems of William Dunbar Volume Second*, edited by David Laing, (Edinburgh: Laing and Forbes, and William Pickering, 1834), pp. 35-36; William Dunbar, 'The Ballad of Kynd Kittock', Allpoetry, allpoetry.com/poem/12068353-The-Ballad-of-Kynd-Kittock-by-William-Dunbar [accessed 24 April 2022].

¹⁴ Linklater, 'Kind Kitty', p. 153 & p. 156.

¹⁵ Linklater, 'Kind Kitty', pp. 154-155.

¹⁶ Although neither Hitler nor Mussolini wore black uniforms, the Italian *Squadre d'Azione* (Action Squads) and *Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale*, MVSN (Voluntary Militia for National

reader the episode becomes a chillingly prescient warning of the mass insanity inspired by Hitler and the crimes against humanity which followed. This means 'Kind Kitty' further demonstrates how Linklater's increasing alarm at the worsening European political climate had begun to creep discordantly into thematically unrelated writing in the comic style which had made his reputation.

Linklater first publicly shared his disgust with the then new Nazi regime as early as April 1934 in the article 'Growing Like a Tree' which 'spoke with a due and proper anger of the brutality already typical of German politics and German prisons'.¹⁷ The article recounts how Linklater 'met a German refugee called W---' in Italy the previous December before his death 'About a fortnight ago', and, for Linklater, 'whatever the doctor's verdict said, W---died of Hitlerism'.¹⁸ W---'s depiction as 'a delicate creature' who is 'like a linnet in a cage, in the inescapable sadness of his exile' portrays him as the vulnerable victim of 'the slow torture of a rancid Prussianism' which 'the Nazis practise on their interned enemies'.¹⁹ His friendship with W--- has added a personal dimension to Linklater's revulsion at German fascism and 'Because of his death I thought of the Nazis' with 'a new bitterness'.²⁰

While W--- performs a significant role in illustrating 'the meanness of the Nazis' brutality' and providing a focal point for Linklater's hostility towards them, his identity remains unknown.²¹ In *Fanfare for a Tin Hat* (1970), Linklater's final and, Isobel Murray claims, 'most reliable' memoir, he coyly mentions the 'indignation' that inspired 'Growing Like a Tree' being provided by meeting 'some early victims of German or Nazi oppression' without mentioning W---, and Parnell's thoroughly researched biography of Linklater refers to W--- but has not uncovered a name.²² W--- has an intangible quality with the mourners at his funeral being unsure of his

Security) as well as the German *Shutzstaffel*, SS (Protective Echelon) fascist paramilitaries were all called the 'Blackshirts' due to their black uniforms. The name 'Blackshirts' and the black uniform were additionally appropriated by the British Union of Fascists founded in 1932 and led by Oswald Mosley.

¹⁷ Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 147.

¹⁸ Linklater, Eric, 'Growing Like a Tree', in *Life and Letters the florin magazine*, x:52 (April 1934), pp. 72-78, pp. 72-73. W--- is a precursor of Fest in *Private Angelo*, a German dissident who was imprisoned in a concentration camp and wears an opaque monocle like the orator at W---'s funeral.

¹⁹ Linklater, 'Growing Like a Tree', pp. 72-73.

²⁰ Linklater, 'Growing Like a Tree', p. 73.

²¹ Linklater, 'Growing Like a Tree', p. 73.

²² Isobel Murray, *Scottish Novels of the Second World War* (Edinburgh: Word Power Books, 2011), p. 24; Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 147; Parnell, *Eric Linklater*, p. 162.

occupation since ‘they were saying to each other that he was a poet, an artist, some said he was a musician’.²³ The description of W--- having been ‘a writer, a disciple of Thomas Mann, I think’ associates him with one of the most prominent of the German authors who fled and denounced the Nazi regime.²⁴ The funeral oration’s summary of how ‘W--- had fought for Germany in the War, and after the War he had lived for Germany, for literature’, emphasises his patriotism and makes him redolent of the ‘so-called “Golden Age” of the liberal German Weimar Republic of the 1920s and early 1930s with its ‘flourishing culture’ that was stifled by the Nazis.²⁵ Although addressing the evils of Nazism, Linklater cannot resist a barb at communism for which W--- had also lived by expressing surprise that ‘so lovable a man’ could be associated with ‘any militant political doctrine’.²⁶ It is suggested that W--- was traumatised by him lamenting how ‘The sea is terrible’ and ‘When there is a tempest I cannot sleep’ because ‘I lie awake all night listening to it – *boo-hoo, boo-hoo!*’.²⁷ Linklater uses this motif as a stylish link to learning of W---’s death by claiming he ‘woke early one morning and heard the sea boo-hooing’ and ‘thought, “Poor W---! He hasn’t had much sleep to-night”’ before learning that W--- had ‘died suddenly during the night’.²⁸ The way W--- has been drawn with the literary flair befitting a novelist as an everyman dissident intellectual and his enduring anonymity make it reasonable to suspect he has been created as a composite of genuine victims of Nazi maltreatment Linklater encountered. Regardless of whether he is the product of poetic licence, the pathos evoked by W--- increases the rhetorical impact of Linklater’s heartfelt attack on the Nazis’ ‘loathsome régime’.²⁹

‘Growing Like a Tree’ further attacks the Nazis by ridiculing their empire-building ambitions. An article about Germany’s ‘new *Drang Nach Osten*’ (Drive to the East) ‘which envisages a conquering march’ across Eastern Europe and into Asia

²³ Linklater, ‘Growing Like a Tree’, pp. 72-73.

²⁴ Linklater, ‘Growing Like a Tree’, p. 72. The term ‘*Exilliteratur*’ is used to describe the writing of dissident *émigré* German authors during the Nazi period.

²⁵ Linklater, ‘Growing Like a Tree’, p. 73; BBC Bitesize, ‘Weimar culture and the reputation for decadence’, in BBC Bitesize, ‘Weimar recovery and Stresemann, 1924-1929’, www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zcfxcw/revision/4 [accessed 24 April 2022].

²⁶ Linklater, ‘Growing Like a Tree’, p. 73.

²⁷ Linklater, ‘Growing Like a Tree’, p. 72.

²⁸ Linklater, ‘Growing Like a Tree’, p. 72.

²⁹ Linklater, ‘Growing Like a Tree’, p. 73.

gives Linklater ‘nightmares about imperialistic steam-rollers’.³⁰ This ambition means, despite ‘Hating as I did all the ways of the Nazis’, Linklater ‘could not restrain a gasp of admiration for this magnificent project’ because ‘It was Tamburlaine all over again– and Tamburlaine is Marlowe’s poetry’.³¹ The irony of this lies in Linklater recognising the similarity between Christopher Marlowe’s renaissance drama *Tamburlaine the Great*, with its theme of overreaching drive to conquest underpinned by ruthless brutality, and the Nazis’ grandiose schemes. Additional derision comes from Linklater being reminded of his ‘boyhood’ with ‘pimples and all’ by ‘the foreign policy of the Nazis’ because ‘I perceived the rationalizing explanation of the Nazis’ desire for Turkestan, and my adolescent yearning to plant Union Jacks in New Guinea and the Marquesas’.³² This prompts the contemptuous observation that ‘Imperialism is simply the homologue of growing-up’ since ‘Empire-building is, of course, only the largest and most spectacular indication of this natural desire to simulate growing-up by growing big’.³³ Linklater rejects expansionism by seeing ‘no intrinsic merit’ in empires and argues ‘they will disappear when the world is truly an adult world’ because ‘There is no point in growing more when one is grown-up’.³⁴ The article thus demonstrates Linklater using his satirical instincts to deny the Nazis the power to intimidate by belittling them and their plans for world domination as being fundamentally juvenile.

The warning ‘Growing Like a Tree’ provided in 1934 shows Linklater’s foresight in recognising through their ill-treatment of political enemies and schemes for imperial conquest the serious danger posed by the Nazis that would result in WWII and the Holocaust. Linklater observed in 1970 how ‘in recent years it has sometimes been said, or written, that we in Britain knew little or nothing of the repression and torment of German concentration camps until they became, during the course of war, so notorious that they could not be ignored’.³⁵ For Linklater, however, ‘That, of course, is nonsense’ because ‘I in Florence – a person without

³⁰ Linklater, ‘Growing Like a Tree’, p. 73 & p. 77.

³¹ Linklater, ‘Growing Like a Tree’, p. 73.

³² Linklater, ‘Growing Like a Tree’, p. 74.

³³ Linklater, ‘Growing Like a Tree’, p. 74. *The Lion and the Unicorn* rehashes much of this part of ‘Growing Like a Tree’ on pp. 167-175.

³⁴ Linklater, ‘Growing Like a Tree’, p. 74.

³⁵ Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 147.

influence or importance – learnt enough about Teutonic intolerance and Nazi brutality to write in condemnation of them’, as ‘Growing Like a Tree’ proves.³⁶

Linklater’s condemnation of the Nazis provoked an ‘immediate’ backlash.³⁷ A German translation of *The Men of Ness* was banned, with prospective publishers Langen-Müller informing Linklater’s agent, Curtis Brown, that ‘It simply went against the grain to do a hand’s turn for a book by this author after his attacks on the Germany of today’.³⁸ Langen-Müller, which still exists as an imprint, also sternly rebuked Linklater: ‘It would interest us very much to learn what Linklater himself thinks about having, through his quite unnecessary political excursions, caused us a loss of many thousands and repaid us so badly for our interest in his work’.³⁹ The London paper *News Chronicle* noted how the German edition of *The Men of Ness* ‘was about to appear when the publisher hastily suppressed the 5,000 copies he had printed, cancelled the contract, and told Mr. Linklater he would have nothing more to do with him’, and jeered Linklater by commenting how ‘Novelists should really be more careful’.⁴⁰ In contrast, Neil Gunn presented no such problem to Langen-Müller who published translations of *Butcher’s Broom* (*Das verlorene Leben*) in 1937 and *Morning Tide* (*Frühflut*) in 1938, with Gunn visiting Munich for the launch of the latter.⁴¹ Since the Viking subject matter of *The Men of Ness* ‘might have been well received in Germany’ because ‘By association with a prevalent idea it could have flattered the Teutonic pretension to Norse descent, to inheritance of pagan heroism’, Linklater realised that his principled stance against the Nazis had cost him potentially lucrative German sales as the novel was instead ‘publicly burnt’.⁴²

³⁶ Linklater, *Fanfare*, pp. 147-148.

³⁷ Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 148.

³⁸ Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 148. For more on Langen-Müller and publishing in Nazi Germany including the popularity of Linklater’s *Juan in America* during WWII see Kathryn Sturge, ‘“The Alien Within”: Translation into German during the Nazi Regime’, unpublished PhD Thesis University College London (1999).

³⁹ Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 148.

⁴⁰ *News Chronicle*, ‘Nazis’ Ban on Linklater’, in *News Chronicle*, 11 May 1934, p. 3.

⁴¹ F.R. Hart & J.B. Pick, *Neil M. Gunn: A Highland Life* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1985), p. 162.

⁴² Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 148. The link between consciousness of Norse heritage and fascism was further explored by Linklater with *The Dark of Summer* in which fictional Shetlandic landowner Mungo Wishart has adopted the Norse supremacist doctrine of Norwegian fascist Vidkun Quisling. Despite Linklater’s embracing of his Orcadian roots and the Viking legacy with *The Men of Ness*, he remained contemptuous of fascism in all its guises.

There was a further confrontation ‘About a year later’ between Linklater and the Nazi authorities.⁴³ After ‘the sterility of Nazi thought had reduced, to the trickle of a dry summer, the native production of novels suitable for Germanic reading’, Linklater was ‘approached by a German publisher who thought it might be possible to sell, in translation, *Magnus Merriman*’.⁴⁴ This interest tallies with the attention Scotland had attracted in Germany with, Bowd has uncovered, ‘leading Nazi theoretical journal *Volk und Reich*’ describing how there was ‘In literature, in drama, in the arts, the beginning of a conscious renaissance’ and claiming that ‘Names such as Compton Mackenzie and Eric Linklater, who also have followers outside the British Isles, are at the same time leaders of political Scottish nationalism’.⁴⁵ When Linklater, according to Parnell, learned that his prospective German publishing house had been ‘warned’ by ‘a local gauleiter’ (Nazi regional leader) ‘that they must not use the services of a Jewish translator’, he gave publisher Rupert Hart-Davis, acting as intermediary, the following angry response:

I don’t know whether Goldschmidt is any good as a translator or not, the odds are always on the negative – but if Goverts Verlag refuse to employ him simply because he is a Jew, you can tell them to stuff a large bag of tin swastikas up their fundamental orifices and ride a tandem bicycle to hell. I’m not going to play ring-a-ring-o’-roses with Julius Streicher round a Nazi maypole for anyone or for any money.⁴⁶

This represents Linklater heroically and hilariously rejecting any complicity in German discrimination against Jews regardless of the financial cost to himself. In *Fanfare for a Tin Hat*, Linklater remembers the German publisher being ‘so unwise to formulate a condition I must accept’ by demanding he ‘agree to abstain from further criticism of the Nazi ethic and the Nazi regime’ to which he ‘replied with simple satisfaction: “No! A year ago Germany banned me. Now I ban Germany[”]’.⁴⁷ The

⁴³ Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 148.

⁴⁴ Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 148.

⁴⁵ Gavin Bowd, *Fascist Scotland: Caledonia and the Far Right* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2013), pp. 135-136. Bowd gives his source as ‘Gert Antonius, “Home Rule” für Schottland?’, *Volk und Reich*, November 1934, pp. 827-844 [translation by Daniela Bruns], Bowd, *Fascist Scotland*, p. 283.

⁴⁶ Parnell, *Eric Linklater*, p. 163. Streicher was *Gauleiter* for Franconia as well as a publisher and author with a strong anti-Semitic agenda who was convicted and executed at the Nuremberg trials in 1946.

⁴⁷ Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 148.

blacklisting of Linklater was completed with a letter 'posted on 9 December 1935, by the President of the Reichsschrifttumskammer' (Reich Chamber of Writers) that 'referred to a letter of 20 September in which he had said "there is no objection to the personality of the author, Eric Linklater"', but now 'coldly remarked "this statement is no longer true"'.⁴⁸ In reference to the British Prime Minister's attempts at appeasement with 'various Government missions to Hitler' before WWII, Linklater noted with retrospective pride how 'In parting company with Germany I anticipated Neville Chamberlain by almost four years'.⁴⁹

The British Government's policy of appeasement also extended to Mussolini's fascist Italy, but Linklater witnessed contrary popular British derision towards inflated Italian pride and imperialism. Mussolini had, Cassels notes, 'profited enormously from Italian umbrage at the so-called "mutilated victory" of 1918-19' when Italy was denied promised territorial gains, but, summarises Farmer, 'for most of the 1920s and early 1930s Mussolini had done little to upset things and had generally sought prestige by remaining within the bounds of international society', with British-Italian relations staying 'reasonably satisfactory'.⁵⁰ This changed in 1935 when, Mitter observes, 'Mussolini, fired by visions of recreating the Roman Empire, invaded Ethiopia [then known as Abyssinia], one of Africa's last independent states'.⁵¹ Britain and France brokered what Bouverie terms 'a shady deal' that would have handed Mussolini most of Abyssinia, but the public leaking of the plan forced its abandonment and the resignations of British Foreign Secretary Hoare and French Prime Minister Laval amidst widespread outrage over rewarding Italian belligerence.⁵² As 'Mussolini, swollen by monstrous ambition, was sending his armies to invade Abyssinia', Linklater observed an obscenely comic encounter between the conquering forces of Italian fascism and unimpressed British soldiers

⁴⁸ Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 148; The dates of the two letters create some confusion about the identity of the sender(s) as Hans Friedrich Blunck was president of the Reichsschrifttumskammer until 3 October 1935 when he was succeeded by Hanns Johst. Lebendiges Museum Online, 'Die Reichsschrifttumskammer', www.dhm.de/lemo/kapitel/ns-regime/kunst-und-kultur/reichsschrifttumskammer.html [accessed 9 September 2020].

⁴⁹ Bouverie, *Appeasing Hitler*, p. 131; Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 148.

⁵⁰ Alan Cassels, 'Switching Partners: Italy in A.J.P. Taylor's Origins of the Second World War', in Gordon Martel, (ed.), *The Origins of the Second World War Reconsidered: The A.J.P. Taylor Debate after Twenty-five Years* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 73-96, p. 75; Farmer, *Britain: Foreign and Imperial Affairs 1919-39*, p. 80.

⁵¹ Rana Mitter, *China's War with Japan* (London, Penguin, 2014), p. 63.

⁵² Bouverie, *Appeasing Hitler*, p. 80.

whilst travelling through the Suez Canal.⁵³ He recounted the episode in *Fanfare for a Tin Hat*:

Somewhere in the Canal we tied up to allow the northward passage of one of our troopships, homeward bound from India. Also tied up was an Italian trooper, outward bound for Ethiopian adventure, and as the two ships approached – each crowded with soldiers – there was a hurricane of cat-calls and counter cheers, of Britannic mockery and Roman or romantic patriotism. Then, in the Italian ship, a tall, vociferous, indignant man mounted to the broad top of a railing, unfastened his trousers, unlimbered a penis of impressive size, and directed towards the British trooper an arc of glittering, contemptuous urine. For a moment there was total silence. Our well-disciplined, innately respectable soldiers were deeply shocked by the indecency of such Mediterranean exhibitionism. But one of them quickly recovered his wits, and remembering a common belief of those days, that the Abyssinians mutilated the dead bodies of their enemies in a very offensive way, shouted across the narrow water in a voice as excessive as the Italian's virile member, 'That's all right, mate! Make the most of it while you 'ave it. You won't 'ave it long!'⁵⁴

This made Linklater and his fellow passengers 'auditors and participants in a moment of history that glossed his [Mussolini's] outrageous policy with the bawdy objectivity of that supreme commentator on history, the British soldier'.⁵⁵ The vulgar braggadocio of the Italian exhibitionist is thus equated by Linklater with the strutting expansionism of his master Mussolini. The soldier's unfortunate speculative fate also carries retrospective irony since the Italian people suffered greatly during WWII, which Linklater explored in *Private Angelo*, as a consequence of Mussolini's unwarranted aggression.

While the verdict of history backs Linklater's stance against fascism and communism since, Overy states, "The ideological forces unleashed by the new movements in the end devoured millions of those who followed them' in an 'orgy of

⁵³ Linklater, *Fanfare*, pp. 155-156.

⁵⁴ Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 156.

⁵⁵ Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 156.

collective political and racial violence set in motion in the 1930s', he received condemnation in the confused period of the mid-thirties.⁵⁶ He later described how, alongside the German censure already discussed, 'From Italy too, I was attacked with some animosity when I disclosed my dislike of Fascism and its grosser practices; and, when I wrote of Russian Communism that it was an Oriental perversion aggravated by torments and a technique filched from Germanic practice, I was again abused by many who did not share my opinion'.⁵⁷ His position was controversial at a time when, Worley observes, 'many within Britain's intellectual milieu empathized with efforts to transcend prevailing liberal-democratic ideas' and 'were prepared to entertain the notion that democracy was a chimera and that the future belonged to a modern, state-driven dictatorship'.⁵⁸ In the Scottish context, Linklater differentiated himself from some former colleagues in the nationalist movement given, Bowd claims, 'the ambivalent, to say the least, attitude of Scottish Nationalists towards Fascism', such as Andrew Dewar Gibb, Scottish National Party (SNP) leader 1936-1940, whose 'admiration for Hitler in the interwar years', adds Macdonald, 'was well known'.⁵⁹ Linklater was also at odds with other Scottish literary figures such as Hugh MacDiarmid who had 'explicit sympathies for the international Communist movement' and self-proclaimed 'Anarcho-Communist' Lewis Grassie Gibbon.⁶⁰ Alongside his friend Compton Mackenzie, Linklater resigned his membership of the writers' association PEN and its Scottish branch in 1937 'on the grounds that their involvement in politics was too acute and taking them too far to the Left'.⁶¹ The centrism of Linklater reflected mainstream British politics since, despite 'Intellectuals' interest', notes Worley, neither communism nor fascism 'seriously threatened to overhaul Britain's liberal parliamentary democracy between the wars' because 'both the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and the various fascist groupings that came and went between 1923 and 1940 remained on the margins of

⁵⁶ Overy, *Morbid Age*, p. 265.

⁵⁷ Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 149.

⁵⁸ Worley, 'Communism and Fascism in 1920s and 1930s Britain', p. 144.

⁵⁹ Bowd, *Fascist Scotland*, p. 131; Catriona M.M. Macdonald, 'Andrew Dewar Gibb', in James Mitchell & Gerry Hassan, (eds.), *Scottish National Party Leaders* (London: Biteback, 2016), pp. 105-125, p. 117.

⁶⁰ Christopher Whyte, 'Seeking for Continuities in MacDiarmid's Poetry: Overcoming Fragmentation', in Marco Fazzini, (ed.), *Alba Literaria: A History of Scottish Literature* (Venice: Amos Edizioni, 2005), pp. 487-503, p. 489; Carla Sassi, 'James Leslie Mitchell/Lewis Grassie Gibbon: The Challenge of a Kaleidoscopic Identity', in Marco Fazzini, (ed.), *Alba Literaria: A History of Scottish Literature* (Venice: Amos Edizioni, 2005), pp. 519-532, p. 520.

⁶¹ Parnell, *Eric Linklater*, p. 205.

British politics'.⁶² While Linklater remained proud of having been 'scrupulously fair in my comparison of the abominations of Communist rule with the unprincipled ferocity of Hitler and his ruffians', this was contentious amongst his Scottish peers and the wider cultural climate in the mid-1930s, making it less of a virtue signalling exercise than may appear today.⁶³

This near-equal aversion to communism and fascism placed Linklater in a quandary with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 because his hostility towards Franco's fascist Nationalists was balanced by distaste towards the communist elements of the Republicans. From 1934, Linklater had attempted to insulate himself 'in the solitude of Orkney', but 'no sooner had I raised my aery ramparts than they began to quiver at the sound of guns in Spain' and Linklater's 'pretty notion for diminishing myself, and so enlarging my capacity for work and happiness, was ruined when I also became a battlefield'.⁶⁴ The Spanish Civil War, notes Calder, 'broke down pacifism on the left and helped to clarify political alignments' as 'Both "Red" and "middle" opinion were anti-Franco', while 'Catholic and right-wing opinion acclaimed Franco', with Linklater declaring in 1937 how 'My sympathy is with the people and government of Republican Spain' since 'I am against Fascism and Franco'.⁶⁵ He later described how 'The remnant of my youth, my sense of decency, and a civilised palate for justice suggested I should go to Spain and help fight the black invaders'.⁶⁶ His 'self-knowledge and my more critical parts refused', however, since he 'had reason to doubt my quality as a rifleman', but, more significantly, also because he 'could not quite stomach the thought of fighting for Communism, even though Communism in Spain was in the right'.⁶⁷ While Linklater sat out the conflict alongside the non-interventionist British government, the 'Republican cause attracted intellectuals from all over the world', observes Bicheno, 'whose idealized view of the conflict did not survive exposure to its realities', such as George Orwell who went to Spain to fight fascism, but ended up fleeing internecine

⁶² Worley, 'Communism and Fascism in 1920s and 1930s Britain', p. 142.

⁶³ Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 149.

⁶⁴ Eric Linklater, *The Man on My Back* (London: Macmillan, 1947 [1941]), pp. 331-332.

⁶⁵ Calder, *The People's War*, p. 25; Left Review, *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War* (London: Left Review, 1937).

⁶⁶ Linklater, *Man on My Back*, p. 332.

⁶⁷ Linklater, *Man on My Back*, p. 332. The Scottish protagonist, Edward Balintore, of Linklater's 1963 novel *A Man over Forty* goes to fight in the Spanish Civil War on the fascist side.

persecution from Spanish communists.⁶⁸ Linklater's political moderation meant he 'could not see an issue so clearly defined as to command my service on the better side' because just 'as Franco's cause was sullied by his German and Italian allies, so was the apparently constitutional cause stained and confused by Russian aid'.⁶⁹ These misgivings are borne out by how the Soviets, notes Bicheno, 'acquired disproportionate political influence as well as Spain's gold reserves' and the Republican government, claims Carr, 'became what its enemies called it, the puppet of Moscow'.⁷⁰ The lasting effect of the 'Spanish prelude to war' was to demonstrate to Linklater how 'evil was not only positive in the world, but that evil had mobilised and become aggressive', meaning he knew his neutrality could not last indefinitely because 'The world was again at war, and sooner or later we should have to choose our side'.⁷¹

It would take until the end of the 1930s and the approach of WWII, as detailed in Chapter V, for Linklater to choose decisively his side both in life and writing. His period of vacillation in the middle of the decade, brought to a near crisis by the Spanish Civil War, was partly due to Linklater's strong and freely expressed antipathy towards 'Fascism and its unpleasant brother Hitlerism' alongside 'that well-intentioned Frankenstein, Communism', which left him non-aligned and under attack from both sides in the pressing political debate and international fault line between hard left and equally hard right.⁷² This meant that Linklater was stranded in the political centre ground in the mid-1930s surrounded by the rising tide of fascism and communism as a moderate in an era that was, to use Eric Hobsbawm's term, 'The Age of Extremes'.⁷³

⁶⁸ Bicheno, 'Spanish Civil War (1936-39)'. Orwell wrote about his Spanish Civil War experiences in *Homage to Catalonia*.

⁶⁹ Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 159.

⁷⁰ Bicheno, 'Spanish Civil War (1936-39)'; E.H. Carr, *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), p. 31.

⁷¹ Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 159; Linklater, *Man on My Back*, p. 332.

⁷² Linklater, *The Lion and the Unicorn*, p. 148.

⁷³ Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*.

Chapter II

The Baltland Stories: Communist and Fascist Dystopias

Linklater's antipathy towards fascist and communist totalitarianism was further explored in two little-known short stories set in the fictional country of Baltland: 1934's 'The Revolution' and 'His Majesty the Dentist' of 1935.¹ Originally published as an individual volume by the White Owl Press in May 1934, 'The Revolution' was, Parnell notes, 'not widely distributed, did not receive much attention and was a relatively minor matter'.² After an otherwise unrelated first part, 'I The Actress Olenina', introduces the character of Olenina, the second part, 'II The Revolution', chronicles the ultimately successful efforts of a radical author called Jean Paris to overthrow Baltland's benevolent King Oscar III, before the final part, 'III Jean Paris', has Jean coming to regret his actions because he has precipitated an autocratic and restrictive communist dictatorship in Baltland with clear similarities to the Soviet Union.³ Linklater returned to Baltland with 'His Majesty the Dentist', which followed 'The Revolution' in his 1935 short story collection *God Likes Them Plain*. In the intervening period between the two stories, Baltland has turned fascist, and, having mocked communism with 'The Revolution', Linklater uses its companion piece to target fascism. 'His Majesty the Dentist' portrays an English dentist named Beeston attempting to use his professional abilities to exercise a restraining influence on Kempenfeldt, the brutal fascist dictator of Baltland. This chapter will determine how Linklater uses the Baltland stories to promote his own political moderation, cultural conservatism and fierce sense of individualism as well as to showcase his hostility to emerging totalitarian states in what represents a significant response to the crises of the 1930s.

¹ Only the first part, 'The Actress Olenina', of 'The Revolution' was included in the two collections, *The Stories of Eric Linklater* (1968) and *The Goose Girl and Other Stories* (1991), which reprinted a selection of Linklater's short stories.

² Parnell, *Eric Linklater*, p. 167.

³ Eric Linklater, 'The Revolution', in Eric Linklater, *God Likes Them Plain* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1935), pp. 233-272, p. 233, p. 244 & p. 262.

The Cautionary Tale of Baltland's Degeneration

Although a moderate in the political climate of the 1930s, Linklater developed an idiosyncratic political creed promoting national distinctiveness called 'small nationalism' which influenced the Baltland stories. The basis for 'small nationalism' was Linklater's sense that 'the gross errors of our civilization are mainly due to the fact that the states in which they exist are unmanageably large'.⁴ He recalled how the idea originally occurred to him in the US because 'Uniformity on the vast American scale' appeared 'wasteful and dangerous', and his alternative was to advocate 'a multitude of small, different nations' to 'make a more interesting and agreeable world than a solidification into three or four major or super powers'.⁵ This would 'produce diversity' and increase 'political responsibility' which 'in a major state is so minified as to be invisible' and 'may exist in a satisfying degree only in a little country'.⁶ 'Growing Like a Tree' whimsically illustrates this theory by the utopian country 'Magnolia' thriving after subdividing itself into four smaller states under the 'new political movement of Benevolent Disassociation'.⁷ Although Linklater admits his 'careful elaboration of the benefits of small nationalism cut no ice whatever' when an NPS candidate, he remained convinced that 'Scottish Nationalism is, of course, for the island of Britain, the first and obvious step towards the ideal map of the world, which, with so many colours and boundaries, will look like cloisonné work'.⁸ An additional dimension is added, therefore, by his political philosophy of 'small nationalism' to Linklater's loathing of fascism and communism because as totalitarian ideologies they repressed cultural diversity and diminished the unique qualities of countries as well as individuals, which represented a cardinal sin to Linklater. The Baltland stories serve to illustrate this theme as communism and fascism ruin a once proud nation.

When Baltland is introduced in the second part of 'The Revolution', it 'was prosperous' because 'Its neutrality during the Great War had multiplied its wealth' and its 'prudent government had repaired the damage' caused by the invasion of its

⁴ Eric Linklater, 'Preface', in *The Devil's in the News* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1934), pp. 9-25, p. 25.

⁵ Linklater, *Man on My Back*, pp. 224-225; Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 136.

⁶ Linklater, *Man on My Back*, p. 224.

⁷ Linklater, 'Growing Like a Tree', pp. 75-76.

⁸ Linklater, 'Growing Like a Tree', p. 78.

neighbour Russia in 1921.⁹ Although Baltland's head of state is King Oscar III, it 'would be misleading to say that Oscar III had ruled his kingdom' because 'He was a constitutional monarch' who had 'served successive parliaments whose majority opinions had ranged from Toryism to advanced Socialism' and prides himself on having 'never been tyrannical or oppressive'.¹⁰ He does not fear being deposed since he is 'popular with the vast majority of my subjects' and questions 'How in heaven's name, would Baltland be better off as a republic, than it is to-day?'.¹¹ There is, confirms the narration, 'a great deal of truth in what the King said' because 'He was an excellent and industrious monarch, for ever opening new bridges and hospitals' and was 'extremely popular' for 'the probity of his private life'.¹² As a hard-working, popular and moderate constitutional monarch admired for his conduct, Oscar resembles King George V, and Parnell recognises Baltland to be 'in many ways like the England of the first postwar decade'.¹³ Baltland is, therefore, an affluent, well-governed country with a vibrant political scene under the beloved figurehead of King Oscar, bearing some resemblance to contemporary Britain.

Baltland becomes a totalitarian communist state, however, following a '*putsch* that drove King Oscar, half-dressed and wholly bewildered, out of his palace'.¹⁴ After ensuring, with menacing subtext, that 'Political opposition has been effectually silenced', Baltland's communist dictatorship is free to enforce its cultural dogma.¹⁵ What even Hugh MacDiarmid detested as the 'Puritanism that goes with most so-called Communism or Socialism' is comically portrayed with Baltland's government prudishly decreeing that 'a lady's dress shall fall at least ten inches below the knee', while 'jewellery may not be ostentatiously worn'.¹⁶ The exiled King Oscar notes how 'The liberty of my subjects appears to have been somewhat curtailed since I had the

⁹ Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 245.

¹⁰ Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 244.

¹¹ Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 245.

¹² Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 245.

¹³ Parnell, *Eric Linklater*, p. 181. Linklater demonstrated his monarchist credentials by being 'both pleased and exhilarated by the honour' when awarded a CBE in 1954 and becoming a Deputy Lieutenant for Ross and Cromarty in 1968, Parnell, *Eric Linklater*, p. 291. He had a further brush with royalty when 'A courtesy copy of *The Royal House of Scotland* was sent to The Duke of Edinburgh, who liked it so much that the Linklaters were invited to stay at Balmoral. They spent a memorable weekend there in September [1970]. Eric joked about hobnobbing with royalty, but it was an occasion that he treasured', Parnell, *Eric Linklater*, p. 338.

¹⁴ Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 246.

¹⁵ Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 270.

¹⁶ MacDiarmid, *Lucky Poet*, p. 239; Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 270.

honour of ruling them', with other killjoy restrictions including 'The sale of wine and spirits' being limited to 'between the hours of six and ten p.m.' and 'Horse-racing and all forms of gambling' being 'prohibited'.¹⁷ A spartan, egalitarian ethic is further fostered by a 'regulation' that 'As the working classes have always been content with plain and simple fare, and as the will of the people is now law, no tavern, restaurant or hotel will henceforth be allowed to serve meals exceeding in price two shillings per person'.¹⁸ Amidst what Overy describes as 'the apparently wilful blindness of the left (and not just the left) in Britain to the realities of the Soviet system', the ridiculously puritanical Baltland highlights what Linklater regarded to be the inhuman repression and forced austerity of communism.¹⁹

In 'His Majesty the Dentist', Baltland has experienced a 'counter-revolution and the emergence from obscurity of the infamous dictator Kempenfeldt', which has transformed the country from a communist dystopia into a fascist one.²⁰ The martial fixation of fascism transforms the streets of the capital Flens into a parade ground where the citizens 'all moved in little groups in military formation' and 'Two out of every three people in the streets wore uniform'.²¹ The scene's bizarreness is compounded by the 'new greeting and salute devised by Kempenfeldt' consisting of raising 'a clenched fist high in the air' and shouting 'Ahoy!', which parodies the 'Roman Salute' of fascist Italy and the 'Hitler Salute' of Nazi Germany.²² There were also 'queues, disciplined as Guardsmen, waiting to cast their vote in a municipal election' all carrying 'large red tickets', which are 'their voting cards' for 'the secret ballot-box'.²³ The exercise is a ludicrous pantomime as red is 'the colour of the Government candidate, Blue of his opponent', but 'No blue cards were issued' because 'that would have been contrary to the ethics of the totalitarian state'.²⁴ The brutality underpinning the system in Kempenfeldt's Baltland materialises in the form of 'a procession of outcasts, pale with the pallor of prisons' deemed 'Enemies of Baltland' who are being sent to the 'Baltish Marsh' used 'for the disposal of political

¹⁷ Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 270.

¹⁸ Linklater, 'The Revolution', pp. 270-271.

¹⁹ Overy, *Morbid Age*, p. 289.

²⁰ Linklater, 'His Majesty', p. 279.

²¹ Linklater, 'His Majesty', pp. 285-286.

²² Linklater, 'His Majesty', p. 284 & 282.

²³ Linklater, 'His Majesty', p. 285.

²⁴ Linklater, 'His Majesty', pp. 285-286.

prisoners whom the Concentration Camps have failed to reform' and 'will all be dead within six weeks'.²⁵ The more farcical side of fascist Baltland is apparent in Kempenfeldt's 'scheme for the instruction of kindergarten schools in elementary ballistics; another for the abolition of Christmas puddings, which would henceforth be known as Odin's Dumplings; a third for the enforcement of public eating, in communal restaurants, to put a stop to the criticism of totalitarianism which was occasionally current over the domestic dinner-table; and a fourth for the provision of new maps, in which all other countries would be coloured in objectionable hues and made to look smaller than Baltland'.²⁶ Linklater thus uses Baltland to create a preposterous yet cruel caricature of a fascist country to mock the real-life absurdities and brutishness of Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany.

Linklater's depictions of communist and fascist Baltland are, despite the sinister undertone of political crackdowns, largely comic explorations of the inherent ridiculousness caused by the implementation of extreme political ideologies into everyday life. In addition to stifling individual freedom and expression, the enforcement of uniformity amongst the general population, through the spartan social restrictions of communism in 'The Revolution' and the civil militarisation of fascism in 'His Majesty the Dentist', represents the antithesis of the vibrancy and diversity Linklater sought with 'small nationalism'. Baltland's degeneration from a prosperous and liberal constitutional monarchy to politically and culturally repressive totalitarian communist and fascist republics also serves as a cautionary tale for Linklater's predominantly British readership.

²⁵ Linklater, 'His Majesty', p. 286-287.

²⁶ Linklater, 'His Majesty', p. 310.

'The Revolution' as an Indictment of Left-Wing Intellectuals

'The Revolution' gives a starring role to radical playwright Jean Paris in the circumstances leading to the overthrow of King Oscar and Baltland's descent into communist misery. The likely inspiration for Jean is 'certain post-post-War poets' Linklater named as 'Mr. Auden, Mr. Spender, Mr. Michael Roberts, Mr. Cecil Day Lewis, Mr. Tessimond', whose poetry he praised as 'admirably compact of high seriousness and high spirits', but whose politics he criticised since 'Some of these young poets are Communists, despite the fact that others realize the antipathy between Communism and the practice of poetry'.²⁷ The poets in question all featured in the 'avowedly political anthology' *New Country* (1933), edited by Roberts who, Wood summarises, 'called upon intellectuals to prepare the way for an English Lenin and to aid the workers in destroying the class system' and 'concluded his introduction by admitting that what followed was not "proletarian art"', but 'Its importance lay in that "it shows how some of us are finding a way out of the individualist predicament"'.²⁸ Linklater used 'The Revolution' to provide a conservative riposte to such fashionably leftist intellectuals by using the character of Jean to mock them for their polemical efforts being politically counter-productive and potentially tedious, as well as offering an implied defence of individualism and bourgeois art.

The political influence wielded by writers is suggested by Jean's attempts at insurrection becoming successful when he abandons direct action after a strike he organises at Baltland's National Theatre ends disastrously and instead employs the method of literary agitation. His first play is 'a furious and somewhat foolish satire' with 'speeches that might be construed as attacks on the Royal Family' that 'almost

²⁷ Linklater, 'Preface', in *The Devil's in the News*, pp. 15-16. While Roberts, Day-Lewis and Stephen Spender were all at some point card-carrying communists, W.H. Auden and A.S.J. Tessimond were not. It is helpful here to adopt Neal Wood's definition where 'The expression, "communist intellectual" does not necessarily indicate a person who is or has been a member of the Communist Party, but may refer to anyone who over a period of some time has publicly expressed his sympathy for communism and communist ideas', Neal Wood, *Communism and British Intellectuals* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1959), pp. 9-10.

²⁸ A.T. Tolley, 'Tessimond, Arthur Seymour John (1902-1962)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (23 September 2004), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/61596> [accessed 25 June 2023]; Wood, *Communism and British Intellectuals*, pp. 41-42.

created a riot' and sees Jean 'arrested on a charge of sedition'.²⁹ His incarceration leaves Jean 'elated by so convincing a proof of his importance' and he writes 'a satirical novel in which the principal character bore a striking resemblance to Count Jassy, the Prime Minister'.³⁰ Jean's 'success – his imprisonment, that is – had so improved his temper that his malice turned to gaiety, and the novel, though scandalous, was vastly amusing' and its resultant popularity 'undoubtedly helped to turn the scale at the next elections and to secure for Baltland its first Liberal Government for seven years'.³¹ This proves 'the prelude to a happy and successful period in Jean Paris's life' as 'He was reinstated at the National Theatre', which provides him with a political platform, and he forms a power couple with charismatic foreign actress Olenina, with the result that 'young men swore themselves devoted both to her and republicanism'.³² Distilling his revolutionary fervour into a palatable and entertaining artistic form is what makes Jean's anti-establishment ideas popular and influential in a testament to the potential socio-political power of writers.

The story's conservative agenda manifests in Jean, as the public voice of republicanism, struggling to answer when 'people frequently demanded of him what he expected to gain under a republic' since 'Baltland is prosperous' with 'no repressive laws'.³³ Jean 'still believed that republicanism would offer chances of amelioration to the wretchedly poor that a monarchy denied them, and he still despised the aristocracy for their possession of unearned privileges', but 'try as he would, he could find no economic arguments capable of sustaining the former opinion' and 'the latter view, he now admitted to himself, was based largely on his personal grievances: which weakened his faith in it as an article of debate'.³⁴ His resentment stems from losing his privileged position as the illegitimate son of a Baltish Count when the vengeful Countess cuts him off after his father's death, which forces him to abandon studying at the national university and take 'refuge' with the destitute Irish mother he previously spurned.³⁵ This meant Jean's 'spirit woke to rebellion' because 'he ardently desired revenge on the order that had created their

²⁹ Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 249.

³⁰ Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 249.

³¹ Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 249.

³² Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 249 & p. 254.

³³ Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 250.

³⁴ Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 250.

³⁵ Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 248.

joint misery' and he was also driven by 'a large and truculent faith in his own ability'.³⁶ To compensate, Jean 'had evolved an anti-monarchical argument of his own that satisfied him better than any economic or social reasoning', which is that 'the King and all his constipated Counts' are 'dull!'.³⁷ The nation's creative life suffers because the establishment 'patronize dullness, encourage it' by favouring traditional composers, artists and writers, which allows Jean to question the value of Baltland being prosperous because 'what's the use of that when its soul is suffering from creeping paralysis?'.³⁸ For Jean, 'Dullness is the deadliest disease of civilization, and Oscar is its carrier', whereas he hopefully promises 'There'll be nothing dull about the Republic of Baltland!', although ironically Jean's 'plays, hung like many coats on one hook – the alleged dullness of King Oscar and his circle – themselves became somewhat dull in time'.³⁹ In a rebuke to radical young writers from advantaged backgrounds, Jean's anti-establishment posturing, in the absence of real oppression, resembles that of a petulant juvenile rebelling against the cultural values of the preceding generation on principle rather than merit.⁴⁰

Baltland becomes a microcosm of European turmoil as 'The various social and political theories, all indicative of unrest, that moved somewhat haphazardly about Europe at this period infected Baltland'.⁴¹ The rise of left-wing radicalism in Europe, which propelled the French Popular Front and Spanish Popular Front to power in 1936, is reflected by Jean becoming 'definitely related to the political system of Baltland' and the 'influence' of his 'Republicans' securing electoral victory for 'the extreme Socialists'.⁴² The peace movement's popularity in the mid-1930s is referenced by how the socialist politicians in Baltland 'were all infected with internationalist and pacifist theories of the most virulent kind' and 'announced their intention of contributing to World Peace by an immediate reduction of the Army,

³⁶ Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 248.

³⁷ Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 250.

³⁸ Linklater, 'The Revolution', pp. 250-251.

³⁹ Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 251 & p. 255.

⁴⁰ It is worth noting the privileged backgrounds of many prominent 1930s left-wing British writers such as Cecil Day-Lewis, W.H. Auden, Christopher Isherwood and Stephen Spender, all of whom were privately schooled and attended either Oxford or Cambridge universities. In contrast, Linklater was well and classically educated but at the state secondary school Aberdeen Grammar and less socially prestigious University of Aberdeen.

⁴¹ Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 256.

⁴² Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 256.

Navy, and Air Force'.⁴³ King Oscar is persuaded 'that it was his duty, as a constitutional monarch, to sign the Act effecting these altruistic economies', with Oscar 'Concealing his displeasure with the thought that he was behaving like a truly progressive sovereign in a truly progressive world'.⁴⁴ This 'roused a storm of popular indignation' since Baltland 'was far from being convinced of the virtues of dogmatic pacifism, and since their defeat of the Russian invaders both soldiers and sailors had enjoyed great esteem', which provides 'the Republicans' opportunity'.⁴⁵ Jean is 'smuggled into barracks, smuggled aboard the threatened cruisers' where he 'inflamed soldiers and sailors alike with magnificent eloquence' in a 'passionate exhortation to his audiences to defend their jeopardized services'.⁴⁶ The result is that 'In a week's time, roused by Jean Paris the services were ripe for rebellion' as the rhetorical force of Jean's words seed the revolution.⁴⁷

Jean becomes the figurehead of Baltland's largely peaceful revolution. The non-threatening mood of the uprising is conveyed by how 'Soldiers and sailors marched on Flens', but the 'Royal Guards refused to fire on their comrades' and the 'King fled, half-dressed, for he was in his bath when the Guards had turned out, and wholly bewildered, because he could think of no reason why so excellent a sovereign as he was should be deposed'.⁴⁸ When the rebels 'discovered how scant was the opposition, the determination of the townspeople turned into triumph, and the rebellion became a carnival whose heroes were Jean Paris and Olenina'.⁴⁹ The popular coronation of Jean and Olenina culminates with Jean speaking 'in accents of jubilation on the intoxicating theme of triumph' before 'the crowd shouted for Olenina, and she sang her old revolutionary songs' with 'so exuberant a soul that new frenzy seized the people, and like galley-slaves released they roared through the streets shouting, "The day has come! We live at last, at last!"'.⁵⁰ The long-sought triumph of Jean is seemingly complete as he receives the hysterical acclaim of the newly liberated masses of Baltland.

⁴³ Linklater, 'The Revolution', pp. 256-257.

⁴⁴ Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 257.

⁴⁵ Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 257.

⁴⁶ Linklater, 'The Revolution', pp. 257-258.

⁴⁷ Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 258.

⁴⁸ Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 258.

⁴⁹ Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 258.

⁵⁰ Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 259.

In what is likely to be a warning to British radical writers, Jean turns out to have been used by more sinister revolutionary forces. Jean's artistic pursuit of his romanticised vision of republicanism has prepared the way for more pragmatic and dangerous agitators as 'Slowly five people came into prominence as exponents, more practical than Jean Paris, of the republican idea'.⁵¹ Since 'The Five – as they had already come to be known – cloaked their political theories in a fine garment of patriotism and denounced alike King Oscar and the Socialists for their treachery', they exploit the political situation created by Baltland's unilateral disarmament to seize power for themselves.⁵² Although Jean incited the uprising, it was organised and enacted by the 'Five', and soon after the popular lionising of Jean it becomes clear where the real power lies as, in his absence, the 'Five earnestly discussed what measures were necessary to establish the newly-declared Republic on a firm and solid foundation', reaching agreement that 'there are certain disruptive elements in the country of whom we must be rid'.⁵³ The 'following morning ex-King Oscar, still utterly bewildered but now reasonably attired, was politely ushered into the train' taking him to exile where it soon transpires that 'the occupants of the adjoining compartment were Jean Paris and Olenina' because the 'Committee of Five had unanimously agreed to deport them on the grounds that they were dangerous to the new Republic by reason of their ability to excite the populace, their unruly and impolitic views of life, their *penchant* for criticism, and their tendency to revolution'.⁵⁴ The heavy irony directed at Jean is that his rebelliousness has ushered in a more repressive regime that will not tolerate his dissonant presence.

Further ironic misery is heaped upon Jean in the story's final section, 'Ill Jean Paris', as he is made aware of his tragic culpability for Baltland's downfall. He and Olenina 'find shelter' with the monarchy they 'had for so long been bent on destroying' in exile at the fictitious 'Ardroy Castle, in the county of Inverness', which strengthens the story's relevance to Britain by domestic republicanism being referenced with how 'the English and Scottish Socialists' had 'protested violently'

⁵¹ Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 256.

⁵² Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 257.

⁵³ Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 260.

⁵⁴ Linklater, 'The Revolution', pp. 260-261.

against Baltland's royal family being granted 'refuge'.⁵⁵ Jean, 'forgetting how many of his plays dealt rudely with the royal family', becomes friends with Oscar and observes how 'Your Majesty has more humour than I used to believe'.⁵⁶ Since Jean's 'criticisms used to find their way to the Palace', Oscar recognises that 'had I not been so dull a fellow – in your eyes, that is – I might have been allowed to reign in peace'.⁵⁷ To Jean's 'surprise' and 'obvious embarrassment', Oscar confesses to 'How bored I was by the old frauds' of Baltland's cultural establishment, but favoured them because he found the young creatives 'even worse than the old ones' since 'they preached their artistic licentiousness, their aesthetic immorality, with the gloomy fanaticism of a Scotch Calvinist or a Wahabi Puritan'.⁵⁸ The disregard Linklater, who was, Parnell summarises, 'conservative to his backbone', had for unorthodox modernist writers is paralleled by Oscar's complaint that avant-garde Baltish authors' 'writing was indecent but unintelligible – and that was doubly annoying'.⁵⁹ The young artists were also 'dull' because 'None of them had the ability to use his art as a plaything: they had to support it with a grim expression, and earnest theory', making them 'more guilty than I of the charge you levelled at me' of 'dullness'.⁶⁰ The core of the reactionary dissatisfaction felt by Oscar, and likely Linklater, towards the younger practitioners of the creative arts is, therefore, their excessive devotion to ideology since 'nothing is more tedious than earnest enthusiasm and the pulpit-noise of a new doctrine'.⁶¹

The tedium of ideology and indoctrination also manifests in politics with Oscar assuring Jean that 'the Committee of Five, who are even now misruling my country, will succeed in boring intelligent people as I never did'.⁶² Soon 'news arrived from Baltland that showed the King's estimate of the political situation there to be

⁵⁵ Linklater, 'The Revolution', pp. 262-263 & p. 265.

⁵⁶ Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 269 & p. 265.

⁵⁷ Linklater, 'The Revolution', pp. 265-266.

⁵⁸ Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 266.

⁵⁹ Parnell, *Eric Linklater*, p. 69; Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 266. Linklater's disdain towards leading modernists finds memorable expression in *Magnus Merriman* which describes how, led by 'the American Eliot', the 'poets of the post-war world were fairly united in their belief that poetry, to be poetical must be unrhythmic, unrhymed and unintelligible', while 'His protagonist in prose was the Irishman Joyce' who 'had treated the English language as Irish tenants had not seldom treated the cattle, fields, and houses of an absentee English landlord, and built on the ruins an edifice far beyond normal comprehension and incomprehensibly charming', Linklater, *Magnus Merriman*, p. 56.

⁶⁰ Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 267.

⁶¹ Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 267.

⁶² Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 267.

remarkably correct' as the revolution 'had grown definitely class-conscious' and 'its anti-royalism had become anti-capitalism' with the result that two of the Committee 'who would have been satisfied with a republic, were being frozen out, and the other three were demanding a dictatorship of the proletariat'.⁶³ Baltland's circumstances broadly shadow those of the Soviet Union, which formed after hard-line communist Bolsheviks seized power following the toppling of the Tsar in 1917's Russian Revolution. Baltland further resembles the Soviet Union with the infighting that means 'the dictatorship of the proletariat was becoming a dictatorship of Rausch and Spiridion' since 'Schmidt, the German, had been granted leave of absence owing to ill-health', although, suspiciously, 'No one knew where he had gone to recuperate'.⁶⁴ This roughly parodies the power struggles after Lenin's demise which saw Stalin eventually emerge from a triumvirate with the later executed Kamenev and Zinoviev to become Soviet dictator by the late 1920s. The clear parallel between Baltland and Russia is that a popular uprising against a monarch ends up installing an authoritarian communist dictatorship.

The communist takeover of Baltland, and Jean's attitude towards it, is used to critique Marxism's negative implications for culture. Baltland's 'new developments' inspire 'mixed feelings' in Jean as 'He had fought for many years to better the lot of the poor people of Baltland', but 'had always disliked the teaching of Karl Marx, partly because he could not understand it, and partly because he maintained that *Das Kapital*, and Marx's other works, were far too badly written to contain anything worth understanding'.⁶⁵ He had wanted to make the poor 'happier by giving them better wages, better houses, and better amusements', but, contradicting a central tenet of Marxism, Jean 'saw no necessity for their usurpation of sovereign power', especially since he had not 'discovered any characteristic common to the poor' which 'led him to think they were any more capable of ruling a country than rich people were'.⁶⁶ Marx's idea of 'the role of the intellectual in the socialist movement', summarises Wood, was that 'the ideologists—writers, artists, scientists, etc.—who had been able to transcend their class-bound outlook, would place their skills at the

⁶³ Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 267.

⁶⁴ Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 269.

⁶⁵ Linklater, 'The Revolution', pp. 267-268.

⁶⁶ Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 268.

disposal of the proletariat'.⁶⁷ The cultural uniformity and utilitarianism this suggests was incompatible with Linklater's mindset, as expressed in a 1937 letter: 'I would say to the proletariat – and I might well be lynched if they heard me – "What shall it profit the proletariat if it gain the whole world, and lose its capitalist and bourgeois literature?"'.⁶⁸ Jean echoes this by worrying if Baltland's people 'are all compelled to read Karl Marx' then 'their literary taste will be utterly ruined' and 'what shall it profit a man if he owns the whole world, but doesn't know the difference between a good book and a bad one?'.⁶⁹ Baltland's adherence to Marxism sees the nation's theatres ordered to enter 'a new sphere of usefulness' by performing only 'plays suitable to a proletarian state' alternated with 'lectures, by accredited orators, on the meaning of the Government's policy' and 'the doctrine of Karl Marx', to Jean's horror: 'God help my poor people'.⁷⁰ Linklater again offers only a mild exaggeration of the enduring 'cultural repression' of the Soviet Union, with Mulcahy noting in 1984 how 'Cultural dissidents are harassed, nonconforming art is denied an audience, and the national theatres adhere to official *diktat* about proper performance and approved repertory'.⁷¹ The rejection of Marxism by Jean and Linklater is, therefore, on the basis of cultural elitism, which carries the implication that it is self-contradictory for cerebrally superior, individualistic and inherently bourgeois intellectuals to embrace communism due to their fundamental incompatibility with its egalitarian and working-class hegemonic principles.⁷²

The climax of 'The Revolution' is Jean's tragic realisation of his responsibility for enabling the tyrannical new regime in Baltland. When Oscar points out how Baltland's people 'brought this upon themselves – with your assistance', Jean 'noisily weeping, ran from the room'.⁷³ In a final irony, the story concludes with the repentant

⁶⁷ Wood, *Communism and British Intellectuals*, p. 16.

⁶⁸ Parnell, *Eric Linklater*, p. 206. The letter was to Linklater's sister-in-law, Alison Bonfield, who was the secretary of Scottish PEN at the time.

⁶⁹ Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 268.

⁷⁰ Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 271.

⁷¹ Kevin V. Mulcahy, 'Official Culture and Cultural Repression: The Case of Dmitri Shostakovich', in *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 18:3 (1984), pp. 69-83, p. 69.

⁷² Neal Wood elaborates how 'in practice the new partnership between worker and intellectual was not completely harmonious' since 'By upbringing and outlook, the bourgeois intellectual has always been something of a non-conformist' and 'Moreover, his dogmatism, his impatience with the practical details of a subject, his contempt for the parochialism of his proletarian comrades, and, most obviously, his bourgeois manners and speech set him apart, and did little to endear him to the workers', Wood, *Communism and British Intellectuals*, pp. 16-17.

⁷³ Linklater, 'The Revolution', p. 271.

Jean returning to Baltland in an attempt to restore King Oscar. The tragedy of Jean is that his revolutionary agitprop achieves the opposite of his intentions by facilitating a duller and more repressive communist government. The Soviet Union was even harsher than Baltland in persecuting intellectuals through execution or internal exile in gulags, which peaked during the Great Purge or Great Terror of 1936-1938, with Conquest claiming 'the heaviest toll of all seems to have been among the writers'.⁷⁴ This means that Linklater has used the example of Jean Paris to indict radical young writers for being what would later derogatorily be termed 'useful idiots': left-wing commentators and activists unwittingly serving the communist cause.⁷⁵

'The Revolution' reflects the widespread dread of further communist revolutions on the Russian model in the 1930s, especially since, Bouverie states, 'the principle of "world revolution" was considered by many as intrinsic to the movement and kept the fear of communist contagion alive'.⁷⁶ While Linklater was proved correct about the young left-wing British poets of the 1930s in stating 'I do not believe they will ever bring Communism to England', their influence was strong enough for George Orwell to feel 'For about three years, in fact, the central stream of English literature was more or less directly under Communist control'.⁷⁷ The example of Jean Paris stands as a warning to British writers about the dangers of radical anti-establishment literary posturing and the fundamental incompatibility of communism with creative freedom of expression. This ensures that 'The Revolution' explicitly engages with both the rise of the Soviet Union and the threat of communism spreading to other countries in one of the more obvious crises of the 1930s.

⁷⁴ Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (London: Pimlico, 1996), p. 297.

⁷⁵ Oxford English Dictionary, 'useful idiot', www.oed.com/view/Entry/220640?rskey=gf4gYh&result=1#eid205795844, [accessed 5 March 2022].

⁷⁶ Bouverie, *Appeasing Hitler*, p. 51.

⁷⁷ Linklater, 'Preface', in *The Devil's in the News*, p. 16; George Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', in *Inside the Whale and Other Essays* (London: Penguin, 1988), pp. 9-51, p. 32.

'His Majesty the Dentist' and the Heroic Crisis of the Fascist Age

While the major theme of 'His Majesty the Dentist' is the idiocy of fascism, the way this is explored through its protagonist Beeston, a British dentist, adds layers of meaning and black comedy. The flawed Beeston is ironically presented as a modern hero for the fascist age by championing moderation against extremism through tempering the excesses of Baltland's 'sadistic, paranoiac, megalomaniac' dictator Kempenfeldt, who bears an obvious resemblance to Hitler.⁷⁸

The story's agenda of attacking fascism and absurdist comic style is self-consciously introduced by its opening in which a 'disillusioned writer of adventure stories' laments 'the spectacle of folly presented in the several militaristic totalitarian regimes that disfigure our world to-day' while receiving dental treatment in London.⁷⁹ Since fascism 'glorifies reliance on armed force, which, in the light of all the lessons of the last war, is simply reliance on the political efficacy of self-destruction', it provides 'an object-lesson in popular folly and pure dunderheadedness'.⁸⁰ Fascism's success has made the writer realise his 'previous confidence, in the benevolence of the times and humanity's fundamental good sense, was totally unjustified'.⁸¹ This produces a problem because his 'profession' was the 'creation of heroes and the elaborating of heroic incident' making it 'necessary to believe in the validity of heroic action and the social desirability of the hero', but he now 'perceived that heroism – or rather militant heroism, which was the staple of my novels – had become deplorably anti-social'.⁸² The writer's faith in the traditional concept of a hero and heroic plot, which is essentially good defeating evil, has, therefore, been undermined by the rise of fascism suggesting the reverse is true.⁸³ In fascist times, the writer feels 'If my

⁷⁸ Linklater, 'His Majesty', p. 279. Kempenfeldt can be regarded as a precursor to Count Hulgubloot in *The Wind on The Moon* and both are parodies of fascist dictators.

⁷⁹ Linklater, 'His Majesty', p. 274.

⁸⁰ Linklater, 'His Majesty', p. 274.

⁸¹ Linklater, 'His Majesty', p. 274.

⁸² Linklater, 'His Majesty', pp. 273-274.

⁸³ This might be compared to George Orwell's 1943 musings on how 'We in England underrate the danger of this kind of thing [a totalitarian fascist world], because our traditions and our past security have given us a sentimental belief that it all comes right in the end and the thing you most fear never really happens. Nourished for hundreds of years on a literature in which Right invariably triumphs in the last chapter, we believe half-instinctively that evil always defeats itself in the long run. Pacifism, for instance, is founded largely on this belief. Don't resist evil, and it will somehow destroy itself. But why should it? What evidence is there that it does? And what instance is there of a modern industrialized state collapsing unless conquered from the outside by military force?', George Orwell, 'Looking Back

work is to bear any resemblance to actuality' then 'I must no longer write of heroes, but of clowns' and 'a tale of modern adventure must necessarily be one of ludicrous adventure, and the hero an anti-hero'.⁸⁴ Linklater is using the writer, representing himself to an extent, to establish the premise that 'His Majesty the Dentist' itself is a 'ludicrous adventure' with the clownish dentist Beeston, who comically interrupts the writer with prompts like 'Wide open, please', being its 'anti-hero' to reflect the folly of fascism.⁸⁵

The 'sentimentally romantic' Beeston is 'a dentist of superlative ability' but 'appreciated only by people too poor to make their appreciation profitable, too humble to give it importance'.⁸⁶ He fantasises about becoming 'rich and famous enough to choose and select his patients' when 'he would have none but youth and beauty' although 'he would make an exception, now and then, for some elder statesman'.⁸⁷ His dreams start coming true when the beautiful 'refugee' Gerda Salsund seeks his professional attention.⁸⁸ Gerda's plight is representative of how 'most of Europe was governed by oligarchies, dictators, and soviets from which thousands of people were daily in flight', and she has escaped from Baltland where Kempenfeldt 'has broken millions of my countrymen, like eggs to make an omelette, and he calls that omelette a Totalitarian State', but which 'is not fit for anyone but himself to eat!'.⁸⁹ Her effect on Beeston is that 'having lost his heart to her he now lost his head' and when Gerda 'parted her lips' for him to finish treating her tooth, 'he threw the drill behind him, and plunging like a gannet kissed her hard and enthusiastically between her still parted lips'.⁹⁰ By Gerda complaining 'bitterly' about how 'in Baltland I was at the mercy of political tyranny, and now I am the prey of your licentiousness', she equates the professional misconduct of Beeston's 'amorous assault' with the aggression of the fascist dictator Kempenfeldt.⁹¹

on the Spanish war', in George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), pp. 223-247, p. 237.

⁸⁴ Linklater, 'His Majesty', pp. 274-275.

⁸⁵ Linklater, 'His Majesty', p. 273.

⁸⁶ Linklater, 'His Majesty', pp. 275-276.

⁸⁷ Linklater, 'His Majesty', p. 274.

⁸⁸ Linklater, 'His Majesty', p. 278.

⁸⁹ Linklater, 'His Majesty', pp. 278-279.

⁹⁰ Linklater, 'His Majesty', p. 280.

⁹¹ Linklater, 'His Majesty', p. 281.

The connection with Kempenfeldt becomes overt when Beeston is invited to Baltland to treat the dictator. After the incident with Gerda, Beeston is eventually 'assailed by terror' about 'What would happen if she were to report him to the authorities' because he dreads 'public scandal' and 'being erased from the roll of licensed dentists' leaving him 'destitute'.⁹² In 'an effort to escape from this wretched state of mind' where 'Fear paralyzed him, and the misery of love held him prisoner', Beeston turns to the unsaleable manuscript of the novel '*A Modern Hero*' left by the writer in lieu of payment.⁹³ This desperate escapism hints at the eventual revelation that the following events are dreamt by Beeston under the influence of the novel, which 'showed a world gone mad, and behind the picture of solemn topsy-turveydom sounded ever and again the hinges of rusty humour'.⁹⁴ Taking the story at face value, however, the catalyst for Beeston's modern mock-heroic adventure is the 'Unannounced' entry of Captain Schweik who informs Beeston that Kempenfeldt has heard 'of your skill and the delicacy of your painless touch, and he begs you to come immediately to Baltland, as he is suffering from toothache'.⁹⁵ This invitation gives Beeston the 'perception of opportunity' to undertake a redemptive quest, although for a selfish motive since he 'did not conceal from himself the very comforting thought that Miss Salsund was unlikely to prosecute him for assault when she heard that he had joined her party and was working for the attainment of its ends – whatever they might be – in the very court of the Dictator'.⁹⁶ The '*Modern Hero*' motif thus creates irony at Beeston's expense as, in contrast to a traditional hero helping a damsel in distress out of chivalry, he is not aiding Gerda against fascism for the noblest of reasons.

'His Majesty the Dentist' uses the farcical plotting and set pieces Linklater originated in *Poet's Pub* and developed further with *Juan in America* and *Magnus Merriman* to satirise fascist dictators. An example is Kempenfeldt's underwhelming entrance where the 'normal ferocity of the Dictator's countenance was mitigated by a large white bandage' and his face is further 'contorted' by 'spasms of pain' from

⁹² Linklater, 'His Majesty', p. 281.

⁹³ Linklater, 'His Majesty', p. 282.

⁹⁴ Linklater, 'His Majesty', p. 282.

⁹⁵ Linklater, 'His Majesty', pp. 282-283.

⁹⁶ Linklater, 'His Majesty', p.283.

toothache.⁹⁷ His egotism is revealed by how he finds it ‘infamous and incredible that I, Kempenfeldt, should have to endure this pain!’ because ‘Pain was ordained for weaklings and for women, not for me’ with it being ‘damnable that greatness should suffer like a common man!’.⁹⁸ Kempenfeldt’s toothache has underlying significance by suggesting the inner rottenness of fascism and that his posturing of strength through his ‘vehement exhortation to the people of Baltland’ on radio, imitating Hitler’s frenzied public addresses, is overcompensation for a secret weakness.⁹⁹ Beeston takes advantage of Kempenfeldt’s agony by telling the dictator that ‘I shall do nothing to help you until you have revoked the sentence’ on the procession of condemned prisoners he witnessed in Flens.¹⁰⁰ The dictator’s fury means ‘For a moment indignation banished pain’ and he refuses Beeston’s demand since ‘Kempenfeldt’s word is irrefragable!’, but soon ‘successive waves of pain’ force him to broadcast the reprieve Beeston demanded.¹⁰¹ By leveraging his dental expertise to exploit Kempenfeldt’s one human vulnerability and exercise a moderating influence on the dictator, Beeston displays a perverse heroism and wins a small victory over fascism.

Since Baltland has ‘poor teeth’ and ‘ham-handed’ dentists, Beeston becomes ‘a person of great influence’, sitting on ‘the Dictator’s Council’ and being referred to as ‘*His Majesty the Dentist*’.¹⁰² He ‘had exerted his power to ameliorate the lot of Kempenfeldt’s political victims – either using a method of persuasion similar to that he had found successful with the Dictator himself, or in difficult cases stimulating sensibility with a probe’.¹⁰³ The removal of Kempenfeldt’s teeth creates a metaphor for how Beeston is rendering the predatory dictator less deadly, and ‘though the militarist-totalitarian regime was nominally as rigid as ever, a degree of tolerance had in practice begun to mitigate its severity’.¹⁰⁴ His dreams of being rich and important appear to have come true, and he has conciliated Gerda whose letters reveal her ‘admiration for Mr. Beeston’s daring policy had become warmer and warmer’.¹⁰⁵ The

⁹⁷ Linklater, ‘His Majesty’, p. 288.

⁹⁸ Linklater, ‘His Majesty’, p. 289.

⁹⁹ Linklater, ‘His Majesty’, p. 288.

¹⁰⁰ Linklater, ‘His Majesty’, p. 290.

¹⁰¹ Linklater, ‘His Majesty’, p. 290.

¹⁰² Linklater, ‘His Majesty’, pp. 292-293.

¹⁰³ Linklater, ‘His Majesty’, pp. 292-293.

¹⁰⁴ Linklater, ‘His Majesty’, p. 293.

¹⁰⁵ Linklater, ‘His Majesty’, p. 293.

dentist had, however, seen ‘with each extraction his influence had grown greater, but more short-lived’, and he risks losing everything when Kempenfeldt had ‘only one tooth left’.¹⁰⁶ This sparks fear across Europe that ‘rid of all restraining influence, Kempenfeldt would again become ruthless to internal dissidence and a black threat to his neighbours’, meaning ‘Beeston’s dismissal would be a disaster to the cause of peace, a tragedy in the tale of humanity’.¹⁰⁷ To prevent this, Beeston forms the ‘daring and ambitious plan’ of inserting a clause granting him personal approval over all marriages by requiring a pre-nuptial ‘dental examination’ into Baltland’s eugenic ‘Restriction of Marriage Bill’.¹⁰⁸ Since Kempenfeldt vainly wants to ‘establish his name in history by founding a dynasty that should rule after him’, he must ‘choose a consort with proper care’, and Beeston makes an ally in dentally challenged would-be bride Princess Hildegard by offering to block Kempenfeldt’s marriage to her more attractive rival, Countess Olga, on the false grounds that the Countess’s ‘alveolar periosteum is undoubtedly morbid’.¹⁰⁹ With the bill passed, Beeston finally agrees to extract the bestial Kempenfeldt’s ‘surviving fang’, but afterwards stresses his indispensability because he is ‘now in attendance on your future consort’.¹¹⁰ The childishly petulant Kempenfeldt then ‘gnashed his teeth in rage, and hoarsely exclaimed, “Fury of hell! Am I to be saddled with you forever?”’, but, comically, only after ‘Hurriedly replacing his dentures’.¹¹¹ Having secured victory over the toothless Kempenfeldt and preserved his authority, Beeston shows hubris in how his ‘soul within him sang proudly: /“With a hey-diddle-diddle and a hot-nonny-no, /For a dentist is the ruler of the whole damn’d show!”’.¹¹²

Beeston’s triumphalism is interrupted by the arrival of nemesis in the form of ‘a huge unruly crowd’, headed by Gerda, ‘demonstrating against the Restriction of Marriage Act’ with banners including ‘DONKEYS AND DENTISTS BOTH SAY NAY, BUT LOVE WILL FIND A WAY!’.¹¹³ After the ‘rebellion was soon suppressed’ violently and Gerda imprisoned, Beeston ‘was horrified to learn that some of her

¹⁰⁶ Linklater, ‘His Majesty’, p. 294.

¹⁰⁷ Linklater, ‘His Majesty’, p. 294.

¹⁰⁸ Linklater, ‘His Majesty’, p. 295 & p. 297.

¹⁰⁹ Linklater, ‘His Majesty’, pp. 297-298.

¹¹⁰ Linklater, ‘His Majesty’, pp. 304-305.

¹¹¹ Linklater, ‘His Majesty’, p. 306.

¹¹² Linklater, ‘His Majesty’, p. 306.

¹¹³ Linklater, ‘His Majesty’, pp. 306-307.

bitterest words had been aimed at Clause 8, which he himself had devised, and that he was now coupled with the Dictator as a villainous oppressor'.¹¹⁴ He realises how 'He had come to Baltland as a champion of liberty', but 'had fallen into the gross error of believing that liberty depended on him and could best be maintained by his authority' and so 'had plotted and planned to enlarge that authority, and as Kempenfeldt identified Baltland with himself, so Mr. Beeston had identified himself with the cause of liberty, and diminished liberty for his own aggrandisement'.¹¹⁵ The 'bitterest part of his conscience', however, is that 'it was he who had sent her [Gerda] to prison' and now must rescue her to redeem himself a second time.¹¹⁶ Since neither his patients on Kempenfeldt's Council nor Princess Hildegard dare to defy the dictator out of self-preservation, Beeston discovers the limits to his persuasive power. Learning that Gerda 'was to be executed', Beeston 'conceived the germ of a wild idea' and adopts one of the dictator's 'aphorisms' that 'humanitarianism is either a function of decadence or the confession of impotence' by offering to demonstrate his 'new X-ray cabinet' to Kempenfeldt and his council, before rendering them unconscious with sleeping gas, tying them up and hiding them under his bed.¹¹⁷ Beeston's taunting of his captives with 'Don't you wish I'd gone on being a humanitarian?', but 'I'm going to be a dictator now', shows he has again been overcome by his own megalomaniacal tendencies.¹¹⁸

After bluffing his way into her prison, however, the 'pitiful sight' of Gerda 'weeping' ends Beeston's 'political ambitions and his vainglorious intention of returning to the Palace with Gerda to proclaim a new dictatorship'.¹¹⁹ He tells her 'Don't cry now' because 'I've come to save you from prison', but she punctures his pretensions of being her saviour by explaining 'I'm not crying because I'm in prison', but since 'I've got toothache'.¹²⁰ In a taxi back to Beeston's London surgery after escaping Baltland, 'Gerda became tearful again, for her tooth was aching, but Mr. Beeston, though warmly sympathizing with her, was happier than he had ever been

¹¹⁴ Linklater, 'His Majesty', p. 308.

¹¹⁵ Linklater, 'His Majesty', p. 308.

¹¹⁶ Linklater, 'His Majesty', p. 308.

¹¹⁷ Linklater, 'His Majesty', pp. 309-311.

¹¹⁸ Linklater, 'His Majesty', p. 313.

¹¹⁹ Linklater, 'His Majesty', p. 314.

¹²⁰ Linklater, 'His Majesty', p. 314.

before' because 'it was extraordinarily pleasant to be comforting her'.¹²¹ So absorbed is Beeston in Gerda that only when he sees newspaper headlines proclaiming 'GRAVE CRISIS IN BALTLAND' and 'DISAPPEARANCE OF KEMPENFELDT' does he remember 'I left Kempenfeldt and his Council under my bed'.¹²² He explains his actions by telling Gerda 'I did it for your sake, and if you don't see why, then you know nothing about love, which is quite as curious as politics, but nicer', which means Beeston views himself as having been the dashing hero of a romantic adventure.¹²³

The story has other ideas and deflates Beeston by proceeding to the reveal where, struggling to open his front door, he 'assaulted it with both hands ...', before the scene changes to him being woken by a corresponding 'Knock knock knock', and, as 'the pile of manuscript fell from his knee', his adventures in Baltland are exposed to have been a dream inspired by '*A Modern Hero*'.¹²⁴ His awakener is Gerda whose 'other bad tooth is now aching', making her dependent on Beeston despite his previous inappropriate conduct.¹²⁵ This leaves an open ending by granting Beeston, perhaps wiser from his experiences, another chance with Gerda, although Kempenfeldt's reign of terror presumably continues unabated in Baltland. Linklater's pessimistic idea of a modern hero is represented by Beeston because, while unable to defeat fascism, he at least tried to exercise a moderating influence. The English Beeston also embodies British democracy in having faults yet avoiding the lure of autocratic tyranny. The temporary nature of Beeston's humanitarian successes, however, mean Linklater implies it is a fallacy to think, as advocates of appeasement did, that aggressive dictators can be contained long-term by persuasion rather than force. The juvenility of the conceit by which the majority of the story turns out to have been dreamt by Beeston is ameliorated by this further suggesting the story's bleak message that the idea of reasonable people thwarting fascist despots is also make-believe. Beeston may not fit the traditional expectation of a hero, but he is all Linklater feels the fascist-dominated 1930s deserve.

¹²¹ Linklater, 'His Majesty', p. 316.

¹²² Linklater, 'His Majesty', p. 316.

¹²³ Linklater, 'His Majesty', p. 317.

¹²⁴ Linklater, 'His Majesty', p. 317.

¹²⁵ Linklater, 'His Majesty', p. 317.

Although 'His Majesty the Dentist' does portray the brutality of fascism, Linklater offers a literary response of comic parody and ridicule rather than earnest horror towards its oppression. The added layer of the failed author means that, while 'The Revolution' suggests the potential political power of writers, Linklater uses its successor self-mockingly to stress their relative impotence. The lampooning of a fascist dictator resembling Hitler from an imaginary country means the story has obvious similarities with Charlie Chaplin's film 'The Great Dictator' (1940), but Linklater prefigured Chaplin by five years. 'His Majesty the Dentist' uses the black comedy of its farcical plot and the general absurdity of fascist Baltland to fulfil Linklater's sincerely held and deadly serious agenda of highlighting the cruel preposterousness of Hitler and Nazi Germany.

The Baltland Stories in the Context of the Crises of the 1930s

With 'The Revolution' and 'His Majesty the Dentist', Linklater uses Baltland's degeneration from prosperous constitutional monarchy to communist and fascist dystopias to stress the merits of conservatism and moderation in politics and culture through the medium of comedy. The satirical humour of the Baltland stories offers a detached, cynical viewpoint towards political developments in the Soviet Union, Italy and Germany which alarmed Linklater rather than, as in 'Growing Like a Tree', *Ripeness is All* or *The Lion and the Unicorn*, solemnly denouncing them. While this may be partly for literary reasons with Linklater wishing to maintain the comic style for which he was renowned, it also suggests his sense of bemused but bitter powerlessness in the face of oppressive fascist and communist governments.

The ironic attitude of the Baltland stories, heightened by their fantasy setting, is also symptomatic of the lack of resolve hampering Linklater in the mid-1930s. Linklater was, Parnell describes, 'torn between two notions of what ought to be done about' tyrannical regimes since 'That they should be resisted was patently obvious, but whether there might be some other means than the use of force to correct their

errant ways exercised him intellectually and emotionally for some years'.¹²⁶ Although not featured in the Baltland Stories, Linklater thought his 'small nationalism' could provide an alternative because 'in a world of little states no one could afford to buy big guns or monstrous battleships, and lack of credit would ensure disarmament without the help (or hindrance) of conferences'.¹²⁷ 'Growing Like a Tree' imagined a form of collective defence with how 'the four states of Magnolia' are menaced by the neighbouring 'Malevolenz', but 'take their troubles to Geneva' and gain support from other small countries whose threat to cut coal imports forces the aggressor to back down.¹²⁸ This reveals Linklater's residual optimism in 1934 that international co-operation could still prevent conflicts before the League of Nation's failure over the Italian landgrab in Abyssinia (Ethiopia) the following year meant the notion of 'Collective security was dead, as was the belief that the League could protect small nations from aggressors'.¹²⁹ Linklater was further restrained by an aversion, apparent in 'The Revolution', to writing as a means of propaganda because 'Propaganda is different from criticism', since 'Criticism of social values, standards, etc is implicit in most kinds of prose writing', as the Baltland stories demonstrate, but 'propaganda demands the sacrifice of nearly all the characteristics of literature – individual judgment, aesthetic, a *whole* creation of character, and the rest of them'.¹³⁰ In this light, the facetious satire of the Baltland stories seems a compromise in avoiding what Linklater saw as the literary pitfall of becoming excessively polemical while still allowing him to attack the monstrous totalitarian regimes spawned by fascism and communism that were pivotal to the crises of the 1930s.

¹²⁶ Parnell, *Eric Linklater*, p. 162.

¹²⁷ Linklater, 'Preface', in *The Devil's in the News*, p. 25.

¹²⁸ Linklater, 'Growing Like a Tree', p. 76.

¹²⁹ Bouverie, *Appeasing Hitler*, pp. 81-82.

¹³⁰ Parnell, *Eric Linklater*, p. 206. Linklater set out his views in the same 1937 letter to Alison Bonfield referred to previously.

Chapter III

Juan in China:

Searching for Comedy in Sino-Japanese Conflict

Linklater's novel *Juan in China* swaps the fantasy setting of Baltland for Shanghai, but is still rooted in the crises of the 1930s with an opening describing how 'From China to Spain the world is seething in war and rebellion, hissing with industrial strife, bubbling over with military philosophies and martial economies'.¹ While Linklater realised the danger of fascism and communism and recognised the Spanish Civil War as a harbinger of wider European conflict, *Juan in China* fails to grasp the extent of the threat posed by Japanese imperialism in East and Southeast Asia despite the warning presented by Japan's conquest of Manchuria in 1931-1932. Published in February 1937 shortly before the Second Sino-Japanese War began the following July, *Juan in China* anticipates the conflict and its early battleground of Shanghai yet trivialises the nascent Chinese Republic's plight with an inappropriately facetious comedic response.

Juan in China's reductive perspective towards contemporary China stems partly from the circumstances surrounding its inception. As a sequel to *Juan in America*, the novel inherits the picaresque protagonist Juan Motley, a descendant of Byron's Don Juan, and also a flippant British attitude towards a foreign country. The success of *Juan in America* led to Linklater's 'horse-trader' publisher Jonathan Cape urging him 'to write *Juan in Italy*, *Juan in Spain*, *Juan in Germany*, because he saw profit in such a series', and Linklater admitted regretting not immediately continuing Juan's adventures since 'For several reasons, some of which were good, I have wanted the money that comes with success, and never got it'.² This suggests a

¹ Eric Linklater, *Juan in China* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958), p. 7. Linklater's opening tallies with Rana Mitter's observation of how 'For many progressives in the West, the war in China was linked inextricably with the Spanish Civil War, and many observers – Auden, along with his companion Christopher Isherwood, the photographer Robert Capa and the filmmaker Joris Ivens – went seamlessly from one war to the other, reporting on them as connected sites in an overarching global struggle by democratic (or at least progressive) governments, against fascism and xenophobic "ultranationalism"', Rana Mitter, *China's War with Japan*, p. 10.

² Linklater, *Fanfare*, pp. 125-126.

financial motivation for Linklater resuming Juan's adventures and the setting of China followed on from *Juan in America's* conclusion in which Juan met the 'remarkably beautiful' Chinese woman Kuo Kuo.³ Linklater later admitted 'the impulse to write this book or the desire to see China' were 'as closely joined as the Siamese twins that later became characters in the novel'.⁴ *Juan in China* appears, therefore, born of Linklater's desire to repeat *Juan in America's* popularity and to visit China rather than any real interest in its culture or precarious position in the 1930s.

The casualness of Linklater's relationship with China is matched by Juan only being drawn there through his romantic attachment to Kuo. Juan is encapsulated by Linklater's grandson Alexander as 'a lover who is captured by women rather than seducing them; a hero who stumbles unheroically from one event to the next in a sequence of unlikely accidents', and this is apparent in how Juan's pursuit of Kuo leads to his misadventures in war-torn China.⁵ After a comic reunion in a Californian nudist colony where a fully-clothed Kuo is amused by Juan's nakedness, she initially declines accompanying him to San Francisco because 'I am Chinese' and 'in China to-day there is so much misery that to look for pleasure would make me a traitor to my country'.⁶ Juan's shallowness makes him 'unwilling to accommodate his mind to such heroic seriousness' and he was also 'fairly ignorant about China', but after Kuo informs him 'the Japanese are trying to destroy China, and make us a subject people', he feels 'A man's impulse to succour beauty in distress'.⁷ Less pure sexual motives are suggestively implied by how 'he wanted to extend and enlarge the pleasure of being with her' because 'Kuo delighted and excited him'.⁸ Since Kuo's 'attractions were magnified by her nationality' because 'She was Chinese and unfamiliar', Juan's 'young man's altruism' started 'to plait itself into his simple motive' until 'He began to feel strongly about China himself' and 'more than half-ready to fight for China'.⁹ The 'bargain' Juan proposes, 'if you come to San Francisco with me, I'll go to China with you. And I'll bring my own machine-gun', really represents

³ Eric Linklater, *Juan in America* (London: Capuchin Classics, 2008), p. 414. Linklater also gave the name 'Kuo Kuo' to the Siamese cat he acquired in 1937, Parnell, *Eric Linklater*, pp. 204-205.

⁴ Linklater, *Man on My Back*, p. 240.

⁵ Alexander Linklater, 'Foreword', in Eric Linklater, *Juan in America* (London: Capuchin Classics, 2008), pp. 8-11, p. 9.

⁶ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 13.

⁷ Linklater, *Juan in China*, pp. 13-14.

⁸ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 14.

⁹ Linklater, *Juan in China*, pp. 14-15.

supporting her Chinese nationalist cause in exchange for a romantic relationship.¹⁰ Since 'all men are sailors', Juan is thus a sexual and cultural tourist wanting to explore the foreign territory of Kuo and her country, admitting 'At present I have twin desires' and 'The other is to see China'.¹¹

As the novel's only major Chinese character, Kuo's depiction betrays the limitations of Linklater's understanding of the country and its people. Since 'Kuo' forms the beginning of the ruling Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Party), Kuo's name associates her with Chinese nationalism.¹² Her fruitless search in the US for 'some philosopher who knew as much about modern times as Confucius knew about his' links her to the Chinese 'New Culture' movement 'that aimed to liberate China from the constraints of outdated thinking'.¹³ She is also active in youth politics as leader of 'the Conquering Youth of China' at a time when the 'May Fourth Movement' had 'brought both the new cultural ideas of science and democracy and the new patriotism into a common focus in an anti-imperialist program'.¹⁴ This saw violent protests, some in Shanghai, against the continued foreign presence in China which dated from the 'unequal treaties' of the nineteenth-century that 'forced open new ports for foreign trade, including Shanghai', but lacked 'any reciprocal benefits for the Chinese themselves'.¹⁵ It seems unrepresentative, therefore, that a young radical patriot such as Kuo would pliantly agree to the British Juan's romantic proposition presenting himself as a white saviour and making claims upon her body, when anti-

¹⁰ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 15.

¹¹ Linklater, *Juan in China*, pp. 14-15.

¹² Kuo Kuo was further linked to the Kuomintang and its original leader through the mention in *Juan in America* that 'her father was a close friend of Sun Yat Sen', although this is not referred to in *Juan in China*, Linklater, *Juan in America*, p. 454.

¹³ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 13; Mitter, *China's War with Japan*, p. 32. Fairbank and Goldman summarise how as 'Ideas of several kinds of socialism, of the emancipation of women, and the rights of labor versus capitalists swept around the globe and flooded into Republican China', the Chinese intellectual community 'instinctively took on the task of understanding and evaluating this revolutionary outside world at the same time that it struggled to reevaluate China's inherited culture', John King Fairbank & Merle Goldman, *China: A New History* (Cambridge & London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 267.

¹⁴ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 21; Fairbank & Goldman, *China: A New History*, pp. 267-268. The 'May Fourth Movement' formed out of a student demonstration on 4 May 1919 in Beijing against the Chinese government's acceptance of 'the decision of the peace-makers at Versailles to leave in Japanese hands the former German concessions in Shandong', Fairbank & Goldman, *China: A New History*, p. 267.

¹⁵ Mitter, *China's War with Japan*, p. 20. At one bloody protest 'in front of a Japanese-owned factory in Shanghai's International Settlement' on 30 May 1925 'the British-run Shanghai Municipal Police force' opened fire leaving 'eleven workers dead, and in doing so, sparked a national protest movement of demonstrations and boycotts', Mitter, *China's War with Japan*, pp. 37-38.

imperialism and autonomy over its own territory were at the forefront of Chinese nationalism and progressive politics.

The decision Juan makes of ‘arraigning the Japanese as her [Kuo’s] worst enemies’ is also true of Linklater’s attitude which overlooks the Chinese Civil War raging between the Kuomintang government and communist insurgents.¹⁶ The only acknowledgement is Kuo’s brief allusion to how ‘China is being destroyed by bandits and Communists’, but downplays their threat by stressing the Japanese ‘are much the worst’ since ‘We have always had plenty of bandits and criminals in China, and we do not really mind them’.¹⁷ In fact around the mid-1930s the ‘preoccupation’, observes Wheatcroft, of Kuomintang leader and Chinese Premier Chiang Kai-shek ‘was not only with the Japanese, but with the communists’ and Shanghai had been an earlier flashpoint between Chinese Nationalists and Communists.¹⁸ Chiang’s anti-communism meant he ‘hoped that Western support would enable him to construct “a bulwark against bolshevism”’, but ‘By the mid-1930s neither the United States nor Britain had much enthusiasm for supporting the Chinese cause’.¹⁹ The nonchalance Linklater displays towards Chinese communism despite his alarm over its spread in Europe is, therefore, indicative of a wider lack of Western interest in the Chinese Civil War.

Linklater’s Western bias and lack of real awareness of China is heightened by *Juan in China* restricting Juan, who previously traversed the US, to the unrepresentative ‘global city’ of Shanghai.²⁰ The foreign controlled zones of the French Concession and International Settlement, where ‘the British were dominant economically and politically’, were the centre of Shanghai in the 1930s.²¹ Shanghai is

¹⁶ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 14.

¹⁷ Linklater, *Juan in China*, pp. 13-14.

¹⁸ Overy with Wheatcroft, *The Road to War*, p.333. Fairbank and Goldman describe how ‘In April 1927 at Shanghai foreign troops and warships confronted the Communist-led labor unions, which had seized local control’ and ‘Under Comintern orders’ were awaiting the arrival of Chiang ‘as their ally, only to be attacked and decimated by his forces in a bloody betrayal, aided by the Green Gang of the Shanghai Underworld’, Fairbank & Goldman, *China: A New History*, p. 284.

¹⁹ Overy with Wheatcroft, *The Road to War*, p. 333 & p. 330.

²⁰ Isabella Jackson, *Shaping Modern Shanghai: Colonialism in China’s Global City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 9. Jackson describes how ‘The concept of the “global city” was coined by Saskia Sassen to describe cities hosting a critical mass of multinational corporations in the 1980s’ and applies the term to Republican Shanghai, Jackson, *Shaping Modern Shanghai*, p. 9.

²¹ Jackson, *Shaping Modern Shanghai*, p. 2.

described by Linklater as ‘a robber-keep at the entrance to China’ since ‘Merchants had founded it, and merchants ruled it’.²² Although the term ‘robber merchants’ implies disdain for Shanghai’s foreign founders, their superiority is emphasised by how having ‘crossed the world, and sat themselves down in a hostile land’ they ‘raised to a wondering sky this imperial city, where before had been only some wattled huts and a stinking swamp’.²³ Since ‘for their own purpose’ they ‘had established law in their settlement, and contrived for those who lived there a very reasonable degree of security’, the city’s Western governance makes it ‘a Centre of Civilization’ in ‘contrast to the unspoilt hinterland, whose charms included banditry, extortion, armed assault, and such reverence for the Confucian principles as to leave invested capital without any adequate protection’.²⁴ This leads Linklater to claim the ‘result was that worldly and wealthy Chinese, in ever-increasing numbers, had discovered the amenities of the roost, and come to the conclusion that the pirates’ law was better than their own lack of it’.²⁵ Such a Western-centric view of Shanghai overlooks how, Kaufman explains, ‘growth and modernization’ were not ‘limited to the foreign neighborhoods’, but ‘rippled outward’ to the Chinese-controlled suburbs.²⁶ Its unique fusion of Western and Chinese influences meant ‘many Chinese believed that Shanghai was forging a new, dynamic Chinese culture – outward looking, cosmopolitan, prepared to embrace the twentieth century’, which made, Jackson adds, ‘Shanghai the most important city in Republican China’ as ‘Chinese political and cultural life centred on the economic powerhouse of Shanghai, while the key developments of the period, particularly the growth of nationalism and anti-imperialism, grew out of Shanghai’.²⁷ By limiting the scope of the novel to Shanghai and portraying the city as a colonial outpost of Western civilisation in an otherwise backward and lawless country, Linklater echoes the chauvinistic mentality, Mitter

²² Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 17.

²³ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 17.

²⁴ Linklater, *Juan in China*, pp. 17-18.

²⁵ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 18. The broad accuracy of Linklater’s description is confirmed by Kaufman describing how ‘All the policies of the International Settlement were designed by its business leaders to create the stability, prosperity, and lack of government interference yearned for by foreign capitalists’, creating ‘a “Republic of Merchants”’ with the result that ‘In the Roaring Twenties and the 1930s, middle-class and wealthy Chinese flocked to Shanghai, drawn by its economic opportunity and a life unavailable anywhere else in China’ as the city ‘enjoyed what most of China lacked: a stable government that could protect its citizens’, Jonathan Kaufman, *Kings of Shanghai* (London: Abacus, 2021), pp. 77-78 & p. xxvii.

²⁶ Kaufman, *Kings of Shanghai*, p. 79.

²⁷ Kaufman, *Kings of Shanghai*, p. xxvii; Jackson, *Shaping Modern Shanghai*, p. 2.

describes, of the 'Foreigners in the city's two "concession" areas' who 'often dismissed towns beyond Shanghai as mere "outstations"'.²⁸

Shanghai 'might have developed peacefully on these lines', Linklater recognises, 'had it not been for the unruly ambition of the Japanese' whose strong presence in the city created tensions with the Chinese.²⁹ Juan and Kuo arrive in an anxious Shanghai where 'War was imminent, bloody and serious war'.³⁰ The naïve Juan 'found it difficult to understand the necessity for war', but the narration explains the background with how the Japanese 'had become civilized, and discovering in civilization the very weapons they needed, had adopted along with it a modern code of ethics, imperialism, and revengeful efficiency' and consequently 'were so foolish as to want, not merely China's trade, but much of its unwieldy land and undisciplined people'.³¹ This roughly reflects how the impact of the depression on industrialised yet under-resourced Japan contributed to the rise of an extreme nationalist regime, and, Farmer summarises, 'China's weakness was a constant temptation to Japan, which needed new markets and raw materials and which still had imperial ambitions'.³² The consequent Japanese 'militant avarice' means 'the streets of Shanghai – that most benevolent of pirate polities – became a bloody and untidy battlefield' as events in the novel foreshadow the real-life Battle of Shanghai.³³

Since the novel is told from Juan's perspective, it favours his glib, Western attitude towards China. While the devoted Kuo decides 'China could only be saved by charging with its embattled youth on the invader's guns and bayonets', Juan 'fancied that the first thing to reconnoitre was a line of retreat' because 'he was pledged to fight, but by no means to die for China'.³⁴ This self-interest is typical of Westerners as 'In the Foreign Settlement the Europeans were very angry', but only because they are 'worried about their investments' and are 'mobilizing their Defence Force' with 'stern impartiality' to 'defend their property against the aggressor, and

²⁸ Mitter, *China's War with Japan*, p. 93.

²⁹ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 18.

³⁰ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 21.

³¹ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 33 & pp. 18-19.

³² Farmer, *Britain: Foreign and Imperial Affairs 1919-39*, p. 41.

³³ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 19.

³⁴ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 34 & p. 20.

against fugitives from the aggressor'.³⁵ When the war starts in the novel, Juan is ensconced in the International Settlement's British Shanghai Club with 'The longest bar in the world', which doubly excluded Kuo through a membership policy banning women and Chinese.³⁶ This ensures Juan and the other Westerners are safely insulated from Chinese suffering just as 'the distant gunfire' has been 'Muffled by the intervening air'.³⁷ The expat drinkers exhibit a nonchalant attitude towards the Chinese: 'Poor bloody China' says one, but 'Serves 'em right' said another because 'They've been asking for it', and there is greater concern over whether 'the Japanese will respect the Settlement'.³⁸ Both Juan and the novel itself leave the impression of being more comfortable among Western characters in the International Settlement than with the Chinese.

The dichotomy between Shanghai's international centre and Chinese suburbs is explored through the two major plot strands into which Juan is drawn. The Chinese side is highlighted by Juan aiding Kuo retrieve 'the plan that's going to unite all China, and teach us how to defeat the Japanese, and live noble, useful, and peaceful lives', which she sourced from a mountain-dwelling guru, Lo Yu.³⁹ This places Juan as a fish-out-of-water in colourful Chinese locations including a Buddhist monastery and a bustling market. The foreign community is showcased with Juan assisting the gargantuan English expat Flanders extract more money for the Japanese made tanks he is selling to the Chinese army. Neither Juan nor Linklater's narration appear to have any qualms about the contradictory situation of working with Kuo for China's cause while simultaneously helping a foreigner profiteer at China's expense. This further augments the sense that Juan is always more aligned with Western interests and merely dabbling in Chinese affairs.

³⁵ Linklater, *Juan in China*, pp. 32-33.

³⁶ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 43.

³⁷ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 47.

³⁸ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 45. The authenticity of this depiction is borne out by how the 'foreign community did not welcome its new guests' and a 'commentator' in the '*North China Daily News*, the voice of the British community in Shanghai', Mitter has discovered, 'fussed about the unwillingness of the Chinese to accept their inevitable fate without inconveniencing others' when an 'influx' of Chinese refugees sought sanctuary in Shanghai's international concessions between July and August 1937, Mitter, *China's War with Japan*, p. 93.

³⁹ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 84.

Juan in China's juxtaposition of Shanghai's parallel worlds is heightened by the war into grotesque absurdity. After Lo Yu's plan is misplaced with an opium-addled concubine, Peony Sun, Juan and Kuo undertake a perilous journey to recover it into the war-ravaged Chinese suburb of Chapei's 'confusion of shattered walls and ruined houses' with soldiers' bodies that 'lay where they had fallen'.⁴⁰ While the Japanese forces are menacing, Linklater is even-handed because the 'Chinese looters, freebooters, murderous thieves' are just as dangerous, with Juan's Chinese guide, Wang, being sickeningly beaten to death.⁴¹ After driving the Chinese 'gangsters' away with a pistol, killing one, Juan casually remarks to Kuo that 'It's funny' how 'I should come here to fight Japanese, and the only person I succeed in killing is one of your countrymen'.⁴² Returning from this harrowing ordeal to the safety of the International Settlement, Juan then genteelly attends a 'sherry party' thrown by British couple the Fannay-Browns who are horse-traders in both senses of the word.⁴³ The disparate sides of Shanghai overlap when Juan is 'astonished' to hear an 'anecdote' that 'was a highly ornamented account of his own escape from Chapei: which had become the rescue of three sing-song girls who were an American journalist's mistresses'.⁴⁴ Even more incongruous is the expats arranging a ceasefire to stage a paper-chase, in which Juan rides a deranged pony Mr Fannay-Brown is attempting to sell him, that results in a farcical set piece hailed by Parnell as 'a small masterpiece of comedy'.⁴⁵ Less amusing, however, is how 'Juan heard commendation of the Japanese for their sportsmanship in agreeing to an armistice' whereas 'The Chinese had consented to it simply because they wanted a chance to bury their dead'.⁴⁶ While Linklater satirises Shanghai's decadent Western community and depicts the grim reality of urban warfare, his tendency to revert to a light-comedic style means the novel shares Juan's flippancy towards the always once removed misery of the Chinese.

⁴⁰ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 117.

⁴¹ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 119.

⁴² Linklater, *Juan in China*, pp. 130-131.

⁴³ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 136. For an example of life imitating art, see Christopher Isherwood's account of attending an official garden party at the British Ambassador's residence in the French Concession amidst the sound of gunfire from Japanese occupied Shanghai in which Chinese guerrilla units were active, W.H. Auden & Christopher Isherwood, *Journey to a War* (London: Faber & Faber, 1986), pp. 229-230.

⁴⁴ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 137.

⁴⁵ Parnell, *Eric Linklater*, p. 198.

⁴⁶ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 168.

China's plight becomes a source of resentment for Juan by placing him in a love triangle as Kuo proves 'more deeply in love with China' than him.⁴⁷ He selfishly feels 'unhappy and with anger for a core to his unhappiness' due to the 'bitterness of love' when Kuo goes to Nanking (Nanjing) without him on an 'important' mission.⁴⁸ Although escaping the attentions of glamorous Russian conjoined twins, the 'Sisters Karamazov', Juan begins an affair with adventurous Western writer Harriet after meeting her at the Fannay-Browns' party.⁴⁹ Juan's infidelity is unchivalrously implied to be Kuo's fault 'for she had hurt his feelings badly by her neglect and indifference' having 'shown, again and again, that she believed the welfare of China to be more important than a love affair'.⁵⁰ Jilted by Harriet, Juan seeks to extricate himself from the interlinked encumbrances of Kuo and China having exhausted his limited interest in both, but 'He could hardly leave China, moreover, without coming to an understanding with Kuo', which 'would be difficult, for though she had practically discarded him as a lover, and no longer attached any importance to his collaboration in her nationalist ambitions, she would probably denounce his suggestion of going home as rank desertion'.⁵¹ For Juan, 'Everything would be very much easier if only the war would come to an end', as he callously reduces the significance of the foreign conflict to a mere personal inconvenience.⁵²

The plot strands combine as the novel builds to its climax in another comedic set piece scene. When Flanders discovers he has received counterfeit money for his tanks from Rocco, a gangster in *Juan in America* now acting as a 'Military Advisor' to the Chinese, Juan accompanies him to Chinese headquarters seeking reimbursement.⁵³ Despite how 'General Commanding the Victorious Division of Ever-Invincible Tanks' Wu Tu-Fu's ineptitude is conveyed by one of his maps

⁴⁷ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 30.

⁴⁸ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 40.

⁴⁹ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 58.

⁵⁰ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 158.

⁵¹ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 192.

⁵² Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 192.

⁵³ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 36. Michael Parnell explains how Rocco was a replacement for Linklater's original character 'Two-Gun Cohen' who could have been 'taken as a libellous portrait of someone of the same sobriquet (and disposition) who had recently been in the news', Parnell, *Eric Linklater*, p. 195. For the story of the real-life Morris Cohen known as 'Two-Gun' Cohen who went from being a petty London criminal to becoming a bodyguard to Sun Yat-sen and a general in the Chinese Army see Daniel S. Levy, *Two-Gun Cohen: A Biography* (New York: InkWell, 1997).

hanging upside down and another being of Brighton and Hove, he soon discovers the 'fraudulent' tanks are made of plywood and arrests Flanders with his accomplice Juan.⁵⁴ They are joined by war correspondent Harris after his protestations that they 'were both British subjects' fail because 'General Wu doesn't seem to have a very high opinion of the British Lion' as 'it's rather tired at present, and not so good at roaring as it used to be' in an indictment of declining British influence.⁵⁵ As the Westerners, including the disgraced Rocco, await execution, Juan's success in bluffing at poker, 'it isn't what you hold that counts, but the moral effect of what you do', leads to the idea that 'If you can win a pot with a bobtailed flush, you ought to be able to go into battle in a plywood tank'.⁵⁶ In order to save themselves, the four volunteer 'to demonstrate the moral value of the tanks' by manning them in combat against the Japanese.⁵⁷ In this haphazard manner, Juan does eventually find himself in action for the Chinese albeit 'With beautiful disregard for the rights or wrongs of the cause for which he was fighting'.⁵⁸

The ensuing battle is mock-heroic in its mixture of stirring action and farcical comedy. After leading a spirited advance, the imitation tanks flounder at a creek 'that was the kind of obstacle that a tank could take in its stride' and the Chinese attack breaks down.⁵⁹ Kuo reappears as an officer and Juan has to drag her to cover against her will, telling her that 'I'm not a hero, and you're not really a soldier'.⁶⁰ Despite Kuo 'insisting on the necessity of immediate attack' with 'voluble and shrill emotion', it 'was clear that nothing short of a miracle would persuade' the Chinese troops 'to leave the miserable security of their ditch'.⁶¹ Juan then has 'a gorgeous and fantastic thought', inspiring him to throw Flanders's 'great wad of notes' into the wind so 'The flock of false money rose high above the creek, and was blown towards the Japanese redoubts'.⁶² The Chinese are 'maddened by the sight of a mandarin's wealth' meaning 'the soldier-coolies raced like maniacs to capture it' and 'the irremissible pursuit became an irresistible attack' as 'The enemy's redoubts were

⁵⁴ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 36 & p. 209.

⁵⁵ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 212.

⁵⁶ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 217.

⁵⁷ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 218.

⁵⁸ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 225.

⁵⁹ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 225.

⁶⁰ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 227.

⁶¹ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 229.

⁶² Linklater, *Juan in China*, pp. 229-230.

trampled flat, his soldiers thrust aside'.⁶³ While Juan 'beheld with amazement the victory won by a few dollars' worth of bad money', typically for him, 'the infelicitous irony of accident' intervenes and he is hit by a Chinese bullet fired 'to celebrate victory'.⁶⁴ Although Kuo 'appeared to think that a proper realization of China's triumph would assuage the agony of his wound', Juan 'did not find it very helpful', in a reminder of the gulf between the zealous self-sacrificial patriotism of Kuo and the cynical self-preserving pragmatism of Juan who remains indifferent towards China.⁶⁵

The novel's trifling Sino-Japanese war fizzles out, conveniently for Juan, while he convalesces. Although the Juan inspired Chinese 'success at Nanyang, of course, had been merely temporary' and 'a Japanese victory was in sight', it 'was unlikely to be the cause of much rejoicing in Tokyo' because 'The Chinese had shown a wholly unexpected power of resistance, and whatever might be the terms of peace, the honours of war would go to the 19th Route Army and the other troops engaged in the defence of Shanghai'.⁶⁶ The reference to the Chinese 19th Route Army suggests Linklater has drawn on the inconclusive January 28 Incident or Shanghai Incident of 1932, which was 'a short conflict, but a real one' between Japan and China, in which the 19th Route Army had taken 'a leading part in the heroic defence of Shanghai'.⁶⁷ It also exposes his lack of knowledge as the 19th Route Army subsequently joined the left-wing Fujian (Fukien) Rebellion and was defeated by the Kuomintang in 1934. The way Linklater's Sino-Japanese war turns out to be a bloody but inconsequential affair matches the sense throughout that it is a distant conflict between foreigners of no real importance either to its British protagonist or predominantly British readership.

Despite selling well, *Juan in China* was 'not a critical success' with Linklater remembering 'adverse criticism' for being 'written, some said, in heartless ill-taste' because 'it mocked the tribulations of an ancient people who were passionately seeking a *modus vivendi* that would release them from immemorial tyrannies and a

⁶³ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 231.

⁶⁴ Linklater, *Juan in China*, pp. 233-234.

⁶⁵ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 234.

⁶⁶ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 239.

⁶⁷ Mitter, *China's War with Japan*, p. 57; William F. Dorrill, 'The Fukien Rebellion and the CCP: A Case of Maoist Revisionism', in *The China Quarterly*, 37 (1969), pp. 31-53, p. 31.

static culture that prohibited their advance'.⁶⁸ Such attacks are justified by how Kuo is made to acknowledge her imprudence when visiting Juan in hospital 'to say good-bye' and 'ask his forgiveness' for having 'brought him to China on a fool's errand', with her 'self-reproach' being due to 'Lo Yu's panacean plan', upon which 'she had depended for the salvation of China and the defeating of Japan', turning out to be just 'insubstantial aphorisms'.⁶⁹ These inscrutable maxims that 'smelt vaguely of Taoism' include 'Whoever will govern the people well, must first learn to govern himself. But who is so foolish as to cut himself off from immoderate delight?' and resemble a pastiche of the Analects of Confucius.⁷⁰ The hermit sage Lo Yu and his teachings are thus reductive caricatures of classical Chinese philosophy, making Linklater backward-looking given the progressive nature of the 'new culture' movement shaping the Chinese Republic. By favouring Juan's outlook, the novel apparently endorses his dismissiveness towards Kuo's 'nonsensical, quixotic, sentimentally blood-and-thunderish romantic notions about patriotism', which are contrary to Linklater's sense of political moderation and individualism.⁷¹ Whereas Linklater appeared righteous when mocking the ideological excesses of fascism and communism, he seems mean-spirited in ridiculing Kuo for having sought a guiding direction to rally her motherland against a foreign invader and bring progress to China.

Although Linklater argued that 'far from being heartless, however, the novel disclosed my immediate response to the beauty, grace, gaiety and dignity of the people of China', his defence does not stand close examination.⁷² More prominent than having 'mocked the futility of Chinese leadership – the faction that was more destructive than invasion' is Linklater's sneering at the cowardice and greed of the

⁶⁸ Parnell, *Eric Linklater*, p. 199; Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 157.

⁶⁹ Linklater, *Juan in China*, pp. 236-237.

⁷⁰ Linklater, *Juan in China*, pp. 236-237. With Lo Yu's '*Precepts for the Individual and Good Council for Government*', Linklater would later 'claim to have anticipated one of the stranger, more improbable elements in the political life of China today, or yesterday: the control of thought, the instigation of opinion, exercised by the aphorisms and precepts assembled in Chairman Mao's little red phylactery', Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 157. He compares the writings of Lo Yu with those of Mao and concludes that 'I am, of course, prejudiced in favour of Lo Yu', but 'I am not, I think, unduly arrogant or improperly self-satisfied when I say that his apophthegms are more interesting than those of Chairman Mao; and there is no disputing the fact that he anticipated Mao and his method by many years; for *Juan in China* was published in 1937', Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 158.

⁷¹ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 22.

⁷² Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 157.

Chinese 'ignorant coolie-army' in the battle, which is especially distasteful given the distressing description of their casualties: 'some of them motionless, and others still horribly alive'.⁷³ His claim to have 'harshly denounced the vulgarity of Japanese aggression' is undermined by the harmlessness of the only significant Japanese character.⁷⁴ Despite Kuo's fear he 'is in the Secret Police', the helpful Hirohoki turns out to have been 'innocent as a lamb in its mother's uterus' because, alongside smuggling Flanders's plywood tanks, he is revealed to have been 'only an insurance agent, the proprietor of a couple of night-clubs, and the owner of the Dernier Cri Antique Store' as a comic caricature of Japanese entrepreneurship.⁷⁵ The novel's lukewarm hostility towards the Japanese can be explained by Linklater's mixed feelings, since he later described how he 'saw the Japanese police and hated them' in Shanghai before being 'met with courtesy, kindness, good-humour' when visiting Japan.⁷⁶ The observation by Andrew Rutherford that 'the war can be seen as funny only by adopting a superior and patronising attitude to the participants', suggests the novel's condescension towards the Chinese and Japanese is a by-product of its comic treatment of the serious subject of warfare.⁷⁷

The facetiousness of *Juan in China* appeared ill-judged and tasteless shortly after publication due to the horrendous reality of the Second Sino-Japanese War. The Battle of Shanghai between August and November 1937 meant, Mitter summarises, that 'Within the space of three months, China's most open, lively and cosmopolitan centre had been turned into a charnel house'.⁷⁸ It was 'largely Chinese blood that had been spilled', adds Harmsen, with Japanese atrocities against the civilian population and many of the best German-trained Chinese soldiers being sacrificed in the dogged but doomed and strategically unwise prolonged defence of the city.⁷⁹ This was partly because Chiang Kai-shek, Wheatcroft states, 'had believed for several years that all-out war in China was the only way to involve Western democracies on China's side' and chose, continues Rigby, to 'postpone the retreat'

⁷³ Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 157; Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 230 & p. 226.

⁷⁴ Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 157.

⁷⁵ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 31, p. 244 & p. 173.

⁷⁶ Linklater, *Man on My Back*, p. 294.

⁷⁷ Andrew Rutherford, 'Eric Linklater as Comic Novelist', p. 155.

⁷⁸ Mitter, *China's War with Japan*, p. 92.

⁷⁹ Peter Harmsen, *Shanghai 1937: Stalingrad on the Yangtze* (Havertown & Oxford: Casemate, 2013), p. 247.

from Shanghai 'in the hope of involving the western powers, with their International Settlement and substantial interests in the city, either as mediators or combatants'.⁸⁰ When Christopher Isherwood visited Shanghai in the aftermath of the battle, he observed how 'The International Settlement and the French Concession form an island, an oasis in the middle of the stark, frightful wilderness which was once the Chinese city'.⁸¹ This proved merely a reprieve as the money-making, high-living enclave of the International Settlement Linklater describes ended permanently in December 1941 with Japanese occupation after Japan's declaration of war on the United States and British Empire incorporated the Second Sino-Japanese War into WWII.⁸² This was just one small example of how Western colonial powers experienced a series of defeats and loss of territory in WWII to the brutal Japanese after underestimating their strength and imperial ambition. Linklater used post-WWII hindsight to castigate the international community for its inaction against Japanese expansion into China by claiming US President Truman's 'brave and timely intervention' in the Korean War had 'saved the United Nations from the death sentence which the old League of Nations passed upon itself when it failed to intervene in Manchuria in 1931'.⁸³ The evidence of *Juan in China*, however, proves that Linklater was himself guilty of failing to make a decisive stand against Japanese aggression in 1937, with his flippant portrayal of Sino-Japanese conflict contributing to a general lack of international concern towards the plight of China and Western underestimation of the danger posed by Japan.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Overy with Wheatcroft, *The Road to War*, p. 331; Richard Rigby, 'Chiang Kai-shek as War Leader', in I.C.B. Dear & M.R.D. Foot, (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to World War II*, Oxford Reference Online, www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198604464.001.0001/acref-9780198604464-e-344 [accessed 2 September 2021].

⁸¹ Auden & Isherwood, *Journey to a War*, p. 230; Mitter, *China's War with Japan*, p. 102.

⁸² In *The Cornerstones* (1941), Linklater is mindful of China's contribution to WWII by including Confucius alongside Lenin, Abraham Lincoln and a recently killed British pilot as representatives of the Allies as he explores the idea of the four victorious major Allied powers forming the 'cornerstones' of a civilised and secure postwar world. At a wartime exhibition of Chinese art in Liverpool, Linklater also 'gave a talk on China's destiny as a great force for peace and sanity in the postwar world', Parnell, *Eric Linklater*, p. 236.

⁸³ Eric Linklater, 'Foreword', in Robert Leckie, *The Korean War* (London: Barrie & Rockliff, 1963), pp. 3-8, p. 8.

⁸⁴ Richard Holmes, quoted by Regan, summarises how the 'British attitude to the Japanese' was 'one of generally underestimating them before the Malaya and Singapore campaign' and Geoffrey Regan elaborates how 'British perception of the Japanese military threat was tied up with racialism and a profound contempt for the Asiatic', Geoffrey Regan, *Great Military Blunders* (London: Channel 4 Books, 2000), p. 81 & p. 77.

While Linklater's opening appropriately positioned Sino-Japanese conflict in the broader framework of the crises of the 1930s, the remainder of *Juan in China* suffers from failing to grasp its true significance. Removed from this historical context, *Juan in China* remains an enjoyable read due to its comic energy and skilful plotting as well as its colourful characters and exotic Shanghai setting, even if the former can be stereotypical and the latter caricatured. A particular strength is its satirical portrayal of the International Settlement's dissolute Westerners with their 'Shanghai mind' characterised by 'high blood-pressure and low thoughts'.⁸⁵ The title of the novel is *Juan in China* rather than *Juan in Shanghai*, however, and the lasting impression is that, like Juan who ends up sailing away 'delighted to be going home', Linklater has only taken a fleeting and superficial interest in China.⁸⁶ The archness that served Linklater well with *Juan in America* veers uncomfortably close to racial condescension when transposed to a culture more alien to him, which is compounded by how, Hart perceives, 'the Juanism so marvelously suited to medieval Prohibition America has proved unfitted to a new tragic-farcical situation'.⁸⁷ This means *Juan in China* is disjointed due to the awkward juxtaposition of being a 'high comedy that was set in the misery of war', and is additionally compromised by trivialising the Japanese threat and a lack of empathy for the Chinese.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 104.

⁸⁶ Linklater, *Juan in China*, p. 249.

⁸⁷ Hart, *The Scottish Novel*, p. 255.

⁸⁸ Linklater, *Man on My Back*, p. 295. *Juan in China* might be contrasted with *Private Angelo* (1946) where Linklater displays a far greater understanding of the Italian people and sympathy for their experience during WWII.

Chapter IV

The Impregnable Women: A Compellingly Flawed Anti-War Novel

The intensification of the crises of the 1930s meant Linklater, turning his attention back to Europe, became ‘increasingly frightened by darkening skies, the threat of another major war’.¹ Since ‘Writing, however, was my practice and my trade – perhaps my vocation’, he ‘found the comfort prescribed and designated for people of my sort by writing with passionate intensity a denunciation of war’ in the form of 1938’s *The Impregnable Women*.² To deliver the novel’s anti-war message, Linklater appropriated the outrageous female sex-strike for peace from the Ancient Greek play *Lysistrata*, first performed in 411 BC during the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta. The problems affecting *Juan in China* from Linklater’s mixing of war and comedy in the scenario of an anticipated real-world conflict are exacerbated rather than resolved in *The Impregnable Women*. While time was not kind to *Juan in China*, Linklater suffered greater embarrassment from *The Impregnable Women*’s imagining of the ‘Next Great War’ having Britain allied with Hitler’s Germany and fighting against France.³ This chapter’s first section discusses the fantasy conflict as a satirical commentary on contemporary European politics and evaluates the significance of Linklater’s descriptions of trench warfare and aerial bombardment. The novel’s observations on gender relations, which are heightened by the social impact of war but remain rooted in the sexual divisions of 1930s Britain, are examined by the second section. The third section analyses how Linklater adapts and appropriates elements of Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* into the novel. In this way, it is determined *The Impregnable Women* delivers a multi-faceted denunciation of war, but is compromised by being self-contradictory partly due to Linklater’s lack of conviction in his pacifist stance amidst the worsening international political climate of the late 1930s. The compellingly flawed *The Impregnable Women* rewards this

¹ Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 159.

² Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 159.

³ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 13.

scrutiny by providing revealing insights into the confused period of British history preceding WWII.

The Franco-British War

At the centre of *The Impregnable Women* is an imagined war between Britain and France. This arose from Linklater's predicament of producing 'a novel written against war' at a time when 'the war that in reality we feared was war against Germany' because 'despite my pacifism I could not persuade myself into drawing a heroine who would want to make peace with the Nazis'.⁴ To resolve this contradiction, 'with some ingenuity I contrived a situation in which France became the aggressor, and that made the revolt more feasible', although also, Linklater admitted, 'gave the war itself a cardboard look'.⁵ The novel's less than prescient scenario of a Franco-British conflict has literary import in facilitating aspects of Linklater's anti-war argument and historical significance by offering a window into contemporary European affairs and muddled British foreign policy, as Linklater, like the UK government, struggled to form an appropriate response to the evolving crises of the 1930s.

A further explanation for what Parnell deems Linklater's 'daft expedient of making France the enemy' is provided by the novel's extended gestation between its inception in 1936 and publication in 1938 amidst the instability and shifting alliances of European politics.⁶ The novel's pitting of Britain and Germany against France and the Soviet Union may have been plausible in the mid-1930s when there was 'a belief in certain circles', observes Sommerstein, 'that the British government was distinctly less unfriendly to Hitler than it was to the Soviets'.⁷ The reverse may have been true of the French government with the novel suggesting 'France, like Britain, had rejected the narrow uncomfortable stools of Fascism and Communism, though with her historical regard for equality and fraternity she was inclined to think a little more

⁴ Linklater, *Man on My Back*, p. 333.

⁵ Linklater, *Man on My Back*, p. 333.

⁶ Parnell, *Eric Linklater*, p. 215. Linklater wrote and published 1937's *The Sailor's Holiday* during the prolonged and problematic composition of *The Impregnable Women*.

⁷ Alan H. Sommerstein, 'Lysistrata Turns a Somersault: Comedy, War and Eric Linklater', in *Classics Ireland*, 14 (2007), pp. 28-29.

favourably of the latter, more leniently of its disadvantages, than Britain'.⁸ When in 1935 Britain signed 'a bilateral naval pact with Hitler, condoning German military expansion', describes Overy, 'Anglo-French relations deteriorated still further', before the May 1936 election victory of the French Popular Front, 'an alliance of left-wing parties, including the Communists', continues Bouverie, 'just two months after the ratification of the highly suspect Franco-Soviet Pact' meant Britain's 'Traditional Francophobia melded with a renewed fear of communism' and created 'a perceptible shift which saw admiration for Nazi Germany increase'.⁹ This apparent affinity between Britain and Germany meant, Overy claims, 'Hitler's foreign policy programme was based on an assumed alliance with Britain', but 'during 1936 relations between them cooled' and 'By November 1937 Britain had become for Hitler a "hate-inspired antagonist"'.¹⁰ This breakdown in British-German relations, together with the Franco-Soviet Pact remaining 'largely a dead letter', made the Franco-British war seem 'very strange', notes Sommerstein, by the novel's publication in 1938 because 'the idea of British troops invading France as allies of Hitler was too absurd to be credible even as fantasy' and 'only made sense if the objective was to denounce war as such'.¹¹ While the premise of a Franco-British conflict might have seemed conceivable when Linklater started *The Impregnable Women*, the end result invites the interpretation of him contriving a specific war recognisable as being the 'most huge and imbecile farce that ever was' to suggest the ridiculousness of war in general.¹²

The literary potential of Linklater's ridiculous Franco-British conflict is exploited to suggest the nonsensicality of war between nations from the perspective of the individual. The novel self-consciously reveres the French language by peppering its English text with numerous untranslated French words and phrases.¹³

⁸ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 15.

⁹ Overy with Wheatcroft, *The Road to War*, p. 160; Bouverie, *Appeasing Hitler*, p. 107. The novel imagines the French President being one 'M. Blum' who may represent socialist Popular Front Prime Minister Léon Blum, Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 23.

¹⁰ Overy with Wheatcroft, *The Road to War*, p. 57 & p. 59.

¹¹ Overy with Wheatcroft, *The Road to War*, p. 168; Sommerstein, 'Lysistrata Turns a Somersault', pp. 28-29.

¹² Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 132.

¹³ While the instances of French words in the text are too numerous to list see Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 128 for good examples with '*renouveau*' being incorporated into an English sentence as well as an unattributed quote from Blondel de Nesle: '*Por la saison, qui se change et remue, chacune, fors moi, s'esjoist et revele*'.

The character Julian Brown is a 'devoted Francophile' for whom 'the French were not only the most agreeable of people, but also the most sensible, the most truly cultured, and the most deserving of England's friendship and admiration', before the war compels him to shoot an agreeable and cultured Frenchman 'Through the face'.¹⁴ The 'Francophiles' are 'all the most agreeable and intelligent people in Britain' who find 'the revelation of the identity of their enemy was an even greater shock than the fact of being at war'.¹⁵ After initially being 'like exiles in a harsh unfruitful land when they found that Paris was the hostile capital, the language of Stendhal and Proust the enemy's tongue, and claret became inimical to their patriotism', the 'vast majority' then 'discovered an anger against France that was fiercer by far than the wrath of original Francophobes', as demonstrated by Julian having 'turned against France with the blind anger of a lover betrayed'.¹⁶ This portrays patriotic hatred of a national rather than personal enemy being a fickle and illogical emotional response. The fallacy of this tribal animosity is implied by how amongst 'the brave and honest men in the trenches' there 'was no longer any hatred for their enemies' and 'they did not fight for pride of their own country', but because 'they were simple men, trained to obedience' who 'had not the wit to escape it, nor even to question its purpose or necessity'.¹⁷ The novel's Franco-British war, and by extension war itself, is, therefore, portrayed as being meaningless and irrational to combatants and civilians alike.

The Franco-British war also allows Linklater to revisit 'ground familiar to me' in the form of a WWI battlefield in Belgium to make an anti-war point.¹⁸ He describes how 'The British Expeditionary Force occupied positions not far removed from those that had once been defended by Old Contemptibles and Kitchener's Army; but with the material difference that they were now facing the other way round' and fighting the French.¹⁹ Graham, a 'captain of the Royal Scots', observes how 'I never thought to see Voormezeele again' where, like Linklater, 'he had fought among the ruins' in

¹⁴ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, pp. 18-19 & p. 76.

¹⁵ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, pp. 42-43. Bouverie comments how 'it is notable how many of the prominent anti-appeasers – Churchill, Eden, Cooper, Nicolson, Spears, Vansittart, Austen Chamberlain – were Francophiles with a strong sense of British history as linked to the Continent', Bouverie, *Appeasing Hitler*, p. 219.

¹⁶ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 43 & p. 88.

¹⁷ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, pp. 152-153.

¹⁸ Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 57.

¹⁹ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 53.

'April 1918' as 'private in the Black Watch', and 'now it was again in ruins, and after a quarter of a century he was once more a soldier'.²⁰ This is tragic because the 'intervening years had been earnest and busy, filled with arduous endeavour and laudable experiment' and 'mankind had grown a little, here and there, in beauty and wisdom and in charity', but 'now the world was at war again, and again the western Powers were fighting for the ruins of Voormezele'.²¹ The war ensures 'Progress had stopped and their objective had shrunk to that' as, pathetically, 'This shattered village was now the goal and scope of all their effort'.²² The futility of this cyclical and self-defeating situation, augmented by the needlessness of the destructive Franco-British conflict, effectively conveys Linklater's anti-war theme.

For this pacifist argument inherent in *The Impregnable Women's* Franco-British war to work, Linklater must limit his earlier vehement criticism of fascist and communist regimes in his satirical depiction of the circumstances bringing Europe to war. The novel downplays the menace of Hitler by whimsically imagining him experiencing an 'alleged theophany' and becoming 'increasingly Messianic' with a 'curious fondness for Israelitish metaphor', such as 'mysteriously' referencing 'the fact that Moses, or Mosheh – one who leads or draws – was merely the Egyptian for Führer' and the 'land of Canaan' which somehow for him encompasses much of France.²³ Although uncomfortable for the post-Holocaust reader, Linklater's ironic adoption of Hebrew imagery mocks Hitler's anti-Semitism, egomania and bogus justifications for German expansionism. The German army's portrayal is also more pathetic than terrifying through the 'sad story' told by the military attaché to Britain about the preparing of a 'splendid attack along the Regen' that 'was to be a lesson in the art of war', but was 'spoilt' by 'The impetuous Czechs' attacking 'before the Germans were ready', which receives a sympathetic British response: 'They used to be so clever', but 'they've had too much mass emotion and muscle-building and

²⁰ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, pp. 86-87. The village of Voormezele is close to Ypres in West Flanders, Belgium and is where Linklater was wounded in 1918 as described in Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 71. For more on the WWI fighting around Ypres, see Richard Holmes, 'Ypres, battles of', in Richard Holmes (author), Charles Singleton & Spencer Jones (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to Military History*, Oxford Reference Online, www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198606963.001.0001/acref-9780198606963-e-1406 [accessed 26 October 2022].

²¹ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 87.

²² Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 87.

²³ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 21.

Wagner, poor things'.²⁴ The novel's amelioration of Hitler as a crackpot eccentric and depiction of the German military as having being pitifully weakened rather than strengthened by fascism seems an awkward consequence of Linklater having to restrain his contempt for the Nazis in order not to undermine his pacifist rhetoric.

Linklater also puts Britain at war with the Soviet Union and his sardonic treatment of Stalin is more incisive than the portrait of Hitler and has aged better. The real-life case of Welsh journalist Gareth Jones may have inspired the novel's incident of 'an Australian journalist called Ferret' being 'killed in Moscow in mysterious circumstances' after exposing the lies of the Soviet government and the suffering of its people.²⁵ Before his 'unfortunate accident' as the victim of an 'insane' murderer with 'no more connexion to the Government than any other member of the Secret Police', Ferret uncovered how the 'people of Russia' had not 'demonstrated their loyalty and solidarity' by offering the gift of 'a year's income' or 'the year's crop' in 'a personal tribute to Stalin' of 'their own free will' as claimed, but because 'some forty thousand urban workers, and rather more than that number of peasants, had been liquidated in order to make it really spontaneous'.²⁶ In only a slight exaggeration of reality, Linklater thus satirises the cult of personality surrounding Stalin and the horror of his purges. The rest of the novel is, however, overwhelmingly centred on Britain's enmity with France rather than their Soviet allies, again for the probable reason of Linklater not wanting to weaken *The Impregnable Women's* anti-war agenda.

The sense of the novel being confused about its stance towards contemporary international politics is heightened by Linklater's attack on Britain. The opening chapter, 'The Terrain', suggests 'The desire for wealth' is driving the global increase in conflicts as 'Imperialism' is merely 'fortune-hunting on a national basis'.²⁷

²⁴ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, pp. 124-125.

²⁵ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 20. Gareth Jones bravely revealed the horrifying extent of the man-made Soviet famine of the early 1930s in 1933 before being kidnapped and murdered in Japanese controlled Manchukuo or Inner Mongolia in 1935, with a suggestion of involvement by the Soviet secret police. For more on Jones see Margaret Siriol Colley, *More Than a Grain of Truth: The Official Biography of Gareth Jones* (London: Lume Books, 2020).

²⁶ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 20.

²⁷ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, pp. 11-12. 'The Terrain' is omitted from later versions of *The Impregnable Women* in both the 1952 Jonathan Cape reissue and the 1959 Penguin paperback edition.

Linklater highlights Britain's duplicity where 'As the largest of the imperialist powers it had to defend the idea of imperialism, and simultaneously, in mere self-defence, to deprecate the efforts of rival nations to put the idea into practice'.²⁸ This expands into an assault on the fundamental hypocrisy of Britain which 'unlike some of its more logical competitors, remained officially a Christian country', but 'the necessary values of a great imperialist power were so clearly inconsistent with the values of Christianity that the latter could not be taken too seriously or interpreted too accurately'.²⁹ While Linklater clearly considered Britain to be preferable to its fascist and communist rivals, with *The Lion and the Unicorn* stating 'It is true that the individual in Great Britain has still infinitely more freedom than Germans, Italians, and Russians', *The Impregnable Women* seems more preoccupied with its shortcomings.³⁰

This critical attitude towards Britain influenced the Franco-British war's creation as 'In the muddled thought, the indecision and shilly-shallying of our government and those it governed' Linklater 'saw the possibility, not only of war, but of a war declared against the wrong enemy'.³¹ Linklater's justification for his ill-judged scenario is, however, weakened because the British government does not ineptly initiate war since the French launch a pre-emptive attack 'without the formal declaration of war'.³² In its defence, 'France had not acted without reason' as Linklater satirically indicts contemporary British politicians and 'Britannic tergiversation'.³³ This is apparent in the British Foreign Secretary's response to Hitler's designs on French territory, 'this country will never lightly disregard the

²⁸ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 14. Richard Overy sums up the neo-imperialism of the 1930s inspired by the example set by Britain and France: 'There were no more eager pupils than the imperialists in Italy, Germany and Japan. Mussolini recalled the legacy of the great Roman empire. Hitler was an avid imperialist, who sought a new German imperium across the expanse of Eurasia. He saw empire in terms of living-space: Britain and France had theirs in the under-populated overseas possessions, Germany deserved the same. Even the British openly admitted that these were the terms of the contest: "We have got most of the world already, or the best parts of it, and we only want to keep what we have got and prevent others from taking it away from us," wrote the First Sea Lord in the 1930s. Japanese ruling circles in the 1930s were united in their view that Japanese power and future prosperity rested on carving out a similar area for themselves in Asia, reproducing in the Far East what they saw as the dominant features of Western international behaviour', Overy with Wheatcroft, *The Road to War*, p. 406.

²⁹ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 14.

³⁰ Linklater, *The Lion and the Unicorn*, p. 149.

³¹ Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 159.

³² Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, pp. 47-48.

³³ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 43; Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 57.

mutuality of its obligations', which is 'so ambiguous as to be quite meaningless'.³⁴ After this speech convinces France 'she need no longer look to England either for help or sympathy, but must depend on her own strength, and draw closer to her great ally Russia', the French government is further perturbed by 'Britain's threatened breach with Russia' over Ferret's murder, then misinterprets the unrelated 'three occurrences' of a British loan to Germany, 'Staff Talks' between the British and German War Offices and a British ship's accidental ramming of a French destroyer as evidence of 'Britain's hostile intention' in the absence of any 'éclaireissement of British policy'.³⁵ British political and diplomatic incompetence is, therefore, partly responsible for the misunderstanding that sparks the Franco-British war, although Linklater's censure stops short of portraying Britain as the aggressor.

A surprise French air raid on London opens the Franco-British war, with Linklater writing in 1938 when 'we thought of air warfare', remembers Harold Macmillan, 'rather as people think of nuclear warfare today'.³⁶ By describing 'the prophets and the experts' predicting 'Aerial armadas' dropping 'a rain of bombs' so that 'within a week or two the burnt and choking survivors, panic-stricken in their poisoned ruins, would be screaming for peace at any price', the novel references the widespread fear encouraged by 'the new generation of air strategists', Overy summarises, that bombing could deliver 'a "knock-out blow" so terrible that popular morale would crack and governments sue for peace'.³⁷ The French leaders were attempting the military strategy of decapitation where 'The head and power of Britain would be destroyed' in a 'surgical operation, removing from the body politic that which was poisoning it' and 'the war would be over while the echoes of its first assault were still rumbling in the sky'.³⁸ The French bombardment fails in its objective because the 'Between seven and eight hundred killed' are 'no more than the sum of a few weeks' road casualties' and, while 'In all that made it a capital city, London was destroyed' since 'Whitehall was practically demolished' with the 'Houses of Parliament in ruins', the UK government remains intact and merely relocates beyond the range of the French bombers first to Blackpool for comedic effect and

³⁴ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 22 & p. 31.

³⁵ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 22 & pp. 43-45.

³⁶ Harold Macmillan, *Winds of Change: 1914-1939* (London: Macmillan, 1966), p. 575.

³⁷ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, pp. 16-17; Overy with Wheatcroft, *The Road to War*, p. 409.

³⁸ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 47.

then to Edinburgh, which provides a convenient double for Aristophanes' Athens.³⁹ The bombing's relatively limited impact leads Steiner to contextualise *The Impregnable Women* alongside Nevil Shute's *What Happened to the Corbetts* (1938) as 'a reaction against highly alarmist accounts' in popular novels that 'played on public fear of bombing', such as *The Gas War of 1940* (1931) by 'Miles' (Stephen Southwold), because, 'while not short of the ghastly details of the air war', Linklater and Shute 'pointed to possible chances of survival'.⁴⁰ The lesson of strategic bombing on Britain in WWII demonstrates Linklater was right to doubt the prewar doom-mongers, although he did underestimate civilian casualties, and was proved correct in showing how 'faith in the finishing power of an air-raid' was misplaced in the 1930s.⁴¹

The aerial element is removed from the Franco-British war after the 'most appalling damage had been done to almost every large city from Glasgow to Stamboul' because 'Its horror was too much, and the people rose against it'.⁴² While British Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin did claim inaccurately in 1936 that the impact of bombing would mean 'the raging peoples of every country, torn with passion, suffering and horror, would wipe out every Government in Europe', the novel's popular uprisings where 'The people turned against their own men and destroyed

³⁹ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 48. UK road traffic accident casualties were high in the 1930s with 7,343 deaths recorded in 1934 and 6,502 deaths the following year, Juliet Gardiner, *The Thirties: An Intimate History* (London: HarperPress, 2010), p. 679 & p. 685.

⁴⁰ Zara Steiner, 'Views of War, 1914 and 1939: Second Thoughts', in T.G. Otte, (ed.), *British World Policy and the Projection of Global Power, c. 1830-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 174-200, pp. 187-188.

⁴¹ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 48. According to 'government scientific adviser Patrick Blackett', German bombing of the UK killed 'a total of 44,652 people throughout 1940 and all of 1941' and 'An additional 52,370 were seriously injured', Richard Overy, *The Bombing War: Europe 1939-1945* (London: Penguin, 2014), p. 114. The disparity between this reality and prewar predictions is highlighted by Angus Calder: 'In 1937, British experts estimated that in a new war the enemy, now presumed to be Hitler's Germany, would bomb Britain at once and continue his attack for sixty days. On the basis of misleading and inadequate figures of the effects of bombing in 1917-1918, it was assumed that each ton of explosive dropped would cause fifty casualties, killed and wounded. It was further assumed that the enemy had a massive fleet of suitable bombers, all of which could be used at the same time, and all of which would aim accurately at populous areas. So, in this first terrible blow, six hundred thousand people would be killed and twice that number injured. One Briton in twenty-five would become a casualty, and in London, the main target, the proportion would of course be much higher. Exaggerated reports of raids on Barcelona in 1938 provided the still more terrifying multiplier of seventy-two casualties per ton. These calculations are now notorious for their inaccuracy. The actual rate experienced in Britain during the Second World War proved to be no more than fifteen to twenty casualties per ton, and sustained and accurate attack of the type imagined proved impossible', Calder, *The People's War*, pp. 21-22.

⁴² Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 50. It seems inconsistent that Glasgow could have been bombed while Edinburgh is safely out of range of French aircraft.

their own machines' seem implausible, as borne out by WWII, since this would remove their only means of symmetrical retaliation against the enemy.⁴³ As well as uncomfortably prefiguring the novel's subsequent female rebellion, this fanciful 'people's rising' that 'set quiet men and decent household women to lynching and burning' fails to stop the wider war for the unconvincing explanation that it 'had been leaderless' and 'Having destroyed the aeroplanes, the people were again amenable to discipline' since they were 'already deeply ashamed of all they had done in the lust of witch-hunting'.⁴⁴ Sabotage of oil-production facilities in combatant countries as part of the revolt and an American-led boycott of oil supply by neutral nations meant 'Motor-trucks and tanks and armoured-cars all died of thirst like cattle in an Australian drought' as other examples of engineering progress are eliminated.⁴⁵ The effect of Linklater's dismissal of modern advances in warfare on the Franco-British conflict is that the armies 'took to trenches again' as 'both sides prepared for a long and satisfactory war of attrition' in a degeneration to the technological level of WWI, which Sommerstein recognises as 'a transparently and crudely artificial device to enable him to use his own First World War experience in describing the fighting of his imaginary second war'.⁴⁶

This contrived setup facilitates the novel's representation of trench warfare with Linklater's knowledge of WWI's Western Front enabling him to depict convincingly and stylishly a 'desolate landscape' of 'soldiers in their bitter trenches'.⁴⁷ The inhospitable environment where a 'hard frost' means 'at night the sentries on the fire-step, peering into the cold and haunted darkness, felt their elbows freezing to the parapet' suggests the inhumanity of war.⁴⁸ In this harsh atmosphere, Julian struggles with the enemy of his own shameful cowardice: 'It was the cold, he thought, that made him frightened by chilling his blood, and fearful of betraying his feelings he looked along the crowded trench to see if anyone was watching him'.⁴⁹ The

⁴³ Overy with Wheatcroft, *The Road to War*, p. 409; Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 51. For a detailed examination of British attitudes towards retaliatory bombing against Germany see Brett Holman, "'Bomb back, and Bomb Hard": Debating Reprisals during the Blitz', in *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 58:3 (2012), pp. 394-407.

⁴⁴ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, pp. 51-53.

⁴⁵ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 53.

⁴⁶ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 53; Sommerstein, 'Lysistrata Turns a Somersault', p. 22.

⁴⁷ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 72.

⁴⁸ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, pp. 72-73.

⁴⁹ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, pp. 74-75.

dissolution of the 'flooded battlefields' into a 'soft floor of mud' also brings corporal degradation as 'The dead were yielding to corruption' because 'When the frost melted in their flesh the starkness of their last agony had relaxed and the icy preservation of their youth dissolved' so that 'They were no more to be recognized as the sons of men, but as parcels of the troubled earth'.⁵⁰ The living have no more dignity since 'No one could move without being smeared with mud', which 'They ate and drank', and when, fleeing shell-fire, 'With a shout of despair a man fell face-forward into a flooded shell-hole' followed by another, the 'water went over their heads' filling 'mouth and eyes with its foulness, and they floundered, drowning, in the mud at the bottom of the hole while more boots and the weight of other men trampled them down'.⁵¹ The soldiers are forced to wallow in the mire of the battlefield as Linklater creates an association between the unforgiving, disgusting environment and the equally cruel, squalid war that dehumanises and debases the combatants, thus adding yet another facet to the novel's anti-war message.

The traumatic experiences of war casualties are embodied by British officer Eliot Greene who is wounded to the extent 'there wasn't much left of him'.⁵² His suffering is brutally portrayed in how he 'felt the humiliation that came from every movement' as he attempts to exercise the 'bandaged stumps of his legs, not yet resigned to impotence'.⁵³ Amidst spring where 'The world was renewing itself' in a way he cannot, Eliot's indignation assumes a Christian quality where 'the wind was a blast of trumpets crying that man's chief end was to glorify God for His creation and enjoy it for evermore', which means 'war that shattered the limbs of tall young soldiers and left them in the mud to die was blasphemy and the bitter end of folly'.⁵⁴ Eliot's informed view of war is that 'It's not a joke' but 'sheer bloody farce' since 'What does a man want? Happiness. And what does a nation need? Peace. So we go to war and blow each other's guts out'.⁵⁵ The ridiculous situation is encapsulated by how Eliot 'lost my legs when I was trying to rescue a quarter of beef' from the mud of the trenches rather than in gallant combat, which means his sacrifice carried no

⁵⁰ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, pp. 103-104.

⁵¹ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 104 & p. 107.

⁵² Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 168.

⁵³ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 127.

⁵⁴ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, pp. 131-132.

⁵⁵ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 130.

real significance in a war that is also meaningless, prompting him to conclude with bitter irony: 'That's farce, isn't it? Roaring, blood-boltered farce'.⁵⁶ The juxtaposition of the conflict's horrific 'mutilation' of Eliot and the absurd circumstances in which he received his injuries reflects the clearer emergence of Linklater's characteristic viewpoint, present in embryonic form in *Juan in China*, which gives equal weight to what Hart terms 'the horrors and absurdities of war'.⁵⁷

The Impregnable Women represents a throwback to WWI in its style of warfare and its political outlook. The novel would fit comfortably into the anti-war cultural climate of the 'late Twenties and early Thirties' when, Bouverie summarises, there was a 'spate of books, plays and films about the war released and consumed voraciously' that 'brought home the horrors of the trenches to those lucky enough not to have experienced them, while the publication of a number of high-profile political memoirs suggested that the catastrophe had been one tremendous bungle'.⁵⁸ International politics had, however, changed by 1938, and Linklater later admitted 'the mistake of describing the new war in terms of the Kaiser's war'.⁵⁹ This WWI mentality sees Linklater rebuke all the 'warring governments' for being 'in their nature evil', having 'imprisoned their people and diminished their humanity by giving to a whole nation the likeness and single purpose of a machine' that is 'capable only of destruction'.⁶⁰ It suits the novel's pacifism to treat each government, 'However it had been nominated and elected, in Russia and Britain, in France and Germany', as equally warmongering, but this ignores the disproportionate responsibility of totalitarian ideologies and tyrannical dictators in creating the foreboding international atmosphere of the late 1930s.⁶¹

The prominence of the Franco-British war meant the novel's exploration of the shifting international politics of the 1930s became embarrassingly dated little over a year after its publication with the outbreak of WWII. While Ian Macpherson left his

⁵⁶ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, pp. 130-131.

⁵⁷ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 129; Hart, *The Scottish Novel*, p. 252.

⁵⁸ Bouverie, *Appeasing Hitler*, p. 24. For examples Bouverie gives 'Robert Sherriff's *Journey's End*, Robert Graves' *Goodbye to All That*, Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth*, Siegfried Sassoon's *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* and Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*' alongside Lloyd George's 'best-selling *War Memoirs*' as a political memoir, Bouverie, *Appeasing Hitler*, p. 24.

⁵⁹ Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 159.

⁶⁰ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 153.

⁶¹ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 154.

imagined war's details opaque in *Wild Harbour* (1936), Linklater fashioned an elaborate series of events to explain the development of his fictional conflict. Despite this veneer of realism, the scenario's improbability to a contemporary critic is demonstrated by R.D. Charques remarking that 'Linklater describes all these things with a proper sense of their gravity, though not for a moment does one believe him or them'.⁶² The novel's 'earlier chapters', however, earned praise from Forrest Reid 'as a satire on the contemporary world situation' because they 'have an effective bite, their irony is incisive and intelligent'.⁶³ While the Franco-British war fulfils a satirical function, it is inherently clumsy and necessitates a series of contortions and aesthetic compromises from Linklater, which diminish the novel's value as an alternative history. To be able to write emotively about trench warfare, Linklater must unconvincingly dismiss the technological advances that had already rendered it obsolete. His focus on an absurd war between two moderate democracies forces him to ignore the emergence of extremist regimes in Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union and to stifle his abhorrence for them. The novel is, therefore, confused from its inception because Linklater's avoidance of Britain's most probable enemy for the reason that 'Evil as war might be, it could not be more evil than modern Germany' proves he lacked faith in his own pacifist message.⁶⁴ All this means that despite creating literary opportunities to make anti-war arguments through the fickleness with which Francophiles become Francophobes and the replay of WWI with the sides reversed, Linklater's bold but overly contrived and implausible conceit of the Franco-British war must be regarded overall to be a serious flaw which undermines *The Impregnable Women's* treatment of the crises of the 1930s.

⁶² R.D. Charques, 'Novels of the Week', in *Times Literary Supplement*, 1901 (9 July 1938), p. 463.

⁶³ Forrest Reid, 'Fiction', in *The Spectator*, 8 July 1938, p. 34.

⁶⁴ Linklater, *Man on My Back*, p. 333.

The Battle of the Sexes on the Home Front

Alongside the Franco-British war, *The Impregnable Women* features another conflict on the British home front between men and women. The feminist reasoning underpinning the ‘love-strike’ that forms as a female attempt to stop the war means the novel explicitly engages with the women’s movement and the interlinked peace movement of the 1930s.⁶⁵ This section examines how the novel uses the highly gendered environment created by Britain’s transition into a martial state to explore contemporary issues around the place and role of women with wit and insight, albeit also with a sometimes dated attitude. The female perspective showing the influence of the interwar ‘new feminism’ movement Linklater adds to the novel’s anti-war rhetoric is additionally discussed. The relevance of this aspect of *The Impregnable Women* to the crises of the decade is highlighted by Gottlieb and Toye stating how ‘the gender politics of the inter-war years cannot be understood apart from the broader context of the period’ since ‘it is in the 1930s when the yet unresolved debates about the scope and nature of women’s citizenship collide with international crises and a series of different and varied responses to alternative political extremes’.⁶⁶

The novel compares international women’s rights across different political systems in the 1930s. Linklater implies the position of women in Britain to be superior to fascist Germany and Italy because the ‘women of these countries had long since been taught that a woman’s function was purely domestic’, but inferior to the Soviet Union where women ‘had been trained and accustomed to do anything from managing a boot-factory to hewing forests in Siberia or staffing a university in Transcaucasia’ as ‘free-born and equal citizens’ under communism.⁶⁷ It was a mixed

⁶⁵ An example of the crossover between the two movements is provided by Martin Ceadel describing how ‘the Women’s Co-operative Guild, which had been established to promote equal political rights for women’ additionally ‘in the 1930s required its members to take a pacifist line’, Martin Ceadel, ‘The peace movement: overview of a British brand leader’ in *International Affairs*, 90:2 (2014), pp. 351-365, pp. 356-357.

⁶⁶ Julie V. Gottlieb, & Richard Toye, ‘Introduction’, in Julie V. Gottlieb, & Richard Toye, (eds.), *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender, and Politics in Britain, 1918-1945* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2013), pp. 1-18, p. 3 & p. 14.

⁶⁷ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, pp. 336-337. By way of comparison, Michèle Barrett helpfully summarises relevant arguments in *Three Guineas*: ‘According to Virginia Woolf, the links between the tyranny of women’s domestic servitude and the dictatorship of fascists had not been recognized’ with fascism representing ‘an extreme form of patriarchal dictatorship’, Michèle Barrett, ‘Introduction’, in

picture, therefore, for British women in the 1930s as they had gained the right to vote, stand for parliament and enter civil professions, yet were still hugely restricted in what remained a patriarchal society.⁶⁸

This provides the background for how *The Impregnable Women's* protagonist Lady Lysistrata is excluded as a woman from the British diplomatic muddling that precipitates the Franco-British war. Her title indicates she is upper-class, which grants 'influence in certain other quarters' to her husband, Antony Scrymgeour, a leading military figure since 'To the general public he was a hero, to the Army a teacher and reformer'.⁶⁹ Their 'marriage, however, was not the most successful part of Colonel Scrymgeour's career' because Lysistrata 'had a character of great independence, and her mind was so much her own that it not only resisted the victor of Ghazni, but often attacked him'.⁷⁰ She further asserts her independence by taking Eliot Greene, a junior Foreign Office minister before the war, as her lover. The personal influence granted by her attractiveness over these powerful men does not translate into political influence and she complains on the brink of the Franco-British war that 'Tony [Scrymgeour] never tells me anything', questions how 'We talk about our commitments and our friendship with France' while 'at the same time the War Office is having Staff Talks with Germany', and upbraids Eliot for his and the other

Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own/Three Guineas*, edited with an Introduction and Notes by Michèle Barrett, (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. ix-liv, p. xxviii.

⁶⁸ The Representation of the People Act of 1918 'granted most women over thirty the right to vote' with the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act of the same year allowing women to become members of parliament, before 'British women secured the vote on the same terms as men, under the Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act (1928)', Gottlieb & Toye, 'Introduction', p. 1. Gardiner describes how 'The 1919 Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act had given women the theoretical right to "assume or carry on any civil profession or vocation", though that is hardly what happened' since 'It wasn't only the responsibilities of caring for a family that fuelled objection to married women in the workplace', but also because 'There were reservations about a woman's "proper" role, a carry-over from the fear of "dilution" from the First World War, sharpened in the years of unemployment, that women would undercut men's wages and take their jobs, and women found themselves refused "men's jobs"', Gardiner, *The Thirties*, pp. 552-553.

⁶⁹ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 29.

⁷⁰ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 29. Linklater's imagining sometime after the Spanish Civil War of 'the last Afghan war' in which Scrymgeour became 'the hero of the battle and long-drawn siege of Ghazni' alludes to the Battle of Ghazni during Britain's ill-fated and misguided first Anglo-Afghan war of the nineteenth-century and serves to reinforce the novel's premise of many localised global conflicts as well as Britain's continued imperialism, Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 29. See Brian Robson, 'Anglo-Afghan wars (1838-1919)', in Richard Holmes (author), Charles Singleton & Spencer Jones (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to Military History*, Oxford Reference Online, www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198606963.001.0001/acref-9780198606963-e-61 [accessed 3 August 2017].

ministers' irresponsibility in leaving London.⁷¹ Eliot condescendingly dismisses her concerns, 'I shouldn't worry, Lysistrata', which is 'infuriating' to her because 'The situation is serious, and I want to talk seriously about it' yet 'no one will help me, neither you nor Tony'.⁷² This ignoring of Lysistrata is representative of how, McCarthy summarises, 'The door to foreign policy influence remained, as one commentator observed in 1938, "shut against the Woman and Workman alike"'.⁷³ The sense of British leadership being an upper-class boys' club finds literal expression in the novel's 'Old Hattonian Society' of old boys from 'Hatton College'.⁷⁴ The Old Hattonians, including Eliot, Scrymgeour, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary, 'were the rulers of the land, the almost-hereditary senate'.⁷⁵ Lysistrata, however, is contemptuous of such 'masculine authority' because it 'is always either cynical or incompetent; and often it is both together'.⁷⁶ A landscape of male hegemony means that despite her high-born status and forceful personality Lysistrata remains, as the wife of a commander and mistress of a politician, once removed from genuine military and political power.

The relationship between sexual politics and war manifests from a different perspective in the prewar frustrations of Julian Brown before he overcomes his fear to display 'gallant and soldierly behaviour' on the battlefield.⁷⁷ In peacetime, Julian is

⁷¹ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 32. Linklater's treatment of Lysistrata might be compared with the question Virginia Woolf asked about what influence women have 'had in the past upon the profession that is most connected with war – upon politics?'. Woolf acknowledges that women such as 'The famous Duchess of Devonshire, Lady Palmerston, Lady Melbourne, Madame de Lieven, Lady Holland, Lady Ashburton — to skip from one famous name to another — were all undoubtedly possessed of great political influence', but rejects the value of this type of secondary influence by society women over powerful men and its viability as a route towards female political engagement because 'If such is the real nature of our influence, and we all recognize the description and have noted the effects, it is either beyond our reach, for many of us are plain, poor and old; or beneath our contempt, for many of us would prefer to call ourselves prostitutes simply and to take our stand openly under the lamps of Piccadilly Circus rather than use it', Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas*, in Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own/Three Guineas*, edited with an Introduction and Notes by Michèle Barrett, (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. 115-334, p. 128 & p. 130.

⁷² Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 28 & p. 31.

⁷³ Helen McCarthy, "'Shut Against the Woman and Workman Alike": Democratizing Foreign Policy Between the Wars', in Julie V. Gottlieb & Richard Toye, (eds.), *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender, and Politics in Britain, 1918-1945* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2013), pp. 142-158, p. 144. McCarthy's source is listed as 'Alison Graham, 'For Women Only', *Headway*, December 1938, p. 34', McCarthy, "'Shut Against the Woman and Workman Alike"', p. 156.

⁷⁴ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, pp. 161-162. The name 'Hatton' appears to be a portmanteau word combining the English public schools of Harrow and Eton.

⁷⁵ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 164.

⁷⁶ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 28.

⁷⁷ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 74.

a Brixton school teacher, but 'wanted above all things to be a great lover'.⁷⁸ Denied the affair enjoyed by the more privileged Eliot and Lysistrata, Julian sees his opportunity as 'war, if it came, would produce other excitements than those of the battle-field' because 'War was a moral laxative of the strongest kind, and one who was fighting his country's battles, if he avoided being killed in them, might well become a great lover in the intervals of sterner service'.⁷⁹ Matters are complicated by the arrival in his neighbourhood of 'world-famous' singer and actress Rose Armour, whose success is founded upon a 'physical charm more than sufficient', to nurse her ailing mother, with her beauty and caring nature making Rose a male fantasy figure.⁸⁰ For Julian, 'her coming had been unusually disturbing' as 'the nearness of Rose Armour had driven all his other dreams away', although he 'curiously resented this enforced fidelity that put him on the same level as half the love-sick hobbledehoy in Britain' because 'Despite his passion, he regretted his lost freedom, his heroic and never-achieved promiscuity'.⁸¹ The pride of Julian, 'a lieutenant in a Territorial battalion' in polishing the 'brass and buttons and the already gleaming leather' of his 'uniform tunic' reflects Woolf's observation of men that 'your finest clothes are those that you wear as soldiers', with this being 'partly in order to impress the beholder with the majesty of the military office, partly in order through their vanity to induce young men to become soldiers'.⁸² The peacockery of Julian wishing Rose 'could see him, no longer a schoolmaster, but an officer with a sword at his side' adds to Woolf's 'connection between dress and war' by suggesting the allure of military finery to women and its additional appeal to men through this capacity to attract women.⁸³ The example of Julian's inability in civilian life to be the romantic hero to win the otherwise unobtainable leading lady Rose is thus used satirically by Linklater to suggest male enthusiasm for militarism is rooted in a primitive desire to entice female mates.

The Impregnable Women engages with the 'context of the perceived alienation between sexes' Gottlieb discerns in interwar Britain, caused by how the

⁷⁸ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 25.

⁷⁹ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 26.

⁸⁰ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 25.

⁸¹ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, pp. 25-26.

⁸² Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 26; Woolf, *Three Guineas*, p. 138.

⁸³ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 27; Woolf, *Three Guineas*, p. 138.

'upheaval of the First World War had occasioned a blurring of gender lines', which, adds Kent, 'led many in British society to see in a reestablishment of sexual difference the means to re-create a semblance of order'.⁸⁴ This background can be observed in how the French bombing of London gives the uniformed Julian the opportunity to prove himself 'not merely capable of dealing with the situation, but of exploiting it' by asserting masculine control in taking charge of the scene as well as of Rose through enlisting her service, with her complementary maternal qualities 'calming the frightened children'.⁸⁵ Julian seizes his chance to comfort Rose, also grieving for her mother, as 'She held tightly to his arm' and 'sobbed without concealment', with the result that while 'the wounded were carried past', Julian 'hardly saw they were in pain' since 'he felt the tight hand on his arm, and a thrill of triumph in his blood' because, callously, he 'had wanted a war, and now it had come'.⁸⁶ Their romance develops with the conflict since 'The schoolmaster had become a soldier and Rose Armour was only a woman' who falls for the 'fine young officer' because he 'was fighting for England, and for her'.⁸⁷ The war creates and nourishes the relationship between Julian and Rose by allowing them to fit performatively into the mutually accommodating gender archetypes of the warrior male and the desirable yet vulnerable female who 'looked to him for protection'.⁸⁸

The novel presents a similar viewpoint to Woolf's *Three Guineas*, also published in 1938, where, Barrett summarises, 'war in general was a male activity' and militarism was 'bound in with men's insistence that women restrict themselves to serving the needs of fathers, husbands and families'.⁸⁹ This is expressed by the outbreak of war changing the power balance in Lysistrata's marriage as the failure of Eliot's political class to prevent the conflict gives precedence to the military including Scrymgeour whose 'fame had grown correspondingly' and 'So had his wife's love',

⁸⁴ Julie V. Gottlieb, 'We Were Done the Moment We Gave Women the Vote': The Female Franchise Factor and the Munich By-elections, 1938–1939' in Julie V. Gottlieb, & Richard Toye, (eds.), *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender, and Politics in Britain, 1918-1945* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2013), pp. 159-180, p. 160; Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Inter-war Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 99.

⁸⁵ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, pp. 37-38.

⁸⁶ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, pp. 41-42.

⁸⁷ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 42, p. 39 & p. 61.

⁸⁸ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 42.

⁸⁹ Barrett, 'Introduction', p. xxviii.

resulting in Lysistrata ending her affair with Eliot.⁹⁰ Lysistrata submits to male dominance by having 'ceased to be critical of' Scrymgeour 'on the day that he was given a brigade' because 'he was a soldier' and 'of such paramount importance' that 'her love for him, that previously was so impatient and capricious' had 'acquired an almost idolatrous fervour'.⁹¹ This also happens on a general level with women embracing subservience to men as captured by the song 'A Man in the House', performed by Rose, becoming an anthem:

Up in the morning and fry the bacon,
 Make him a nice cup of tea:
 Who would think yesterday I was forsaken,
 Now I'm as happy as happy can be?
 If you feel rotten because you're a woman,
 Seek for a suitable spouse –
 Say what you like, but we're all of us human,
 And better for having a man in the house!⁹²

An understanding of the historical context is useful here as Linklater portrays the Franco-British war exacerbating what Kent describes as an 'antifeminist backlash' in the interwar period which, by 'emphasizing sexual difference and separate spheres for men and women, contributed to the elimination of many of the gains women had made in previous years'.⁹³ *The Impregnable Women* thus depicts Britain's transformation into a military state resulting in clearer male hegemony and a reinforcement of perceived traditional gender roles because the conflict is being fought and led exclusively by men.

The level of insight Linklater offers behind the novel's comic veneer into the female experience of war is deceptively profound. As the Franco-British conflict grinds on and male casualties mount, the secondary impact is that 'more and more

⁹⁰ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 56.

⁹¹ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 56.

⁹² Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 62 & p. 40. See Susan Kingsley Kent's description of the perception of the masculinising effect WWI had on British men and society, coupled with the widespread resignation of women to having a supporting role in the chapter titled 'The Sexual Representation of War, 1914-15: Reestablishing Separate Spheres' in Kent, *Making Peace*, pp. 12-30.

⁹³ Kent, *Making Peace*, p. 145.

women became lonely through no fault of their own, and girls when their lovers left them for the war saw loneliness haunting their middle years', which meant Rose's 'vulgar song was acquiring an unexpected bitterness'.⁹⁴ A morbid female mood also manifests in the 'huge and murmurous crowd at the station to see the troop-trains pass' mostly composed of 'women, and many in a state of strong excitement', and, while 'Here and there was a mother's uncontainable misery', Linklater cynically describes how 'far more numerous were girls and shrill young women whose emotion was quite simply that of animals in heat'.⁹⁵ Society's reversion to a more bestial level is further suggested by the departing soldiers having become 'more positively male' than the 'dull mechanics, pale docile clerks, and tradesman' they were formerly after being 'segregated and trained to kill' in order to fulfil a 'primal function', which increases their desirability to the women.⁹⁶ In an exaggeration of WWI's 'khaki fever', mass female hysteria results in 'hundreds of waiting girls, pressing against the barricades and shrieking as the fly stung deeper', with the description that they 'cheered their lovers to their death' darkly suggesting the women are goading the virgin soldiers into battle.⁹⁷ The novel thus displays empathy for the suffering the Franco-British war is causing women, while also accusing them of complicity in encouraging its continuation.

The theme Linklater explores of the degeneracy of war travels beyond the battlefield onto the domestic front. The scene at the railway station is one example of how 'in every country and every kind of human activity the war had destroyed all reason and moderation'.⁹⁸ War creates a hedonistic zeitgeist because 'As grief had become excessive, so gaiety had grown extravagant'.⁹⁹ Since 'soldiers in the line were living in constant fear and the squalor of a badger's den', this means that 'those on leave, and they who were under orders for the front, must fare as richly as they could', and, while 'uncountable women were weeping in bitterness that knew no solace', at the same time 'others, hot with the world's excitement, were laughing and

⁹⁴ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, pp. 120-121.

⁹⁵ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 69.

⁹⁶ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, pp. 69-70.

⁹⁷ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 70. Susan Kingsley Kent provides examples of how women did actively encourage men to join up to fight and possibly die in WWI, with reluctant recruits being incentivised by the prospect of gaining female romantic favour which was often forthcoming, Kent, *Making Peace*, pp. 26-29.

⁹⁸ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 54.

⁹⁹ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 54.

making love in a sightless frenzy'.¹⁰⁰ The drastic social changes brought by the war mean 'Nothing was the same as it had been, and most things were altered for the worse' after 'Good sense and temperance had been lost with peace, and now there survived nothing but extremes, of faith and ugliness, of fortitude and passion, of greed and lies and tenderness and cruelty, of utter misery and fevered glee'.¹⁰¹ This again offers an inflated version of the changes in social and sexual behaviour which meant, observes Marwick, 'The safest generalization about the First World War would be that it was a time of powerfully heightened emotional activity and responses'.¹⁰² Although many moral prohibitions of 1930s Britain might be viewed as prudish today, the war's destruction of social mores is portrayed as being excessive and constitutes yet another aspect of the anti-war argument at the novel's core.

The Franco-British war's reinforcement of the patriarchy, militarisation of the country and loosening of carnal inhibitions means Linklater has created the perfect climate to ferment a rebellion harnessing the opposing forces of femininity, peace and sexual repression. To become leader of this feminist uprising, Lysistrata undertakes a personal journey touching upon elements of female identity. Although 'Nobody wanted a war less' than Lysistrata who was 'practically a pacifist before it started', she also 'passionately believed that the only way to stop it was to win it' and does 'an honest job of work that will help to finish it' as an 'Area Commandant of the V.A.D.' military nursing service since what De Groot terms the 'female combat taboo' precludes her from active service.¹⁰³ As the doomed Eliot leaves for the front after becoming superfluous as a politician and lover, Lysistrata is presciently and maternally 'afraid for him because she could see his peril so clearly'.¹⁰⁴ Gazing in the

¹⁰⁰ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 54.

¹⁰¹ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 54.

¹⁰² Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 151.

¹⁰³ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, pp. 56-58; Gerard J. DeGroot, 'Whose Finger on the Trigger? Mixed Anti-Aircraft Batteries and the Female Combat Taboo', in *War in History*, 4:4 (November 1997), pp. 434-453, p. 434. The influence of WWI on the novel is again apparent as The Voluntary Aid Detachment, a nursing service mainly staffed by women, rose to prominence during that conflict. Shirley Williams, whose mother Vera Brittain wrote of her experience as a V.A.D. nurse, describes many volunteers being 'from aristocratic families' and these 'Powerful women who ran large families and large estates were well versed in management and saw no great problems in managing a military hospital instead', Shirley Williams, 'The many battles faced by WW1's nurses', in *BBC News Magazine*, 02/04/14, www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-26838077 [accessed 25 June 2017]. Such a position, therefore, is appropriate to Lady Lysistrata and grants her a degree of official pseudo-military power at a time when women seldom held high-ranking positions, albeit one in the field of nursing which was traditionally regarded as a female role.

¹⁰⁴ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 67.

mirror prompts Lysistrata to reflect how 'Her beauty had always given her a deep and satisfying delight. But is beauty, she wondered, anything more than a refinement of utility? A yacht and the Ionic column are serviceable things'.¹⁰⁵ This leads to the epiphany that her body is not a decorative object and is instead formed for the function of bearing children as 'Passionately, with sudden conviction, she thought: I must have children' because no longer 'foolish, and blind and selfish' she realises 'I cannot live childless and die a barren stock'.¹⁰⁶ Lysistrata parallels the interwar shift in the feminist movement where, Kent describes, 'the ideology of motherhood and constraining ideas about gender found so ready an acceptance among women who had before the war [WWI] rejected them' by recognising her latent overriding maternal instinct which provides the impetus that will bring her to the conviction that the war must be ended.¹⁰⁷

This maternal drive heightens Lysistrata's 'distress' at Eliot's war injuries and influences her to adopt his suggestion of a way she can stop the war.¹⁰⁸ The 'fantastic and preternatural' plan 'more drastic than any precept of the most violent and radical of political revolutions' Eliot proposes is a 'General Love-strike' by women in which they refuse all relations with men including sexual, although this is not yet explained.¹⁰⁹ While Eliot intends Lysistrata to lead the strike and does not live to see its success, his role as its progenitor appears to diminish her importance and the novel's feminist credentials. Since frontline combat is an overwhelmingly masculine experience, however, Eliot adds perspective as a casualty of war in a way Lysistrata cannot, with his wounding representing a symbolic emasculation allowing him to recognise the idiocy of male behaviour, and he additionally understands the power of being denied female affection as her spurned lover. Lysistrata's newfound obedience to her husband leaves her concerned 'she would be betraying Tony', but her conscience is eased by the 'thought of the hatred gathering about him because he won his battles with so great a loss of men' and 'If the war were stopped he would be saved from hatred and perhaps disgrace'.¹¹⁰ A mutinous feminist agenda is

¹⁰⁵ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 69.

¹⁰⁶ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 69.

¹⁰⁷ Kent, *Making Peace*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁸ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 129.

¹⁰⁹ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 132 & p. 172.

¹¹⁰ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 133.

added when ‘the thought sprang up that it would be glorious to rebel against the folly of the world and the hateful forces that threatened Tony: to lead rebellion, to bring to their knees, so simply and with certitude, the bull-headed arrogant dull men who were destroying the world’.¹¹¹ Although ‘Rebellion was a fine breath-taking thought’, the enormity of taking on the patriarchy means its ‘very splendour made her cooler self mistrustful of it’.¹¹² The deciding factor for Lysistrata is a militant humanitarianism inspired by a hospital waiting-room filled with women ‘motionless, prisoners to dread or fearful hope’ that causes her to feel ‘compassion like a blow, and with it a burning anger’.¹¹³ Wanting to ‘put her arms about them’, but recognising the gesture’s impotence because ‘what real comfort could she give?’, she realises ‘There was only one way to help them, one thing that would put an end to the fear in which all women lived’.¹¹⁴ For the reason that such ‘desolation of the innocent and brutal robbery could not go on’, Lysistrata ‘made up her mind’ that ‘No matter how, the war must be stopped’.¹¹⁵ Lysistrata’s maternalism thus convinces her of the righteousness of ending the war due to the suffering it inflicts and in the power of women to do so because with purposely maternal imagery, ‘If poor and wretched women could breed soldiers, then women could bring soldiers to their knees’.¹¹⁶ This makes Linklater’s characterisation of Lysistrata an example of how, McCarthy describes, the ‘framing of women’s international responsibilities in maternalist terms, which inflected so much interwar feminist discourse, had a wider cultural purchase’.¹¹⁷

Lysistrata’s arguments to persuade women to join her anti-war campaign are representative of contemporary ‘new’ feminism and the interlinked female peace movement. As an ‘ideology stressing traditional femininity and motherhood permeated British culture’ after WWI, Kent describes how “New” feminist demands arose from the conviction that sexual difference rather than a common humanity

¹¹¹ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 133.

¹¹² Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 133.

¹¹³ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 134. This angry compassion becomes a theme in Linklater’s writing and would reappear in *The Dark of Summer* and *Judas* in which Jesus is described as ‘the only man I have ever known’ by Saint Philip ‘in whom compassion has the vehemence of wrath’, Eric Linklater, *Judas* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1939), p. 103.

¹¹⁴ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 134.

¹¹⁵ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 135.

¹¹⁶ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 132 & p. 135.

¹¹⁷ McCarthy, “Shut Against the Woman and Workman Alike”, p. 151.

characterized the “natural” relationship between men and women’.¹¹⁸ Cross-pollination between ‘new’ feminism and the peace movement meant a resurgence of ‘the idea of women as mothers, as givers of life’ that ‘was accompanied, indeed, it depended upon the notion of men as warriors, life-destroyers’, which had in early WWI ‘emerged from rhetoric that focused on women’s roles in wartime and from arguments about the relationship between feminism and pacifism’.¹¹⁹ Linklater is influenced by these concepts in having Lysistrata tell her audience she has ‘changed my mind’ from believing ‘our duty was to win the war’ to ‘say now that our duty is to stop the war’, with her exclusionary female focus apparent from how ‘I speak as a woman to other women’.¹²⁰ Lysistrata rejects traditional conceptions of patriotism from a feminist perspective by claiming ‘Politics are a male invention’ arising ‘When men have interests that must be defended’, whereas ‘we are women, and our concern is not the defence of any clique or faction or vested interest’, but instead with ‘the defence and happiness of all humanity’.¹²¹ This implicitly suggests that war as an extension of politics is also a male invention and contrary to the nature of women whose ‘chief concern’, contends Lysistrata, ‘is with the preservation and reproduction of life itself’ rather than its destruction, which places women morally above men and their conflicts.¹²² These feminist rhetorical arguments Lysistrata gives her assembly of women mean, as Clarke puts it, ‘Their reasons for stopping

¹¹⁸ Kent, *Making Peace*, p. 115 & p. 117. Susan Kingsley Kent summarises the interwar schism in British feminism: ‘In 1927, the Women’s movement split, with “new” feminists in the NUSEC [National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship] facing strong opposition from such “equalitarians” as Elizabeth Abbott, Lady Rhondda, Emmeline Pethick Lawrence, Cicely Hamilton, Rebecca West, Winifred Holtby, and Vera Brittain, who removed themselves to newly founded organizations like the Open Door Council and the Six Point Group to continue to lobby for sex equality’, Kent, *Making Peace*, pp. 117-118.

¹¹⁹ Kent, *Making Peace*, p. 115.

¹²⁰ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 137.

¹²¹ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 137. Linklater is again exploring similar territory to Virginia Woolf in *Three Guineas* in which, Barrett summarises, ‘she explains why women’s identification with patriotism is less than that of men’ and rejects male conceptions of nationalism with the notion that ‘as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world’, Barrett, ‘Introduction’, p. xxxv; Woolf, *Three Guineas*, p. 234.

¹²² Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 137. Compare Lysistrata’s argument with a League of Nations Union leaflet from 1934 which stated ‘War is the negation of all women’s primary instincts’ and ‘War means *destruction*. Women are concerned with *construction*; with bearing and rearing children, with home-making, with caring for the weak, the sick, the aged, with preserving the lives that War must destroy’, McCarthy, “‘Shut Against the Woman and Workman Alike””, p. 152. McCarthy’s source is ‘LNU [League of Nations Union], *Women, Work for Peace!*, (London, 1934)’, McCarthy, “‘Shut Against the Woman and Workman Alike””, p. 157.

the war are an attack on the validity of the wholly male world of politics and warfare'.¹²³

The other angle of Lysistrata's entreaty to rally female support against war is to emphasise its devastating yet sometimes overlooked impact upon women. Although many women might disagree, Lysistrata claims 'Our whole nature was so designed that a man's love and the love of children should be our crying need and our deepest thought', but 'what is the war doing to our husbands and the fathers of our children?', and the answer is 'they're being mutilated, and ruined in health, and killed'.¹²⁴ This emphasis on women's needs is further redolent of 'the arguments "new" feminists advanced to legitimate their demands' which differed from 'equalitarian' feminists in being based not on 'the *rights* of women, but the *needs* of women *as mothers*'.¹²⁵ The less immediate female suffering which 'was the legacy of the old war' is stressed by Lysistrata in how 'The agony of the dead soldiers was unspeakable, but it lasted only a little time' whereas 'the misery of the women, condemned by their death to hunger and loneliness, lasted all their lives'.¹²⁶ This leads Lysistrata to question the male priorities driving the war by bemoaning how 'Our leaders say there can be no peace without victory', but 'every victory means that thousands of women are being condemned to barren misery'.¹²⁷ She concludes her argument by asking the women 'Is any victory worth such a price as that? Are you yourselves prepared to pay that price? Or will you join together to bring the wickedness of war for ever to an end?'.¹²⁸ The persuasive case Lysistrata presents, therefore, is that women should actively oppose war due to the secondary but

¹²³ I.F. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War 1763-1984* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 176.

¹²⁴ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 139.

¹²⁵ Kent, *Making Peace*, p. 118.

¹²⁶ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 139. Gardiner notes how 'There had been a perceived "problem" of "surplus women" since the 1890s, and the carnage of the First World War, when over three quarters of a million British and Dominion men were killed on active service, had added to the problem', with their plight being summarised by Kent's example of 'Maude Royden, speaking from personal experience' who 'testified to the "tremendous sacrifice on the part of so large a number of women as is involved in their acceptance of life-long celibacy" necessitated by war deaths', Gardiner, *The Thirties*, p. 551; Kent, *Making Peace*, p. 128.

¹²⁷ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 140. A different slant on this topic is provided by Virginia Nicholson, *Singled Out: How Two Million Women Survived Without Men after The First World War* (London: Penguin, 2007), in which Nicholson explores how the increase in single women as a result of male casualties in WWI had positive aspects with some women harnessing their independence by pursuing varied interests and enterprises.

¹²⁸ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 140.

prolonged suffering it causes them, and, more significantly, because it is anathematic to female nature.

The implementation of Lysistrata's female love-strike creates a situation where 'the country was in a truly desperate condition'.¹²⁹ In 'the counter-war, which the women waged', Lysistrata captured Edinburgh Castle, the wartime seat of the British Government, and 'established centres of revolt in a dozen of the larger towns' while 'Countless women had declared a strike in their own homes' and 'in every street there was a house filled pack-full of defiant women who with deliberate provocation advertised themselves to be marvellously inviolable'.¹³⁰ Although 'the great majority of decent men simply accepted defeat', there is danger 'their inertia would soon be thrown off' since being able to 'endure so wretched a condition for long was hardly conceivable' and 'any considerable delay – occasioned by niceness of feeling, lack of initiative, and a masculine fear of ridicule – would be very dangerous to the women', which ominously raises the threat of mass male sexual violence.¹³¹ This tense scenario can be contextualised with evolving contemporary ideas about female victimisation since pre-WWI feminism contended, summarises Kent, that 'patriarchal laws, institutions, and attitudes rendered women vulnerable to sexual abuse and depredations', but 'new' feminists 'took up a variation of the "drive-discharge" model that relied upon the notion of biological drives to explain male behavior'.¹³² This led to the suggestion 'that women must act differently in order to protect themselves and society from the aggression unleashed by war', which the novel imagines being put into practice.¹³³ In their efforts to end the war, therefore, Linklater's striking women risk being on the receiving end of the very male instinct towards violence which they are attempting to counter.

The novel's pseudo-feminist perspective means the female strikers' defence of Edinburgh Castle also represents the struggle to preserve hard-won women's rights against the besieging forces of the patriarchy. Lysistrata rallies her 'rebel women' with a stirring speech subverting famous historical defences of freedom by

¹²⁹ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 209.

¹³⁰ Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 159; Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 209.

¹³¹ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, pp. 212-213.

¹³² Kent, *Making Peace*, p. 5 & p. 139.

¹³³ Kent, *Making Peace*, p. 139.

men into a female call to arms.¹³⁴ She corrects her followers' perception of 'our struggle merely as a war against the men' because while she 'would be justified in calling upon you to fight as women against the stupidity and the crimes of this generation of men', her use of the conditional tense indicates that is not her intention.¹³⁵ In a feminist adaptation of Abraham Lincoln's 'Gettysburg Address', Lysistrata continues 'I would be justified in saying to you: Six and twenty years ago our mothers brought forth in this country a new womanhood, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that men and women are created equal', referencing the employment rights women gained in 1919 following electoral ones in 1918, and 'Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that womanhood, so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure'.¹³⁶ The objective of this line of argument is that 'the government of women, by women, and for women, shall be established upon earth', but, while she 'would be justified in calling you to fight for such a cause', Lysistrata rejects it by sublimating female self-determination to 'a greater cause'.¹³⁷ In Lysistrata's vision, 'It is not dominion for ourselves, nor the rule of women, that we seek', but 'the dominion of love and the rule of sense', which can be achieved 'by first fighting and defeating error' in the form of the war to secure 'peace on earth' because it is 'freedom from error which is the only true liberty'.¹³⁸ By making her reduce the women's objective to forcing the men to realise the foolishness of their conflict and restoring peace, Linklater seems uncomfortable with the strength and implications of Lysistrata's hypothetical feminist argument. The force of the proto-feminist rhetoric Linklater has unleashed refuses to be diluted, however, with Lysistrata's conclusion of 'For it is not glory, it is not riches nor

¹³⁴ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 299.

¹³⁵ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 301.

¹³⁶ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 301. Compare with Lincoln's Gettysburg Address: 'Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. /Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure', Encyclopaedia Britannica (revised and updated by Adam Augustyn), 'Gettysburg Address: speech by Lincoln', in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, www.britannica.com/event/Gettysburg-Address [accessed 16 August 2020]. The period of time Lysistrata gives as having elapsed is one of the references that indicate the novel is set in 1944-1945. As Graham mentions how he was previously in Voormezele in April 1918 and has returned twenty-six years later, the year must be 1944. The battlefield scenes and Eliot's wounding take place in December of that year and Lysistrata visits Eliot the following spring, which would be 1945. This means that Lysistrata's speech must be taking place in 1945 with her allusion to twenty-six years earlier therefore referring to 1919.

¹³⁷ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 301. Lincoln said 'that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth', Encyclopaedia Britannica (revised and updated by Adam Augustyn), 'Gettysburg Address'.

¹³⁸ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, pp. 301-302.

honours, but liberty that we fight and contend for, which no honest woman will lose but with her life!' adapting the 1320 Declaration of Arbroath's affirmation of commitment to Scottish sovereignty into a rallying battle cry for female independence.¹³⁹

The sense of the novel ultimately recoiling from a strong feminist message is further apparent in its ending. After the striking women's victory, an influx of female MPs enter parliament with Lysistrata becoming Prime Minister, and they 'filled the land with a new spirit' where 'Work was a joy, leisure a perpetual holiday'.¹⁴⁰ This 'Utopian progress, however, most unhappily received a check' after Lysistrata is deposed when the female MPs descend into infighting between spinsters and married women and 'It became evident that as parliamentarians the women had their frailties and limitations'.¹⁴¹ This sexist dismissal of women's suitability as politicians is reinforced by how Lysistrata believes 'We can be politicians, but only in our spare time' and 'refused to take office again' having become pregnant, before rejecting further pleas from 'the once-embattled women of Britain' to 'come back and lead the country' because she was 'now the mother of a fine boy', which contentiously suggests women will prioritise motherhood over their careers and duty to their children over that to their country.¹⁴² Linklater's cynical closing line has the King sending for Lord Pippin to be Prime Minister which means the return of the same incompetent male leadership responsible for the Franco-British conflict, thus making Lysistrata's feminist rebellion against the male folly of war seem ultimately futile.

The Impregnable Women engages with contemporary gender dynamics by portraying the exclusion of women from political decision-making, satirising male attraction to militarism and suggesting female complicity in encouraging men into combat. The depicted effect of the conflict on British society is a strengthening of the patriarchy, with the stresses of war resulting in the relaxation of inhibitions, a morbid

¹³⁹ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 302. The Declaration of Arbroath has, translated from Latin, 'It is in truth not for glory, nor riches, nor honours, that we are fighting, but for freedom - for that alone, which no honest man gives up but with life itself', National Records of Scotland, 'The Declaration of Arbroath', www.nrscotland.gov.uk/research/learning/features/the-declaration-of-arbroath [accessed 05 July 2021].

¹⁴⁰ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 345.

¹⁴¹ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 345 & p. 347.

¹⁴² Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 137 & pp. 346-347.

intensification of emotion and widespread hedonism. The novel draws attention to the dangers facing women through the love-strike increasing the threat of male sexual violence. The influence of 'new' feminism is apparent in Lysistrata's maternally driven characterisation, her arguments about war being contrary to female nature, and how she highlights the suffering war causes women, which add a strong feminine perspective to the novel's comprehensive anti-war message. A wider feminist argument for female self-determination is also essayed by Lysistrata, although Linklater ultimately has her retreat into merely attempting to correct errant male ways. In a typically sideways manner, Linklater thus exposes the underlying gender tensions in British society, which meant, Gottlieb notes, that 'Britain stood on the brink of another world war already embroiled in a sex war on the home front'.¹⁴³ This examination of the battle between the sexes by *The Impregnable Women* ought to be regarded as one of the crises of the 1930s Linklater's writing addresses since it represented a 'breach running parallel to the breakdown in understanding between nations'.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Gottlieb, 'We Were Done the Moment We Gave Women the Vote', p. 160.

¹⁴⁴ Gottlieb, 'We Were Done the Moment We Gave Women the Vote', p. 160.

The Impregnable Women's Intertextuality with Aristophanes' Lysistrata

Despite Linklater's playful confession of literary larceny for having 'filched a good plot from Aristophanes' by appropriating his sex-strike, *The Impregnable Women* discloses its intertextual relationship with the source-text of *Lysistrata* from the outset by using a quote from the play as an epigraph.¹⁴⁵ The novel's change of title indicates, however, that it is not a straight reworking of *Lysistrata* from drama to prose, and Linklater's complex cross-cultural referencing of Aristophanes' Ancient Greek play shifts between adaptation and appropriation.¹⁴⁶ This section uses a comparative approach to examine the literary and historical significances of *The Impregnable Women's* adaptive interplay with *Lysistrata*. It argues that Linklater was drawn towards Aristophanes' anti-war rhetoric expressed through the scenario of a female sex-strike for its comic potential together with its underlying profundity as well as to add cultural legitimacy to his own pacifistic message. These same elements, however, also create problems for Linklater when transposed to a different literary form, alien cultural landscape and a wholly new geo-political situation. This means Linklater's repackaging and repurposing of *Lysistrata* further compounds *The Impregnable Women's* confused response to the crises of the 1930s.

¹⁴⁵ Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 159. On the origins and meaning of the term 'intertextuality', Julie Sanders describes how Julia Kristeva 'formulated the term *intertextualité* in her essay "The Bounded Text" to describe the process by which any text was "a permutation of texts, an intertextuality"'. While 'Kristeva's focus was driven by semiotics; she was interested in how texts were permeated by the signs, signifiers, and utterances of the culture in which they participated, or from which they derived', the use of 'Intertextuality as a term has, however, come to refer to a far more textual as opposed to utterance-driven notion of how texts encompass and respond to other texts both during the process of their creation and composition and in terms of the individual reader's or spectator's response', Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), p. 2. The epigraph in Linklater, *The Impregnable Women*, p. 8 is taken from l. 30 of *Lysistrata* and reads 'οὕτω γε λεπτόν ὡσθ' ὅλης τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἐν ταῖς γυναίξιν ἔστιν ἡ σωτηρία', which the accompanying translation renders as 'By virtue of this triviality the saving of all civilization is in the power of us women'. While this gives the salvation of 'civilization' as *Lysistrata's* goal, it is instead merely 'Greece' at stake when translated by both Halliwell in Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, in Aristophanes, *Birds and Other Plays*, tr. & ed. by Stephen Halliwell, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 95-141, l. 30, p. 96, and Sommerstein in Aristophanes, *Lysistrata and Other Plays*, tr. & ed. Alan H. Sommerstein, (London: Penguin, 2002), l. 30, p. 142. As no one else is credited, the translation may be Linklater's own, perhaps reflecting his particular reading of the play.

¹⁴⁶ Sanders explains that 'the processes of adaptation and appropriation' represent 'in many respects a sub-section of the over-arching practice of intertextuality', Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, p. 17. Linda Hutcheon further clarifies how these processes may be described as 'An acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works', 'A creative *and* an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging', and 'An extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work', Linda Hutcheon with Siobhan O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p. 8. *The Impregnable Women* presents a combination of all three of these definitions.

For much of *The Impregnable Women*, its relationship with *Lysistrata* is one where, as Sanders describes, awareness of 'its shaping intertext' might 'enrich and deepen our understanding' but is not 'entirely necessary to enjoy the work independently'.¹⁴⁷ In addition to the epigraph, Linklater openly acknowledges the influence of Aristophanes' play by his British protagonist retaining the name Lysistrata, with a further nod to her Ancient Greek predecessor in how she 'might have sat as a model to Praxiteles' due to 'Grecian features' she 'inherited from her great-great grandmother', an 'Acarnanian peasant girl'.¹⁴⁸ These references engage with the reader who recognises them by drawing upon what Ellis calls 'a memory that can derive from actual reading, or, as is more likely with a classic of literature, a generally circulated memory'.¹⁴⁹ In the case of *Lysistrata*, this would likely be based predominantly on the notoriety the bawdy sex-strike provided, but additionally and more importantly on its message against war. This intertextual connection changes when Linklater eventually introduces his version of the female strike, having built anticipation in readers cognisant of *Lysistrata*, and *The Impregnable Women* becomes a closer adaptation of its source-text with 'Several scenes', Sommerstein observes, being 'manifest imitations of passages in *Lysistrata*'.¹⁵⁰ The significance of Linklater's reworking of Aristophanes goes beyond these literary qualities, however, by suggesting reverence from the classically educated Linklater towards the Ancient Greeks who are still regarded as cultural originators of not only drama but also democracy and other touchstones of Western civilisation. The effect of *The Impregnable Women*'s referencing of *Lysistrata* is to echo the play's anti-war message implicitly throughout and to add historical and cultural legitimacy which aggrandise Linklater's topical arguments attempting to prevent another major

¹⁴⁷ Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, p.22.

¹⁴⁸ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, pp. 27-28. Appropriately, the name 'Lysistrata' means 'She who breaks up armies', Ian C. Storey & Arlene Allan, *A Guide to Ancient Greek Drama* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), p. 174.

¹⁴⁹ John Ellis, 'The Literary Adaptation: an Introduction', in *Screen*, 23:1 (1982), pp. 3-5, p. 3. Ellis is specifically addressing film adaptations, but the principle applies equally in this scenario.

¹⁵⁰ Sommerstein, 'Lysistrata Turns a Somersault', p. 25. Other examples of *The Impregnable Women* recreating elements from *Lysistrata* include soldiers shopping on horseback, the play's Cinesias and Myrrhine episode being echoed by Rose and Julian, the Greek Lysistrata's analogy of wool-making for managing the city's problems becoming Linklater's Mrs Graham regarding running the country as merely housekeeping on a larger scale, and Aristophanes' confrontation between Lysistrata and the magistrate being restaged by Linklater with the Prime Minister.

conflict, in an example of what Sanders deems the ‘frequently heartfelt political commitment standing behind acts of literary appropriation or “revision”’.¹⁵¹

While *The Impregnable Women* appropriates *Lysistrata*’s sex-strike plot, there is a major divergence in tone between the texts since, as Reid puts it, ‘Where Aristophanes is obscene Mr. Linklater is discreet’.¹⁵² The sex-strike is sanitised by Linklater into a ‘General Love-strike’ with the women abstaining ‘as far as possible from any contact with men’ including, coyly, ‘all marital relations; extra-marital association of a like or comparable nature; and casual intimacy’ until ‘peace has been re-established’.¹⁵³ This evokes the UK General Strike of 1926, with the idea of female industrial action against war having some contemporary currency in being contemplated by Woolf’s *Three Guineas*, while ‘an international general strike of women’s labor halts the violence’ in George Cornwallis-West’s *The Woman Who Stopped the War* (1935).¹⁵⁴ Linklater’s dilution of Aristophanes’ lasciviousness is further demonstrated by how his *Lysistrata* makes a high-minded intellectual and sentimental appeal, as discussed in the preceding section, to convince women to join her strike, whereas her predecessor pandered to baser motives in promising to solve the Greek women’s sexual frustration by ending the war to return their husbands. The attention-grabbing impact and comedic potential of the sex-strike has attracted Linklater, but, in the conservative cultural climate of 1930s Britain having already acquired, Parnell notes, ‘a reputation of impropriety’ and seen *Juan in China* banned in the Republic of Ireland, he shies away from Aristophanes’ comic bawdiness.¹⁵⁵

The deeper significances concealed by the puerile facade of Aristophanes’ sex-strike facilitate the female-centred anti-war arguments of Linklater’s

¹⁵¹ Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, p. 7.

¹⁵² Reid, ‘Fiction’, p. 34.

¹⁵³ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 172.

¹⁵⁴ Susan R. Grayzel, *At Home and under Fire: Air Raids and Culture in Britain from the Great War to the Blitz* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 114. Virginia Woolf ponders the effectiveness of a female strike against war on a class level: ‘If the working women of the country were to say: “If you go to war, we will refuse to make munitions or to help in the production of goods,” the difficulty of war-making would be seriously increased. But if all the daughters of educated men were to down tools to-morrow, nothing essential either to the life or to the war-making of the community would be embarrassed. Our class is the weakest of all the classes in the state. We have no weapon with which to enforce our will’, Woolf, *Three Guineas*, p. 127.

¹⁵⁵ Parnell, *Eric Linklater*, p. 198.

appropriation. Aristophanes' handling of the sex-strike typifies what Storey and Allan deem Old Comedy's 'mix of low-level humor (bodily functions, slapstick, beating a joke to death) and a much more sophisticated comedy of ideas'.¹⁵⁶ The depth of the strike is apparent in how its division of men and women emphasises and heightens what Halliwell calls 'the age-old functional opposition of the sexes whereby the men go out to fight while the women stay at home and wait to see if their husbands and sons will return alive'.¹⁵⁷ The resultant dramatic conflict between males and females also symbolically represents the opposing elements of war and sex where the latter is aligned, describes Halliwell, 'with the life-giving, procreative, and celebratory associations of peace' and set against 'the negative, disruptive, and destructive effects of war'.¹⁵⁸ Linklater emphasises this dichotomy in his *Lysistrata*'s command to 'Tell your husbands and your sweethearts they must choose between love and war'.¹⁵⁹ The women in both texts are exercising self-control through their abstinence, as apparent from Aristophanes' character Myrrhine baulking at *Lysistrata*'s demands: 'walk through fire, or anything else you want – but renounce sex, never!', while Linklater's women, after being concerned about the guilt of denying their male partners, make a more bashful allusion to their own sexual needs with 'We're human too, aren't we?'.¹⁶⁰ Both *Lysistratas* overcome these initial objections by challenging their assembled female audiences to disprove men's chauvinistic underestimation of them with Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* referencing the depiction of women by the 'tragic poets' as a 'total lot of nymphos' and Linklater's successor describing how 'We have also been told that women are utterly selfish, and take no thought for the future' because 'women, like animals, are ruled only by their appetites'.¹⁶¹ The women's self-sacrificing celibacy is, therefore, a triumph of refinement because deferment of immediate gratification for long-term fulfilment is a quality held to elevate humans above animals. Since Linklater has repeatedly portrayed war as being contrary to civilisation, his female strikers are appropriately using sexual repression as a force for civilisation. In this way, Linklater's love-strike, taken from *Lysistrata*, creates a

¹⁵⁶ Storey and Allan, *Ancient Greek Drama*, p. 188.

¹⁵⁷ Stephen Halliwell, 'Introduction [to *Lysistrata*]', in Aristophanes, *Birds and Other Plays*, tr. & ed. by Stephen Halliwell, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 81-94, p. 82.

¹⁵⁸ Halliwell, 'Introduction [to *Lysistrata*]', p. 81.

¹⁵⁹ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 157.

¹⁶⁰ Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, tr. Sommerstein, I. 134, p. 146; Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 155.

¹⁶¹ Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, tr. Sommerstein, II. 138-139, p. 146; Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 157.

contest of will-power pitting women against men with added depth by also representing a battle between love and war with the future of humanity at stake.

The Aristophanes inspired love-strike also, however, creates problems with realism and plausibility which threaten to undermine *The Impregnable Women*. *Lysistrata*'s sex-strike is paradoxical as the women's sanction of refusal of sex is effective despite being directed at absent male lovers whose return is the strikers' object, but Aristophanes was excused by the conventions of Ancient Greek Old Comedy which was driven by, Beale describes, an 'internal, "comic logic"' allowing 'the improbable or impossible to happen'.¹⁶² Without this dispensation, the broader scope of Linklater's general love-strike and its targeting of men who are either on leave or non-combatants resolves *Lysistrata*'s central contradiction. The greater realism of *The Impregnable Women* compared to *Lysistrata* makes it harder to overlook the novel's equally unconvincing dismissal of the potential for rape. The original *Lysistrata*'s hopeful advice to the striking women is 'Just make yourself frigid' as 'No man is ever going to get satisfaction if the woman doesn't choose that he should', while Linklater's *Lysistrata*, more delicately but just as unrealistically, claims that 'Though by sheer physical strength you may be compelled to acquiesce' you 'can still maintain a most discouraging attitude, and pointedly show your displeasure' under 'which circumstances the incident is not likely to recur'.¹⁶³ Linklater uncomfortably elaborates on the impact of the love-strike with how 'Among the middle and upper classes, however, in all parts of the country, there was remarkably little violence', one reason for which 'very often was sheer lack of imagination' as 'Not for centuries had anyone in the politer circumstances of life done his wooing by the simple process of knocking a young woman on the head'.¹⁶⁴ In contrast, the 'superior virility' of the 'labouring classes' meant 'it was easy to distinguish a girl with whom some navy or plasterer, miner or private soldier was deeply in love; for she would have a black eye or suchlike mark to prove it' until 'working women discovered the flying column, and put a stop to corporal abuse' as 'a woman had only to scream once, fairly loudly, and all her neighbours came hot-foot to help her' meaning 'Black

¹⁶² Alan Beale, 'Fantasy and Plot in *Lysistrata*', in David Stuttard (ed.), *Looking at Lysistrata* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2010), pp. 61-69, p. 61.

¹⁶³ Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, tr. Sommerstein, ll. 163-166, pp. 146-147; Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, pp. 158-159.

¹⁶⁴ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, pp. 211-212.

eyes grew fewer and fewer, but more men were scratched and bitten and otherwise maltreated'.¹⁶⁵ Neither the less enlightened time in which he was writing nor his application of poetic justice excuse Linklater's facetiousness about domestic violence and snobbery in portraying it as a working-class phenomenon. *The Impregnable Women's* clumsiness with the issue demonstrates the drawbacks of transposing the implausible sex-strike to a more realistic and wider-ranging modern novel.

Linklater encounters another adaptive pitfall partly caused by his change of medium in how the texts portray male assaults on the female strongholds. In *Lysistrata*, the women strikers capture the Acropolis in Athens, which Linklater transfers to Edinburgh Castle, with both having strategic value as the former holds the Athenian treasury funding the war with Sparta and the latter housing the British Government after the bombing of London.¹⁶⁶ As a novel, *The Impregnable Women* suffers without the performance qualities Ancient Greek theatre offers *Lysistrata* where the attack on the Acropolis forms the play's *parados* or entrance of the chorus, which, Halliwell explains, 'typically initiates or prepares for a drama of confrontation'.¹⁶⁷ Aristophanes symbolically divides the chorus into men and women before depicting the attempt by a scratch force of old men to set the Acropolis on fire and smoke the occupiers out being thwarted by the women dowsing them and their torches with water. As the flames symbolise sexual ardour and the torches are phallic, their extinguishing also represents the women pouring cold water on the men's desires, thus equating the failure of the attack with an unsuccessful sexual assault. In this manner, *Lysistrata's* *parados* fulfils the convention of providing what Halliwell calls 'a grand expansion of the play's scenario through a rich array of poetry, dance and music'.¹⁶⁸ The novel instead offers a comic skirmish where an 'irregular company' of male soldiers carrying 'no weapons', led by Julian driven by 'righteous anger and a great desire to smack Rose Armour's pretty bottom' because she 'had deserted him' to join the rebellion, is defeated by *Lysistrata's* female band

¹⁶⁵ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, pp. 209-210.

¹⁶⁶ Linklater knew Edinburgh Castle well having been posted there in 'the Reserve Battalion of The Black Watch' after being discharged from military hospital following his wounding in WWI and found it 'a very uncomfortable lodging', Eric Linklater, *Edinburgh* (London: Newnes, 1960), p. 11.

¹⁶⁷ Stephen Halliwell, 'Introduction [to *Birds and Other Plays*]', in Aristophanes, *Birds and Other Plays*, tr. & ed. by Stephen Halliwell, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. ix-lxvi, p. xxxiii.

¹⁶⁸ Halliwell, 'Introduction [to *Birds and Other Plays*]', p. xxxiii.

armed with 'golf-clubs, hockey-sticks, or various domestic utensils'.¹⁶⁹ This portrayal of combat as an entertaining knockabout without any serious injuries is discordant after the earlier disturbing scenes of trench warfare and Eliot's horrific maiming. Since *The Impregnable Women's* attempted male storming of Edinburgh Castle is devoid of the 'performative synthesis' that Aristophanes' use of the chorus in the Greek dramatic context adds to *Lysistrata's* failed masculine assault on the Acropolis and its sexual imagery, Linklater's reworking pales in comparison.¹⁷⁰

The issues caused by *The Impregnable Women's* change of medium, greater realism and retreat from carnal lewdness combine to produce a muddled conclusion in comparison with the thematically fitting and dramatically precise ending to Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*. In the play, the women's sex-strike increases the Greek men's sexual frustration, grotesquely visible through obscene props, until it becomes unbearable and the Athenians and Spartans are forced to negotiate peace. *Lysistrata* and her celibate female strikers have triumphed because the power of sex has proved stronger than war and the play concludes with the healing of divisions between the Greeks and the sexes being demonstrated by the erotically charged reunification of the chorus into couples. Aristophanes has thereby provided an audience satisfying dramatic resolution consistent with *Lysistrata's* themes, own 'internal logic' and bawdy character.

The less overtly expressed sexual tension the novel has built with the love-strike reaches culmination in a literal battle of the sexes, compounded by pitting husband against wife, as Scrymgeour's besieging male soldiers take on *Lysistrata's* female garrison in a decisive confrontation at Edinburgh Castle. The resultant mock-heroic battle is unimaginatively a grander scale repeat of the earlier encounter at the castle which maintains a comic brio with again no fatal injuries after the Cabinet had 'categorically forbidden Scrymgeour to employ lethal arms' despite a high level of violence where 'soldiers and women fought hand to hand and face to face'.¹⁷¹ The brawling has a romantic undercurrent as 'sometimes when a man had grappled with an opposing girl his eye betrayed him and the sight of beauty' then 'spoiled him of

¹⁶⁹ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, pp. 179-180 & pp. 186-187.

¹⁷⁰ Halliwell, 'Introduction [to *Birds and Other Plays*]', p. xxxix.

¹⁷¹ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 297 & p. 310.

strength and of his purpose', or how an 'ungainly girl' called Hepburn whom 'no man had ever loved' gains retribution by striking down a 'handsome youth', but finds 'her triumph was half an exquisite remorse'.¹⁷² After the men's greater numbers eventually overcome the women's spirited resistance, Scrymgeour demands the sword-wielding Lysistrata's surrender, but she refuses since 'There can be no surrender' until 'Britain has proclaimed her peace with France'.¹⁷³ Echoing the Greek legend referenced in *Lysistrata* of Menelaus intending to kill Helen of Troy for her infidelity but dropping his sword in the face of her loveliness, the 'anger died in Scrymgeour's heart' when 'He saw the beauty of Lysistrata' and 'He knew that he loved her, and knew nothing more' because he has been disarmed by sublime amorous feeling.¹⁷⁴ This personifies the masculine force of war, represented by General Scrymgeour, being conquered by its feminine counterpart love, embodied by Lysistrata, and is reinforced by couples forming spontaneously of 'soldiers and rebels locked in each other's arms'.¹⁷⁵ Linklater thus achieves a stylish resolution of *The Impregnable Women's* themes that retains some of the spirit of Aristophanes' forerunner but with less vulgarity.

The elegance of the denouement between Lysistrata and Scrymgeour is, however, weakened by the novel's inconsistencies. The triumph of love and the restoration of harmony between the sexes at Edinburgh Castle is rendered irrelevant by the arrival of an army of Highland women whose relief of the siege and capture of the spectating Cabinet secures a female victory. Although the Highland women were 'marching against war because all their history was a tale of war, and war had brought no lasting good to their land', they have used warfare to achieve their objective.¹⁷⁶ This is part of a larger paradox where Lysistrata has only been able to end the destructive male violence of the war through the use of physical aggression by women, which is self-contradictory given her pacifistic posturing rooted in a claim of female moral superiority, especially in comparison with the passive and civil sanction of withholding sex employed by Aristophanes' women. The novel suffers

¹⁷² Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, pp. 308-311.

¹⁷³ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 320.

¹⁷⁴ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 320. Lampito says 'Didn't Menelaus drop his sword, I'm thinking, when he got but a wee glimpse of Helen's twa wee apples?', Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, tr. Sommerstein, l. 155, p. 146.

¹⁷⁵ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 322.

¹⁷⁶ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 327.

further by belatedly revealing that Lysistrata's entreaties 'with women in Paris, Berlin, Rome, Moscow and other capital cities' meant 'the strike had become international' and its widespread success ends the 'Last Great War'.¹⁷⁷ Compared to the prominent bilateralism of Aristophanes whose Lysistrata invited her Spartan enemies alongside her fellow Athenians to unite the Greek women against the Peloponnesian War in the play's opening scene, Linklater's tardy multilateralism seems an afterthought and further diminishes the significance of the twentieth-century Lysistrata's last stand at Edinburgh Castle. This means the conclusion exposes how *The Impregnable Women* lacks the thematic cohesion of *Lysistrata* and is aesthetically compromised.

The Impregnable Women demonstrates the literary potential of intertextuality by incorporating elements from *Lysistrata* which are fused with Linklater's original ideas and recast in a different medium, mode and context. Linklater's referencing of a revered classical work, recognised by Sommerstein as 'Aristophanes' great peace play', has added cultural gravitas and intellectual credence to his anti-war rhetoric, but this may be misappropriation because, cautions Revermann, 'pacifistic readings of the play are demonstrably wrong'.¹⁷⁸ When the original Lysistrata argues 'if all the women join together – not just us [the Athenians] but the Peloponnesians and Boeotians as well [their enemies] – then united we can save Greece', she displays a pan-Hellenistic viewpoint transcending the internecine Peloponnesian War and implies that Greek civilisation itself is at risk.¹⁷⁹ While this superficially appears to convey a general argument against war similar to Linklater's, the claim by Lysistrata that Greece is 'threatened by barbarian foes' reveals Aristophanes' probable subtext that only this specific inter-Greek conflict is wrong because it leaves them vulnerable to conquest by the rival Achaemenid Persian Empire, against which war would be

¹⁷⁷ Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 334 & p. 338.

¹⁷⁸ Sommerstein, 'Lysistrata the Warrior', in David Stuttard (ed.), *Looking at Lysistrata* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2010), p. 37; Martin Revermann, 'On Misunderstanding the *Lysistrata*, Productively', in David Stuttard (ed.), *Looking at Lysistrata* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2010), p. 71. Revermann also describes pacifism 'as not quite there' in the play and regards modern pacifist interpretations as 'productive misreading' of *Lysistrata*, Revermann, 'On Misunderstanding the *Lysistrata*, Productively', p. 71.

¹⁷⁹ Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, tr. Sommerstein, ll. 39-41, p. 142. The unorthodoxy of Lysistrata's pan-Hellenism prompts Robson to claim 'perhaps the single most remarkable feature of *Lysistrata* is the positive press it gives to the Spartans', James Robson, 'Friends and Foes: The People of *Lysistrata*', in David Stuttard (ed.), *Looking at Lysistrata* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2010), pp. 53-54.

necessary and legitimate.¹⁸⁰ An equivalent scenario more faithful to *Lysistrata* that *The Impregnable Women* might have imagined would be one in which Britain's war with France remains inherently wrong, but only because it is against what Linklater deemed 'the wrong enemy', for, as his reluctant soldiers note, 'Britain was in alliance with Germany, and Germany stood for tyranny'.¹⁸¹ By the novel's own judgement, therefore, it would seem justified for Britain and France to unite in a conflict against fascist Germany whose 'cause, whatever it might be, was certainly not the cause of peace and justice, of freedom and democracy'.¹⁸² The evidence provided by *The Impregnable Women*, however, suggests Linklater has been seduced by the seemingly righteous pacifist argument drawn from his misreading of *Lysistrata*.

A Flawed but Pivotal Novel in the Linklater Canon

The mixed results from *The Impregnable Women*'s appropriation of *Lysistrata* are evident from Sommerstein's description of 'in many respects a very skilful adaptation', but Murray dismissing Linklater's 'rewriting' with how the novel 'was, he admitted, a failure'.¹⁸³ In fact, Linklater wrote 'my novel was a failure because my cure for evil was less convincing than the evil I had evoked' and 'I reread the novel, and found in it both good intention and some good descriptive writing'.¹⁸⁴ This points to how the novel's strengths lie in its brilliantly realised descriptions of trench warfare, interesting exploration of gender dynamics with contemporary tensions becoming heightened in wartime, and strong anti-war arguments including both male and female perspectives. The style of warfare depicted, however, had been rendered archaic by technological advances and Linklater's flippancy towards gender violence and female politicians means *The Impregnable Women* cannot be regarded as a true feminist novel. Most damaging to the novel is the blunder of its Franco-British

¹⁸⁰ Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, tr. Sommerstein, l. 1134, p. 186. The interpretation that Lysistrata is referring to the Persians is made by Alan H. Sommerstein, 'Introduction and Notes', in Aristophanes, *Lysistrata and Other Plays*, tr. & ed. by Alan H. Sommerstein, (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 238, and Halliwell, 'Introduction [to *Lysistrata*]', p. 92.

¹⁸¹ Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 159; Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 298.

¹⁸² Linklater, *Impregnable Women*, p. 298.

¹⁸³ Sommerstein, 'Lysistrata Turns a Somersault', p. 28; Murray, *Scottish Novels of the Second World War*, p. 24.

¹⁸⁴ Linklater, *Fanfare*, pp. 159-160.

conflict, which not even Robbin's observation that 'Between 1939 and 1941 world politics evolved in a way that few observers could have predicted with confidence even in 1938' can adequately excuse.¹⁸⁵ A balanced appraisal must, therefore, conclude that *The Impregnable Women* has merits while being unarguably yet intriguingly flawed.

Demonstrating what Hart hailed as his 'extraordinary insight into literary decorum and his own relation to literary history', Linklater recognised the novel 'was ineffectual in manner' because 'The revolt of the women should have been described with the bawdy vigour of Aristophanes himself – only that sort of vigour could have made the comic scenes a match in violence for the scenes of war – but I had not, at that time, the heart to be bawdy'.¹⁸⁶ *The Impregnable Women* suffers, like *Juan in China*, from a sometimes clumsy juxtaposition of harrowing and humorous writing since the comic violence of the skirmishes at Edinburgh Castle are incongruous after the carnage depicted on the battlefield as, Hart summarises, 'trench realism gives over to mythopoeia, Dionysiac ritual, and farce'.¹⁸⁷ This originated from Linklater's 'mistake' of having 'looked at war with realistic eyes, and tried to defeat it by a farcical extension of war'.¹⁸⁸ He acknowledged how 'I should have opposed to war a down-to-earth, bawdy ridicule' letting 'bawdy nature be the conqueror, and peace the reward of those who preferred four bare legs in bed to the profitless cavorting of honour and probity and such-like tattered concepts', and that 'I should have purged myself of emotion, pushed realism out the window, and relied on rough and dirty mockery'.¹⁸⁹ In mitigation, Linklater was constricted by a 1930s British cultural climate that would have screamed obscenity at anything approaching the bawdiness of *Lysistrata*, with *The Impregnable Women*'s bowdlerised version still shocking Reid: 'the subject remains to me repellent; partly, no doubt, because I cannot help remembering the earlier work'.¹⁹⁰ There is another deeper issue at work where Linklater's 'Rabelaisian talent' has been drawn by the absurd comic potential of Aristophanes' sex-strike, but encounters what Hart terms a 'barrier' formed by 'the

¹⁸⁵ Robbins, Keith, *Appeasement* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 90.

¹⁸⁶ Hart, *The Scottish Novel*, p. 246; Linklater, *Man on My Back*, p. 333.

¹⁸⁷ Hart, *The Scottish Novel*, p. 256.

¹⁸⁸ Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 159.

¹⁸⁹ Linklater, *Fanfare*, pp. 159-160.

¹⁹⁰ Reid 'Fiction', p. 34.

realism that [Goodsir] Smith and MacDiarmid had sought to throw out'.¹⁹¹ The difficulty for Linklater is 'not so much language as mode' due to the inherent bias towards realism of the 'modern novel', which meant 'through his long career as a novelist Linklater struggled with this problem' of balancing the realistic and fantastical.¹⁹² The resultant unbalanced tonal character is additionally explained by Linklater describing how *The Impregnable Women* 'was made of the world's new anger and distress, but I packed it into the shape of a comedy because that was the shape I knew best'.¹⁹³

The shortcomings of *The Impregnable Women* were further summed up by Linklater's observation that 'In matter also it was unconvincing'.¹⁹⁴ Many of its issues derive from the confusion at its core due to Linklater being, Parnell describes, an 'Uncertain Pacifist', with a weaker conviction than Aldous Huxley or Vera Brittain at a time when the doctrine was being challenged by international events and Cecil Day-Lewis, for example, 'followed many anti-war activists in assuming paradoxically that peace might only be preserved by war'.¹⁹⁵ Linklater confessed to having 'subscribed to heresy popular at the time' that war 'could prove nothing and no good ever emerged from it', despite how 'History demonstrated a hundred times the untruth of this'.¹⁹⁶ This placed Linklater in an impossible position because his antipathy towards fascist Germany undermined the anti-war argument he was making, as demonstrated by a letter written soon after the novel's publication in which he claimed "For years past I have said – and believed – that Hitlerism is an evil thing, and for years past I have wished that this country would make a stand against it".¹⁹⁷ To deliver the novel's pacifist message, therefore, Linklater had to restrain his political views by concocting the Franco-British war to avoid the more plausible scenario of conflict against Nazi Germany which he would have struggled not to

¹⁹¹ Hart, *The Scottish Novel*, p. 245.

¹⁹² Hart, *The Scottish Novel*, p. 245.

¹⁹³ Linklater, *Man on My Back*, p. 332.

¹⁹⁴ Linklater, *Man on My Back*, p. 333.

¹⁹⁵ Parnell, *Eric Linklater*, p. 201; Richard Overy, 'Parting with Pacifism' in *History Today*, 59:8 (August 2009), pp. 23-29, p. 27. In his article Overy explains how there was a 'high-point of British pacifism in the early- and mid-1930s', but the Spanish Civil War and German expansionism meant that 'By the summer of 1939 the situation had changed sharply' as 'The main anti-war and pacifist organisations had lost ground in the intervening years' and 'Pacifism was increasingly viewed as a dirty word', Overy, 'Parting with Pacifism', p. 24.

¹⁹⁶ Linklater, *Man on My Back*, p. 332.

¹⁹⁷ Parnell, *Eric Linklater*, p. 216.

regard as just. He has also denied himself the opportunity to address what Barrett describes as the 'general argument about fascism and pacifism in the 1930s', which included the contention, Overy summarises, 'that civilization could only be saved by waging war' based on 'an evident logic at the time: war was the greatest and most intractable enemy of civilization; Hitler was the agent of war and barbarism, hence the destruction of Hitler and Hitlerism would save civilization'.¹⁹⁸ The paradox *The Impregnable Women* represents was acknowledged by Linklater's 'embarrassing discovery' that 'the novel was illogical' because 'Its theme was the waste and futility of war, but to end a war the rebel women declared another', meaning that 'Against all intention I had created a situation in which war became rightly purposive and serviceable to humanity'.¹⁹⁹

The Impregnable Women has a pivotal place in Linklater's literary catalogue since themes it introduces reappear in his later writing. Its veneration of the ordinary British fighting man became a constant of Linklater's WWII writing. The novel further developed the sense of war being a mixture of horror and farce that was essayed by *Juan in China* and would reach its ultimate, more balanced expression in *Private Angelo*. The exploration of the nature of courage through reluctant soldiers that began with Julian Brown in the trenches of the Franco-British war continued with *Private Angelo*'s eponymous Italian protagonist and *The Dark of Summer*'s Tony Chisholm. Linklater wrote another self-consciously Aristophanic comedy with the wartime play *Crisis in Heaven* (1944), in which Aristophanes is a character, that resolves many of his earlier novel's inconsistencies with its fantasy setting of Elysium and message that force is necessary and justified to counter aggression in order to establish and maintain peace. While he may have written it off in 1941 as 'not a good novel', we must now regard *The Impregnable Women* as a significant entry in his body of work as an ill-conceived yet necessary study that prepared the ground for Linklater's later literary triumphs.²⁰⁰

For the reason that *The Impregnable Women* now represents a period piece reflecting the doubts of the time in which it was written, even the novel's flaws are

¹⁹⁸ Barrett, 'Introduction', p. xl; Overy, *Morbid Age*, p. 349.

¹⁹⁹ Linklater, *Man on My Back*, p. 333.

²⁰⁰ Linklater, *Man on My Back*, p. 332.

compelling. It offers insights into an uncertain point in British history and Linklater's career when both struggled to find an appropriate response to a degenerating European political order. This makes the novel a cultural artefact of a morbid British climate characterised by, Overy describes, 'a complex and shifting relationship between ideas of peace, war and civilization which eventually locked both politicians and public into an existential dead end in which the civilized world was faced with the real prospect of a destructive war that no one wanted but everyone talked about'.²⁰¹ While Sommerstein claims 'It is hard to escape the suspicion that Linklater decided to write a pacifist book because pacifism, or at any rate fear and loathing of war, was popular and would sell well' despite how 'he would inevitably make it harder to win public support for the firm resistance to Nazi aggression which he himself believed to be necessary', this seems a cynical interpretation of Linklater's motives.²⁰² Driven by remembrance of WWI's horror, from which he bore a literal as well as figurative scar with the dent gouged in the back of his head by a German bullet, Linklater explores his fear of the approaching yet still indistinct war in a less doom-mongering fashion than many contemporaries and the novel reflects his lack of faith in a vacillating British government during a time of shifting international alliances, ideological extremism and grotesque dictators. The novel's commitment to pacifism marks a brave departure from the tendency of his preceding fiction to facetiousness, although Linklater has compromised on his previous rejection of propaganda by presenting such a blatantly anti-war message. *The Impregnable Women* thus represents a sincere but ultimately vain and misguided attempt to arrest the crises of the 1930s from coalescing into the 'Next Great War'.

²⁰¹ Overy, *Morbid Age*, p. 319.

²⁰² Sommerstein, 'Lysistrata Turns a Somersault', p. 35.

Chapter V

Judas:

Biblical Betrayal as an Analogy for Appeasement

The crises of the 1930s intensified in September 1938 when the ‘Next Great War’ was nearly sparked by Germany demanding the Sudetenland, borderlands inhabited predominantly by ethnic Germans, from Czechoslovakia. The difference in the position Linklater took with his 1939 novel *Judas* from its predecessor *The Impregnable Women* reflects how his ‘passionate protest against war’s recurrence turned a sudden somersault when Nazi Germany marched into Czecho-Slovakia and we in Britain – and they in France – made no effective protest’.¹ By regarding the major powers of Britain and France as the means of safeguarding European freedom, Linklater abandoned his earlier notions of ‘small nationalism’ and war being avoidable through international arbitration or popular activism. As ‘Germany gathered its damnable array against Czechoslovakia’, Linklater found the cynicism, pacifism and, especially, confusion that clouded *The Impregnable Women* was dispersed since ‘Blowing like a strong wind, anger cleared my mind’.² For Linklater, *Judas* represented ‘the other side of the medal to *The Impregnable Women*: there I showed the argument against war; here I show the consequences of peace-at-any-price’.³ The threat of an international war was averted by Britain and France disregarding Czechoslovakia’s sovereignty by permitting Germany to annex the Sudetenland in exchange for a commitment not to expand further into Czechoslovakian territory with the Munich Agreement of 30 September 1938. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain was popularly acclaimed by the British press and public alike for bowing to German aggression to prevent a wider war and ‘became, albeit briefly, the hero of Munich’, but ‘history has judged him to be the villain’ along with the soon discredited policy of appeasement.⁴ The driving force behind *Judas* was

¹ Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 160.

² Linklater, *Man on My Back*, p. 335.

³ Parnell, *Eric Linklater*, p. 217.

⁴ Overy with Wheatcroft, *The Road to War*, p. 119. A definition and historical summary of ‘appeasement’ is provided by Alan Farmer describing how ‘Most British politicians hoped that judicious policies of compromise, conciliation and concession would prevent conflict’ and ‘Such

Linklater's disgust at Chamberlain's appeasement of Nazi Germany, which meant '1938 was one of the shabbiest years of our history'.⁵ Since he 'was a writer and had no need to re-arm – my ink-pot was full', Linklater 'made war, in my own fashion, against the betrayal that had diminished us' with *Judas*.⁶ Although 'The novel was written with passion', Linklater stressed this was 'most sedulously controlled, in a bitterness of spirit that by discipline I translated into a treatment as nearly objective as I might contrive', which meant expressing his outrage allegorically having 'found my new story in a more infamous betrayal': that of Jesus by Judas Iscariot.⁷ Linklater's approach results in a nuanced psychological novel, centred on a Judas 'in whom there was much good, but also the elements of disintegration', making it more than a diatribe against appeasement.⁸

Judas differs from *The Impregnable Women* in style as well as import by abandoning the comic tone that had, excepting *White Maa's Saga* and *The Men of Ness*, characterised Linklater's interwar novels. This shift was explained by Linklater reflecting how 'In my youth, when anger and grief had been partners with a certain exuberance, I had taken a romantic view of the world, but when my life ran into broader waters, much of the traffic that I saw was the stuff for comedy' since 'in the years between the two German wars, the matter of comedy lay upon the world as thickly as forest leaves after a storm'.⁹ With Hitler threatening Europe, Linklater's 'younger and less comfortable perception was beginning to return' because 'when evil menaced the very existence of good, a man must put away the richness of comedy, the luxury of doubt, and stand with the angels' as 'Through stress and battle

policies were later called appeasement', although 'The meaning of the word has been so stretched and distorted since 1939 that some historians believe the word should no longer be used'. The term 'appeasement' may 'be used to cover almost every manifestation of British diplomacy between the two world wars', but 'can be used more specifically to describe Chamberlain's policies to Germany in 1937 and 1938'. While 'Since the Second World War appeasement has tended to have a derogatory meaning, and the word is often used to mean a craven surrender to force', it was the case that 'for most of the inter-war years, appeasement was seen as a positive concept: the continuation of a long British diplomatic tradition of trying to settle disputes peacefully'. This meant 'Those who opposed appeasement were seen as cranks or war-mongers' and 'Only the failure of Neville Chamberlain's policies in 1938-1939 (when he actually abandoned appeasement!) turned appeasement into a pejorative term', Farmer, *Britain: Foreign and Imperial Affairs 1919-39*, p. 18.

⁵ Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 160.

⁶ Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 160.

⁷ Eric Linklater, 'Letter to *The Spectator*', in *The Spectator*, 14 April 1939, p. 637; Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 160. Linklater was writing to *The Spectator* to redress comments made by Forrest Reid in his review of *Judas* published in the previous week's issue.

⁸ Linklater, 'Letter to *The Spectator*'.

⁹ Linklater, *Man on My Back*, p. 333.

we must pursue a vision of justice, liberty, and peace'.¹⁰ The cultural climate has also changed since 'such an opinion, in the view of the comic years, would have been romantic and therefore ridiculous', but 'now the romantic view wore strangely a utilitarian look'.¹¹ This conviction led to Linklater embracing 'the possibility of dying for one's faith' by rejoining 'the Territorial Army in a unit that was being raised in Orkney' and writing *Judas*.¹² Serious times called for equally serious literature and *Judas* fitted the bill as Linklater's most portentous novel to date.

By turning to Christian heritage for analogy, *Judas* parallels Naomi Mitchison's *The Blood of the Martyrs* also from 1939, which uses Roman oppression of early Christians as, Burgess explains, 'an allegory of contemporary persecutions in Europe'.¹³ Although loosely based mainly on the Gospels of Matthew and John, *Judas* is neither an attempt at historical accuracy nor a religious discourse.¹⁴ Before writing *Judas*, Linklater read Conrad Noel's *Life of Jesus*, which 'stresses the socio-political side of the state-of-affairs', and James Moffatt's translation of the *New Testament*, with the effect that 'the gospels in modern English took on a shattering reality'.¹⁵ Their influence meant 'when the world was again presented with an outstanding bit of treachery, my thoughts turned naturally to Judas' and the resulting novel 'told the story in modern terms, as if the betrayal of Jesus were a contemporary tragedy' with Linklater 'aware that no attempt to heighten or decorate it could be tolerated'.¹⁶ Linklater describes being 'brought up by parents respectful of Christian values' and 'by accident of birth' was one 'of the oppressed sect called Scottish Episcopalians', with his son Andro observing how 'he had, if not a Christian's faith, a fellow-author's warm regard for the Christians' God'.¹⁷ Although Linklater stressed how 'In my presentation of Jesus there is nothing to offend the

¹⁰ Linklater, *Man on My Back*, pp. 333-334.

¹¹ Linklater, *Man on My Back*, p. 334.

¹² Linklater, *Man on My Back*, p. 335.

¹³ Moira Burgess, 'Introduction', in Naomi Mitchison, *Behold Your King* (Glasgow: Kennedy & Boyd, 2009), pp. i-viii, p. i. *Judas* prefigures Mitchison's exploration of the last days of Jesus in *Behold Your King* (1957).

¹⁴ Key similarities between the Gospel according to Matthew and the novel include Judas identifying Jesus by kissing him, returning the pieces of silver, and committing suicide by hanging after repenting. *Judas* follows the Gospel according to John in Mary Magdalene anointing Jesus' feet with perfume which incenses Judas, having Peter the Apostle injuring the ear of Malchus during the arrest of Jesus and Jesus being first brought to Annas.

¹⁵ Parnell, *Eric Linklater*, p. 217.

¹⁶ Parnell, *Eric Linklater*, p. 217; Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 161.

¹⁷ Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 141; Andro Linklater, 'Introduction', p. vii.

pious nor distress the orthodox' since 'I had no need to simulate reverence', the divinity of Jesus in *Judas* is left ambiguous.¹⁸ There are references to Jesus curing 'the loathsome ailments of humble people', but these are counter-balanced by Judas questioning 'If it was true, as he had said, that control of all things had been given to him by God', and the novel concludes with the faith of Judas' fictional sister Tamar in the impending resurrection of Jesus rather than its depiction.¹⁹ By being non-committal, Linklater sidesteps both accusations of blasphemy and alienating secular readers. This leaves the impression that Linklater was chiefly drawn to the story of Judas for its literary potential, with the Christian connotations increasing its suitability as an allegory for appeasement.

The opening scene of the novel establishes a key theme as Judas, separated from the other apostles, is 'imprisoned' in the 'stinking reckless mob' of a crowd following Jesus and becomes terrified by the bloody war he foresees.²⁰ The crowd's 'danger' arises from Jesus having 'let himself be proclaimed the Son of David when he was going to Jerusalem, where every priest and servant of the Temple', who represent Jewish authority, 'would see in such a claim the challenge it was, see in it rebellion, and meet it with war'.²¹ The incendiary cries from the crowd that 'they were going to fight for the Son of David and the triumph of his Kingdom', mean 'In the mind of Judas a picture spread itself of frantic men, hemmed in a narrow street' before 'clubs broke matted heads'.²² In his imagination, Judas 'could smell the sweet hot stench of the slaughterhouse' as 'The cries of wrath turned to a shrill moan of fear, the crowd broke and ran, and there at the end of the street, hedge of steel, was the steel discipline of Rome' leaving them trapped between 'A Jewish enemy stabbing them in the back, and the way closed by a Roman cohort'.²³ This carnage Judas anticipates Jesus inspiring in the form of Jewish civil war and conflict with the occupying Romans leaves him 'Light-headed with fear' and becomes a morbid obsession that proves his undoing.²⁴ The allegorical context means Judas' neurosis

¹⁸ Linklater, 'Letter to *The Spectator*'.

¹⁹ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 66.

²⁰ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 15.

²¹ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 10.

²² Linklater, *Judas*, p. 11.

²³ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 11.

²⁴ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 11.

embodies the widespread dread in the 1930s of the mass bloodshed another international war would bring.

A major facet of Judas' characterisation is his inner conflict. Despite the violence he fears Jesus sparking, Judas still thinks 'He is a man of peace'.²⁵ He struggles to reconcile believing 'There was no hope save in Jesus and his power of bringing to all mankind a light that should illumine their lives with reason and bring forth peace', while also questioning 'If Jesus so loves the world, why does he want to turn it upside down and ruin the livelihood of thousands of people for the very dubious benefit of paupers, prostitutes, and Jewish Nationalists?'.²⁶ As 'the only wealthy one of the Twelve [apostles]', Judas had sometimes 'been ashamed of the gulf that riches made between him and most of his companions' and 'had belittled his possessions', but also 'adores luxury', angrily complaining Jesus has 'got no right to say the poor are worth more than the rich' because 'They're not! They're foul and dirty, and Jesus is ashamed of them, and that's why he's going to rob the rich, to cover their scabs and scars and filthy nakedness with our coats'.²⁷ This creates an internal struggle for Judas and it 'was only by reason of his overwhelming love that he had been able to forgive Jesus, again and again, for his carelessness about money and personal property'.²⁸ Judas, therefore, is battling to suppress his conservative instinct to protect his personal comfort and wealth which is threatened by Jesus' radicalism. The intended resonance of Judas in the contemporary climate of appeasement is demonstrated by Linklater's explanation of how 'Judas, in my mind's discovery, was poisoned by that loving regard for security, for property, which in recent years has again unmanned so many'.²⁹

The psychological complexity of Judas differentiates him from the picaro protagonists, such as Juan or Henry Tippus from *The Sailor's Holiday* (1937), of Linklater's preceding comic novels. Judas' predicament over Jesus in the novel leaves him vulnerable to manipulation from the establishment represented by his wealthy and well-connected family. His mother, Cyborea, rebukes Judas for how

²⁵ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 18.

²⁶ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 65 & p. 82.

²⁷ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 15, p. 26 & p. 82.

²⁸ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 16.

²⁹ Linklater, 'Letter to *The Spectator*'.

'You and your Nazarene' have stoked 'open rebellion'.³⁰ This alarms Judas, 'For heaven's sake don't talk about war!' since 'I can't bear to think of it', but Cyborea tells him 'you've done as much as anyone to make the danger of it real' and 'You've got yourself to blame', reinforcing Judas' fear and guilt about an impending bloodbath.³¹ Blending historical New Testament figures and organisations with Linklater's inventions, Judas' fictitious uncle, Phaniel, is acting as an advisor to the Sanhedrin, the 'Jewish supreme council and court of justice' collaborating with the Romans, at the behest of the former high-priest Annas whom the novel depicts leading the persecution of Jesus.³² Phaniel tells Judas that an 'influential body of opinion in the Sanhedrin is in favour of immediately arresting' Jesus and 'charging him with high treason', but proposes 'that public safety could best be secured, and the person of Jesus himself respected, by taking him into protective custody' for 'his own benefit, as well as the protection of other people's lives and property'.³³ The objection Judas makes that 'the people wouldn't let you arrest him' and 'They would riot, there would be civil war at once!' reveals how Phaniel plans to use him since 'We have foreseen that danger, and frankly I hope that you will help us to avert it', with Phaniel slyly requesting Judas 'persuade' Jesus 'that it would be in his own interest' were he 'to submit to a period of detention; or, failing that, if you could arrange that he should be alone with you, in some unfrequented place'.³⁴ Realising he is being asked 'to commit the most damnable treachery', Judas refuses to co-operate.³⁵ He has been put, however, in the impossible position of being torn between family allegiance entwined with his 'duty to the government' and personal fidelity to Jesus.³⁶ This also represents a more profound question of loyalty in which Judas' ties as a Sadducee to the Jewish establishment and religious conservatism are challenged by his attraction

³⁰ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 18.

³¹ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 20.

³² E.A. Livingstone, (ed.), 'Sanhedrin', in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, (2nd Revised Edition), Oxford Reference Online, www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198614425.001.0001/acref-9780198614425-e-5135?rskey=9IEW77 [accessed 20 July 2022].

Annas is an extra-biblically sourced historical figure. Although the Gospel of John 18:12-14 claims Jesus was first taken to Annas before being sent to his son-in-law Caiaphas, the high-priest, Linklater has given Annas a more prominent role than in the gospels.

³³ Linklater, *Judas*, pp. 50-51.

³⁴ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 51.

³⁵ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 52.

³⁶ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 203.

to the spiritually and politically revolutionary figure of Jesus.³⁷ In this way, what started as an internal conflict for Judas over Jesus becomes externalised and brought to crisis by Phanael forcing him, as the Munich Agreement did Linklater, to choose his side.

The novel departs furthest from the appeasement analogy at its core in the internal machinations that compel Judas to betray Jesus. The spur to his fatal resolution is Mary Magdalene having used ‘a jar of perfume’ of ‘the most expensive sort’ to anoint Jesus on ‘his forehead and his feet’.³⁸ This ‘piece of vulgar ostentation’ disgusted the parsimonious Judas who told her ‘she ought to be ashamed of herself because ‘money wasn’t meant to be wasted’, but Jesus chastised him with ‘Let her alone’.³⁹ This incenses Judas since ‘It was so monstrous, so imbecile and wicked a thing to do’ and, perhaps especially, because ‘he [Jesus] defended her’, with this relatively innocuous incident being the catalyst for Judas making, albeit ‘only to himself’, the ‘admission that now he hated Jesus’ for having ‘betrayed a spiritual love, the love of Judas his Disciple, for the licence of a harlot’.⁴⁰ Attempting ‘to assure himself that he was acting sensibly’, Judas ‘reviewed the sequence of events, and everything he remembered served to fortify his intention’ since ‘It no longer perplexed him that Jesus should have let himself be called the Son of David, or that he had overturned the tables of the money-changers in the Temple’, but now ‘It merely angered him’.⁴¹ He determines that ‘Such a man was clearly his enemy, and all he did was hostile to common sense and public safety’, yet reveals his morbid disgust and jealousy of Mary by adding ‘To common decency as well as common

³⁷ The Sadducees were a ‘Jewish politico-religious sect’ who ‘rejected belief in the resurrection of the body and the existence of angels and spirits’. They ‘included men of high standing’ with ‘political influence’, which fits with the character of Phanael, as does how ‘at the time of Christ they were important in Jerusalem’ and ‘appear to have taken a leading part against Christ’, E.A. Livingstone, (ed.), ‘Sadducees’, in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, (2nd Revised Edition), Oxford Reference Online, www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198614425.001.0001/acref-9780198614425-e-5081 [accessed 29 August 2021].

³⁸ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 113.

³⁹ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 114. The Gospels according to Matthew 26:6-13 and Mark 14:3-9 both mention the incident of a woman applying perfume to Jesus being questioned by disciples but neither identify Mary Magdalene nor single out Judas. Linklater’s version is based on The Gospel according to John 12:3-8 where Mary Magdalene is the woman and Judas objects to her actions before being rebuked by Jesus.

⁴⁰ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 113 & pp. 115-116.

⁴¹ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 116.

sense, when he showed his liking for a dishevelled harlot in the odour of her trade'.⁴² The impassioned, '*He is my enemy and I hate him*', animosity of Judas towards Jesus has been 'precipitated by a sudden hatred out of a ferment of emotions' with the result that 'The need to betray him had become an obsession'.⁴³ Judas' vendetta thus appears to be a form of revenge, with all the fervour of a scorned lover, for what he perceives as his own betrayal by Jesus.

Despite the extra depth Linklater gives Judas, reviewer Walter Murdoch recognised in 1939 how 'No reader can miss the meaning; that the very same arguments used by Judas to justify his betrayal of Christ were used by Mr Chamberlain to justify his betrayal of Czechoslovakia; in both cases, the plausible excuse for an infamous crime was that it saved the world from war'.⁴⁴ A scathing satirical portrait of Chamberlain is created by Judas revering himself hubristically as 'the saviour of the people', and justifying his unethical behaviour on the basis that 'no doctrine was worth the shedding of their blood'.⁴⁵ He vainly fantasises about how the people 'would say: Like Joshua who bade the day stand still, he held forth his hand and commanded that war should not come upon us' and 'They would turn to bless him, the multitude crying with one voice, Our Saviour!' when 'his triumph was achieved and recognition came to him for his saving of the community, for unarming war'.⁴⁶ Such popular acclaim was triumphantly received by Chamberlain after signing the Munich Agreement when King George VI invited him onto the balcony at Buckingham Palace, describes Bouverie, 'to acknowledge the applause of a vast crowd' where he 'basked in the adulation, alone, for a full two minutes'.⁴⁷ Chamberlain later boasted to another adoring crowd that 'there has come back from Germany to Downing Street peace with honour' and 'I believe it is peace for our time', prompting *The Times* to gush how 'No conqueror returning from a victory on the battlefield has come home adorned with nobler laurels'.⁴⁸ Linklater is thus

⁴² Linklater, *Judas*, p. 117.

⁴³ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 115 & pp. 130-131.

⁴⁴ Walter Murdoch, 'Judas, The Betrayer – Four Recent Portraits', in *The Courier-Mail* (Brisbane, Australia), 15 July 1939, p. 7.

⁴⁵ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 133.

⁴⁶ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 145.

⁴⁷ Bouverie, *Appeasing Hitler*, p. 288.

⁴⁸ Bouverie, *Appeasing Hitler*, p. 289; *The Times*, 'On This Day: The Munich Agreement signals a new dawn', 1 October 2008, www.thetimes.co.uk/article/on-this-day-the-munich-agreement-signals-a-new-dawn-tn36w6q96ht [accessed 23 August 2021].

lampooning the vainglorious Chamberlain and using the dramatic irony of the reader recognising Judas as a byword for treachery to indict him and British appeasement for the same offence.

The discrepancy between the nobility of what Judas thought he was accomplishing and its squalid reality becomes clear. His paranoia and petulant egotism mean as the arrest of Jesus is made 'suspicion broke raw in Judas' mind' that the authorities 'were trying to keep him out of the picture' and 'were still hoping to steal the credit for what he had done', so, desperate for the limelight, 'With a hoarse cry, "Master, Master!"', Judas 'pushed aside the nearest soldier, and in the midst of the lanterns and the ring of armed men, he threw his arms round Jesus' neck, and kissed him'.⁴⁹ Although Jesus recognises the act's significance by asking 'Are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?', when told from Judas' perspective in the manner of one of Linklater's characteristic deflations, more usually comic, of his protagonists' inflated sense of themselves, the great symbolic gesture of treachery traditionally represented by the kiss becomes merely pathetic attention-seeking.⁵⁰ Afterwards, seeking 'credit for what he had done' and 'hungrier than ever for his reward', Judas is infuriated by Annas only paying him in coins when, full of self-importance, he feels 'There isn't money enough in the world to pay for what I've done' because 'I saved the people, saved you all' when 'I put out my hand, and war stood still'.⁵¹ Annas then casts off Judas by telling him 'You were a useful informer' and 'you have been paid for your trouble', but 'I have no further interest in you'.⁵² For Judas, the 'intolerable humiliation' he receives from 'the voice of Annas, killing his claims and cropping his pretensions' comes from thinking he had 'put himself and his knowledge at the service of authority, in the employment of benignant law' to accomplish the heroic deed of preventing war, when he was really being used by the officials as a tawdry, back-stabbing informer to remove, in an underhand manner, an obstacle to their authority.⁵³ In the reading of the novel as an appeasement allegory,

⁴⁹ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 159.

⁵⁰ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 159. This is drawn from Luke's Gospel where Jesus asks "'betraying the Son of man with a kiss?'", James Moffatt, (trs.), 'The Gospel according to S. Luke [22:48-49]', in James Moffatt, (trs.), *The New Testament: A New Translation* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1939), pp. 82-126, p. 122.

⁵¹ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 164-166.

⁵² Linklater, *Judas*, p. 166.

⁵³ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 178 & p. 132.

the way Judas' fear of war and self-aggrandising desire to be a great peace-maker have allowed Annas to use him also castigates Chamberlain for being manipulated by Hitler in the same way.

Linklater takes his Judas beyond the comparison with Neville Chamberlain by developing him into a tragic anti-hero whereas, Calder notes, the 'meanness' in Chamberlain 'denies him any claim to the dignity of tragedy'.⁵⁴ Important to Judas' portrayal following the conventions of tragedy is his journey to awareness of his own culpability. Hearing of the impending crucifixion of Jesus, Judas 'struggled to control himself, for suddenly he realized there was something he must do', which is 'Not the rescue of Jesus' since 'It was too late for that, and he dared not face an angry crowd', but 'something for his own sake'.⁵⁵ Judas feels he 'must get rid of' the 'thirty pieces of silver' because 'They were evidence against him' and 'If Jesus was crucified, then this money made him an accessory to the crime', meaning he 'would be guilty of murder, and that must not be'.⁵⁶ As the coins thus represent Judas' guilt, he imagines wishfully that 'if he returned the money, he would be washing his hands of the whole affair' because 'no tie would remain between him and the Sanhedrin'.⁵⁷ He reverts to self-aggrandisement by imagining an impressive gesture where 'It would show Annas what he thought of him, to throw the money in his face', but can only find an 'elderly short-sighted man' and is pathetically reduced to throwing 'the money on the floor' and declaring 'You can't touch me after this, I'm free, I had nothing to do with it'.⁵⁸ Afterwards, Judas experiences a 'feeling of relief, of freedom regained by giving back the price of betrayal' since he had started to experience qualms about his part in Jesus' downfall, but, being entirely self-centred, is attempting to dispose of any accountability for his treachery.⁵⁹

Judas, however, cannot escape responsibility for his crime. Tamar functions as the voice of conscience by telling him 'You loved Jesus, and yet you betrayed him'.⁶⁰ Insisting 'my hands are clean!', Judas attempts to justify himself by claiming 'I

⁵⁴ Calder, *The People's War*, p. 23.

⁵⁵ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 182.

⁵⁶ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 183.

⁵⁷ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 183.

⁵⁸ Linklater, *Judas*, pp. 183-185.

⁵⁹ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 189.

⁶⁰ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 192.

did what I did because I had to. Not for money' after Jesus 'began to change' since 'he was going to set a man against his father, and make his household his enemies' which 'was not peace, but war and death' and 'how could I love death and the teaching of death?'⁶¹ He perceives his actions being vindicated because 'I gave him up, though I loved him, and I saved the life of all the people of the city', but this is refuted by Tamar telling him it was 'to save your own life, not the life of the people'.⁶² Although Judas tries to resist: 'That's not true...', his 'mind played him false, and he did not know whether it was true or not' as 'He felt himself shaken by conflict'.⁶³ For Tamar, Judas acted out of cowardice 'because you were afraid for your own life, afraid of what was going to happen to your property'.⁶⁴ By telling Judas 'on your own admission, he was the only one who ever gave you peace of heart, and peace of heart is the only peace there is', but 'now you have betrayed him, and he is dead, and you have nothing left. You fool. You fool!', Tamar lays bare Judas' tragic error.⁶⁵

The final stage in the tragic downfall of Judas is the full realisation of his guilt and the enormity of his treachery. Left 'alone again', Judas reaches the epiphany that 'Tamar had spoken truth - not all the truth, before God not all - but a damnable phrase of it'.⁶⁶ Judas understands too late how 'He had been thinking of himself when he did it, his safety and his wealth, because he was a coward and always had been'.⁶⁷ This self-lacerating analysis continues with how 'He had pledged himself to Jesus, who was right and the source of right, and Jesus he had betrayed for a shadow that was the shadow of wrong'.⁶⁸ His personality is obliterated as 'Now there was nothing in him but this wrong', which also means 'the outer world was nothing but a fear with reaching hands, because he had played traitor to the saviour of the world'.⁶⁹ Trapped by 'Fear from without and fear within, and nothing between but the dead shell of his life', the hopeless and irredeemable Judas has 'one refuge left'.⁷⁰ In elegantly understated writing Linklater describes Judas hanging himself:

⁶¹ Linklater, *Judas*, pp. 193-194.

⁶² Linklater, *Judas*, pp. 194-195.

⁶³ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 195.

⁶⁴ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 195.

⁶⁵ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 195.

⁶⁶ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 196.

⁶⁷ Linklater, *Judas*, pp. 196-197.

⁶⁸ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 197.

⁶⁹ Linklater, *Judas*, pp. 197-198.

⁷⁰ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 198.

The bough bent and resurged as the weight fell on it. The whole tree was shaken, and all its branches lashed the sky as though a gale was blowing. Like coloured snow a shower of scattered blossom fell slowly to the ground.⁷¹

He was undone because he lacked courage in his convictions since ‘Judas believed, and then he betrayed Jesus and hanged himself’, whereas for Tamar: ‘Belief isn’t good enough for me. I know!’.⁷² This was Judas’ tragic flaw with Linklater summarising how ‘loss of faith is the catastrophe of which his bewildered mind is the consequence, his death the acknowledgement’.⁷³ As Jesus is the embodiment of all that is righteous and holy to a predominantly Christian readership, Linklater uses the example of Judas to illustrate that moral courage is vital and failing to follow the ethically correct course of action due to fear of personal or collateral damage facilitates a greater evil.

As well as the novel’s message resonating on a general level, Linklater was attacking the Munich Agreement, with Marjorie Linklater confirming *Judas* was written ‘in a frenzy of fury over Neville Chamberlain’s betrayal of Czechoslovakia’.⁷⁴ This agenda can be discerned in how a ‘limping man’ defends his inaction as Jesus was crucified on the basis of ‘What could we have done against a bloody army?’ because ‘We weren’t prepared’, which echoes one of the British arguments against war during the Munich Crisis.⁷⁵ Linklater uses the man’s wife to rebuke such a view with ‘And you never will be prepared’ until ‘you learn to think for yourself, and know the difference between good and bad’ to be able to ‘make up your mind it’s worth fighting for’.⁷⁶ Just as Judas was ‘deceived by Phaniel’ and his false assurance that ‘if he [Jesus] could be taken quietly and put in prison, no harm would come to him, and there would be no fear of war’, so was Chamberlain subsequently proved to have mistakenly accepted Hitler’s unreliable promise of only annexing the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia.⁷⁷ Winston Churchill, a leading contemporary

⁷¹ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 198.

⁷² Linklater, *Judas*, p. 206.

⁷³ Linklater, ‘Letter to *The Spectator*’.

⁷⁴ Parnell, *Eric Linklater*, p. 218.

⁷⁵ Linklater, *Judas*, pp. 210-211.

⁷⁶ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 211.

⁷⁷ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 191.

opponent of appeasement, later opined how 'Appeasement in itself may be good or bad according to the circumstances' since 'Appeasement from strength is magnanimous and noble, and might be the surest and perhaps the only path to world peace', but 'Appeasement from weakness and fear is alike futile and fatal'.⁷⁸ For Linklater, Judas' appeasement of the Sanhedrin and Romans by handing them Jesus and Britain's appeasement of Nazi Germany through yielding Czechoslovakian territory fall into the latter category as they both stem from cowardice and are self-defeating.

When he began writing *Judas* as a response to the Munich Agreement of September 1938, Linklater was outspoken in condemning appeasement when mainstream British political and public opinion mostly supported Chamberlain. The novel's publication was ill-timed, however, since 'Appeasement was becoming a dirty word' with the British government's commitment having faded and the UK public growing increasingly pro-war even before the wider German seizure of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, which, Parnell observes, was 'ironically just as *Judas* was published'.⁷⁹ Since, Bouverie summarises, the 'consensus that appeasement was now dead was instantaneous' after Hitler's 'flagrant violation of the Munich Agreement', *Judas* no longer had current relevance because Linklater was addressing a discredited British political position that Chamberlain himself had abandoned and was regarded as a national embarrassment.⁸⁰ This may help to explain why *Judas* made 'practically no impact in Britain' to Linklater's 'astonishment', receiving a favourable review in *Punch*, but a poor one, 'told with such detachment as to make it read more like a lecture to a psychological society than a piece of creative artistic work', in the *Times Literary Supplement*, and a damning assessment, 'vulgar little novel', from *The Spectator*.⁸¹ Disappointing sales led Linklater to quip 'it appears that nobody except two children and a governess

⁷⁸ Winston Churchill, 'Speech in the House of Commons on 14 December 1950', quoted in Martin Gilbert, *The Roots of Appeasement* (Rosetta Books, 2015).

⁷⁹ Overy with Wheatcroft, *The Road to War*, p. 128; Parnell, *Eric Linklater*, p. 220. Richard Overy describes how Germany's 'seizure of the Czech state accelerated the change but did not cause it directly', with the *Kristallnacht* attacks on German Jews and their property in 9-10 November 1938 being another significant catalyst for anti-German sentiment in Britain, Overy with Wheatcroft, *The Road to War*, p. 127.

⁸⁰ Bouverie, *Appeasing Hitler*, p. 324.

⁸¹ Parnell, *Eric Linklater*, p. 218; Leonora Eyles, 'Historical Stories', *Times Literary Supplement*, 1939 (1 April 1939), p. 191; Forrest Reid, 'Fiction', *The Spectator*, 7 April 1939, p. 606; Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 160.

have bought *Judas*', although a 1946 French translation published in Belgium achieved '*succès d'estime*' (critical acclaim) and 'sold several thousand copies'.⁸² When viewed today, *Judas* provides an authentic and eloquent insight into contemporary criticism of appeasement and the Munich Agreement which, Linklater later observed, 'reflected an indignation that was wide-spread though not general'.⁸³

Writing in 1970, Linklater remained convinced of the righteousness of the position he adopted with *Judas*:

War became doorstep nearer, and now its imminent menace was manifestly our fault because we had failed in honesty and honour. There is little doubt, now, that if we and France had made common cause with Czecho-Slovakia, and with instant indignation – despite our lack of anti-aircraft guns – had forbidden aggression, then Germany's truculence would have shrivelled and retreated. But we were over-cautious, we thought caution wise, and congratulated ourselves on a destructive prudence.⁸⁴

Although Linklater's claim that France and Britain could have deterred Hitler by confronting him in 1938 is contentious, the verdict of posterity is kinder on *Judas* than *Juan in China* or *The Impregnable Women* since the appeasement of Nazi Germany is generally regarded as a shameful historical episode matching the 'heritage of sorrow and disgrace' bequeathed by *Judas*.⁸⁵

While *Judas* engages with the specific episode of the Munich Agreement in the wider period of the crises of the 1930s, its recognition by Hart as 'a book of

⁸² Parnell, *Eric Linklater*, p. 220; Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 160.

⁸³ Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 160.

⁸⁴ Linklater, *Fanfare*, p. 160.

⁸⁵ Linklater, *Judas*, p. 203. Overy and Wheatcroft describe how 'the traditional view' of appeasement has 'two aspects: the popular and the scholarly'. The 'popular view is a morality tale of Good and Evil' where 'One supremely evil madman, Adolf Hitler, captured the German nation and drove the world remorselessly towards war' while 'Only two nations, France and Britain, stood against him, and then only after a shameful period of pandering to the dictator'. This meant that their 'shame – appeasement – was redeemed by the two nations fighting in defence of freedom'. The 'scholarly version tells roughly the same tale, less highly coloured, but with the same basic assumptions' since 'It accepts that cowardice and moral weakness among the Western powers allowed Nazi power to flourish, and it condemns the politicians of the West as "appeasers", a word which they themselves chose to describe their activity', Overy with Wheatcroft, *The Road to War*, pp. xv-xvi.

stunning economy and tact' bears testament to Linklater's blossoming skill as a writer in successfully using the biblical allegory to lend a subtlety, lacking in *The Impregnable Women*, to his anti-appeasement argument.⁸⁶ This also allows the novel to stand on its own as a masterful character study with sophistication in the complex motives, not all ignoble, of its infamous protagonist for whom it even finds a measure of sympathy. Following a series of comedies, the ever-insightful Linklater explains how *Judas* is a tragedy because 'That love of what is good, and perception of the truth, should by human fears and weakness be defeated, is to any standard of criticism a tragic theme'.⁸⁷ As a result, *Judas* is a more consistent and artistically complete work than *Juan in China* and *The Impregnable Women*, with a greater earnestness as Linklater rises to the gravitas of his subject at an ominous point in history on the brink of WWII.

⁸⁶ Hart, *The Scottish Novel*, p. 256.

⁸⁷ Linklater, 'Letter to *The Spectator*'.

Conclusion:

Eric Linklater's Responses to the Crises of the 1930s

This thesis has established how much of Eric Linklater's major writing of the period either directly addresses or is influenced by the crises of the 1930s that cast a dark shadow over the decade before finally erupting into the Second World War. Linklater 'realised that war was now inevitable, and dismay grew more embracing' when news reached him on 22 August 1939 of the Molotov-Ribbentrop non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union.¹ The following day, as a Territorial Army officer in Orkney, he received by telephone 'the third and last of the code words, ordering the mobilisation of Coast Defence units' and eight hours later 'reported that mobilisation was complete, our war stations manned'.² As a soldier in uniform, Linklater 'had indeed got rid of my ego – if only for a measured time – and reduced myself to a very little *i*' since he 'had become nearly anonymous, one of many, bound by oath and subject to discipline'.³ In taking a personal stand against Hitler's Germany by joining the army after the Munich Crisis and writing *Judas*, Linklater was ahead of prevailing British political and public opinion which had now caught up with him as Britain and France honoured their commitment to support Poland against German aggression. Since 'Now was cynicism made bankrupt', Linklater displays an earnest commitment to the cause by describing how 'on the cliff where the guns pointed against Germany, I stood with the angels'.⁴ Yet, for Linklater, 'warmer company than angels were my fellow Orkneymen, awkward as yet in their unfamiliar khaki, but honest and kind, shrewd and strong to endure' who collectively 'had lent our islands and ourselves to the service of the two countries that were busking to fight against a perverted barbarism; whose cause and faith, that now hid their many faults, was the dignity of man'.⁵ Linklater's attitude reflects the strong general support for the war effort and renewed sense of British patriotism in Scotland, although many of his erstwhile nationalist colleagues opposed the right of the UK Government to

¹ Linklater, *Man on My Back*, pp. 339-340.

² Linklater, *Man on My Back*, pp. 340-341.

³ Linklater, *Man on My Back*, p. 341.

⁴ Linklater, *Man on My Back*, p. 339 & p. 341.

⁵ Linklater, *Man on My Back*, p. 341.

conscript Scots.⁶ As WWII dawned, the faith of Linklater in the value of writing itself was shaken when 'Russia and Germany had signed their monstrous pact' because 'If the Nazi could lie down with the Communist, then words must be devalued and half the currency of human intercourse was counterfeit', and, Parnell observes, he now 'thought of himself more as a soldier than as an author'.⁷

It has been demonstrated by the thesis how the literary significance of Linklater's work of the mid to late 1930s comprehensively refutes any sense of his redundancy as a writer. The first chapter discussed Linklater's attacks on fascism and communism intruding into 'Growing Like a Tree', *Magnus Merriman*, *Ripeness is All*, 'Kind Kitty' and *The Lion and the Unicorn*, and examined how he adopted a principled and uncompromising stance amidst the backlash which followed from the Nazi authorities. How these views made Linklater outspoken at times was revealed by contextualising his political position with other contemporary writers in Scotland and Britain, and the chapter found that his quandary with the Spanish Civil War further highlighted the difficulty of remaining a moderate in an age of ideological extremes. The sardonic portrayal Linklater offers of communism followed by fascism turning the imaginary country of Baltland into dystopias was considered in Chapter II. The additional implications of the Baltland stories were also uncovered with 'The Revolution' satirising radical young left-wing writers for their efforts being counterproductive and 'His Majesty the Dentist' suggesting the contemporary British notion of restraining fascist dictators through a moderating influence is fanciful. In Chapter III, it was argued that Linklater failed to convey the seriousness of the Japanese threat and the desperate plight of China because *Juan in China* glibly turns Sino-Japanese conflict into farcical light comedy. Chapter IV determined *The Impregnable Women* to be a pacifist attempt to avert the international conflict Linklater saw looming by 1938. The novel was found to offer compelling insights into the confused British political period preceding WWII, well-realised, albeit already

⁶ Opposition to conscription had been, describes Petrie, the SNP's 'official party policy since 1937', with its position becoming firmer when Douglas Young's very public refusal of conscription that resulted in his imprisonment also propelled him to leadership of the party in 1942 and created a major schism in the SNP, Malcolm Petrie, 'John MacCormick', in James Mitchell & Gerry Hassan, (eds.), *Scottish National Party Leaders* (London: Biteback, 2016), pp. 43-63, p. 55. Linklater dedicated his 1958 play *Breakspear in Gascony* to 'Scotland favourite polymath and my dear friend Douglas Young' who assisted with the lines in Latin, Eric Linklater, *Breakspear in Gascony* (London: Macmillan, 1958), p. v.

⁷ Linklater, *Man on My Back*, p. 339; Parnell, *Eric Linklater*, p. 221.

outdated, descriptions of trench warfare, an intriguing exploration of gender dynamics, and to play a pivotal role in Linklater's catalogue by introducing themes such as the nature of courage and developing the view of war as a combination of horror and farce he would refine in later writing. It also exposed how the improbable scenario of a Franco-British war, mixed results from appropriating the sex-strike plot of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, Linklater's lack of conviction in the anti-war argument he was delivering, and an awkwardly handled combination of harrowing realism and absurd comedy mean *The Impregnable Women* is compellingly flawed. The fifth chapter evaluated *Judas* as an allegorical indictment of Chamberlain's appeasement of Hitler and a complex character study written in a less comedic and more tragic mode, which expresses Linklater's newly resolved determination that confrontation against Nazi Germany was the correct course of action.

These responses of Eric Linklater to the crises of the 1930s form a body of often amusing yet frequently profound literature offering diverse and sometimes brilliantly realised insights into the period preceding WWII. His writing reflects the difficulties of formulating a contemporary reaction to the general breakdown in international relations which is easily overlooked when viewed from a modern perspective. While this thesis has focused on examining the prewar phase of Linklater's career, WWII became a major theme in his subsequent writing, which also convincingly reaffirms the importance of literature and merits further research. The foundation for Linklater's future accomplishments was laid by the formative period when he was forced to confront the challenges of the 1930s and meet the deteriorating global situation with a stylistic transition in his writing from the facetious comedy of the Baltland stories and *Juan in China*, through an indecisive intermediate phase blending the terror and farcicality of war with *The Impregnable Women* as the international situation worsened, to the seriousness and undisguised commitment of *Judas* when his prophecy of the 'Next Great War' began to look guaranteed. Linklater's literary journey over the course of the 1930s from confusion and uncertainty to resolve and purpose mirrors that of Britain itself in the long run-up to the Second World War.

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