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### *Citation for published version (APA):*

Feigel, L., & Miller, A. (2019). 'This is something which we know, in our bones, we cannot do': Hopes and fears for a united Europe in Britain after the Second World War. In I. Haberman (Ed.), *The Road to Brexit: A cultural perspective on British attitudes to Europe* Manchester University Press, Manchester.

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## 2

# **‘This is something which we know, in our bones, we cannot do’: hopes and fears for a united Europe in Britain after the Second World War**

*Lara Feigel and Alisa Miller<sup>1</sup>*

The title for this chapter takes us back to 1951. The initial plans for the European Coal and Steel Community were underway, and it remained to be seen whether Britain would play a part in it. The United States, worried that the Europeans would continue to destroy each other and would eventually call once again on America for aid, wanted Britain to join whatever European Federation might be about to emerge. In Washington the general hope was that Britain might act as a kind of sensible older sibling, preventing the tantrums of her European neighbours from escalating into violence that had drawn their partners, colonies and dominions into successive wars, resulting in enormous losses of life and riches.<sup>2</sup>

In January 1952, the British conservative politician Anthony Eden, who was about to take over as foreign secretary once again after the election later that year, used the occasion of accepting an honorary degree at Columbia University in New York to explain why US hopes were likely to be disappointed: ‘The American and British peoples should each understand the strong points in the other’s national character. If you drive a nation to adopt procedures which run counter to its instincts, you weaken and may destroy the motive force of its action’ (Eden, 1953: 1156–7). ‘You will realize’, he continued, ‘that I am speaking of the frequent suggestions that the United Kingdom should join a federation on the continent of Europe. This is something which we know, in our bones, we cannot do’ (Eden, 1953: 1156–7). This quote captures the tone of debate in the early 1950s – and it is not a very different scene from the current one as we complete this chapter, though much has happened since. But of course then, as now, the political voices in Britain – though often arrogant about the nation’s role in Europe and the broader world – were not unanimous.

In 1954 the civil servant Oliver Franks, then Chairman of Lloyds Bank, delivered the BBC Reith Lectures on 'Britain and the Tide of World Affairs'. The most controversial of these concerned Britain and 'The End of the Old World'. Opening this, Franks stated that 'I think most of you would be surprised if I suggested that August 10, 1952, was likely to be regarded as the most important date in the post-war decade of western Europe. But that is what I think. Why? It was the day on which the Schuman Plan became a reality' (Franks, 1954: 1).

Surveying the situation, Franks posited that the outlook of the majority of the people he spoke to was predominantly negative: 'I have met a good many men and women from different countries of western Europe and my conversations have left me with one clear impression: there are large numbers of people there who are living provisionally' (Franks, 1954: 2). The collective – and persistent – gloom born of a devastating war meant that there was no foundation on which to build. There were only three things that seemed to have life in them, and he thought that the people of Britain needed to be attentive to these. They were: communism (which offered hope for those in extreme poverty); Germany (which was by 1954 recovering far more speedily than anyone might have hoped a decade earlier); and the movement for European unity. About the latter, he said this:

A great many of us feel the idea is so alien to our outlook that we are inclined to dismiss the movement as visionary and impracticable. But this is beside the point. The point is that nowadays the idea comes quite naturally to millions of people on the Continent. For in Europe the two world wars have been civil wars, tearing the fabric of life to pieces. The fact that they arose out of national quarrels and ambitions is an added reason why reasonable men are unable to stake their hopes for the future on the existing pattern of European society. They pin their hopes on the idea that a larger unity including their country with those of their neighbours might give a more enduring and better framework for life. (Franks, 1954: 2–3)

Franks was insistent that only this could ensure peace in Europe, and that Britain had to be a part of it. He went on to assert that: 'We have seen how Britain by taking a positive not a negative attitude, by recognizing the plain facts of her positive involvement in the life and security of her neighbours, has taken her place as a leader in western Europe' (Franks, 1954: 7). He was clear, however, that the nation could not take this self-described ascendancy for granted. Political will and commitment were required, and if it was offered, Britain would shape the post-war world.

This was rousing stuff, but it begs the question, what exactly it would mean for Britain to lead, particularly if the nature of the emerging European project was predicated on the ideal of collective compromise and negotiation, as opposed to unilateral action? It also speaks to an important feature of the mid-century British debate. For all the emphasis on economic integration, arguably the most important and contested arena was cultural. At this point in history, we are suggesting, culture was not assumed to be just an adjunct, prettifying society, but was much more integral to politics. For Britain, Europe began as a cultural entity. Now, with Brexit looming, it looks like that might be all that we – the British and those living in the United Kingdom (or whatever remains of it) – will be left with. But that is a big all: an all that still has the power to keep us as Europeans and that the European Union would be wise to focus on as they do their best to survive the nationalism sweeping their constituent nations. Here we would like to look back to the moment when the notion of Europe as a cultural entity became a prevalent and powerful idea in Britain.

### The appeal of union

The idea of a collective European culture had been developed for centuries across the countries now grouped within the EU, and was often linked with the idea of a politically federated Europe. Then as now, perhaps most enthusiastic were the Germans – think, for example, of Kant's 1795 proposal for an 'eternal peace congress' or Goethe's notion of 'world literature' (though this extended as far as the Orient) (Kant, 1795; qtd. in Eckermann, 1998). Influential French writers and philosophers also spoke of cultural bridges. In August 1848 at an international peace conference held in Paris, Victor Hugo announced: 'A day will come when France, Russia, Italy, England and Germany, all of the nations on the continent, will merge into a firm and superior unity ... A day will come when these two immense groups, the United States of America and the United States of Europe will be seen facing each other, stretching hands over the seas.'<sup>23</sup>

And in Britain too, there existed lone voices calling for a common European literature and for a European federation. One of the great spokespeople was William Stead, a British journalist who edited the *Review of Reviews* in the late nineteenth century. He toured Europe in 1898 and then wrote: 'And now this far-off, unseen event (a United States of Europe), toward which the whole Continent has been moving with a slow but relentless march, has come within the pale of practical politics, and on the threshold of the twentieth century we await this latest and greatest

birth of time' (Stead, 1899: 30). Stead's emphasis on the inevitability of some form of integration reflects the relative optimism of the moment. Other tourists and subsequent witnesses to European battlefields (for example, the localised if exceptionally bloody clashes of the Risorgimento that introduced the illustrative word 'magenta' into the common language and helped to give birth to the International Red Cross) had seen enough to conclude that progress – cultural, humanitarian, technological, economic and political – demanded a federated future (Marwil, 2010: 184–5). This paralleled a broader desire for peace following the interminable Napoleonic wars and eventually culminating in the Entente Cordiale of 1904, which ran in parallel to the sense of a renaissance stemming from German unification and modernisation in the heart of the Continent.<sup>4</sup>

In the years leading up to the First World War, the calls for European integration were given a practical actuality in economic integration. The pre-conflict era was an increasingly globalised one with Europe at the centre of an interconnected imperial business system. Exports rose proportionally in Britain, France and Germany – although British trade and investment still mostly took place with its colonies and dominions – and general productivity and technology expanded, as did international investment, emigration and migrant labour. The increased revenues generated for national treasuries increased military spending, but this in turn – it was hoped – would actually deter conflict (Stevenson, 2004: 5).

Economic integration turned out not to be enough. The move towards European unity was brutally interrupted by war. Philip Larkin in his poem to commemorate 4 August 1914 turned to Roman numerals, 'MCMXIV', to 'lend a sense of time immemorial to the last moments of existence in history before the war'. He, like many other writers who fought in or grew up in the aftermath of the war, framed it as the 'watershed event in [the] archetypal story of lost "innocence"' (Sherry, 2013: 35–6). This lost innocence and the experience of graphic, mass death that caused it actually occurred in many 'foreign fields' – across the empire, at sea, at Gallipoli, in Africa and beyond – as identified by Rupert Brooke in his poem 'The Soldier', but the central theatre and focus of the war for the British metropolitan population was Belgium and France (Brooke, 1915). The conflict sucked lives and wealth in from across the imperial networks, and it imbued the Continent with a melancholy that was not soon shaken off.

Despite the war, some still spoke of a common bond. In the international context, some of the talk about European civilisation emerged as a counterpart to racist views and mounting fears about threats to white supremacy. In East Africa, for example, the German officials assigned black soldiers to guard white settlers; this was considered by critics to be deeply undermining to the concept of 'European loyalty' (Steinbach,

2011: 154). Other authors avoided racial arguments (at least on the surface): in 1916 the German writer Heinrich Mann wrote an article called 'The European', reminding the people of Europe of their common qualities.<sup>5</sup> British Romantic figures, and in particular Lord Byron, whose death in defence of freedom in Greece was taken to prefigure British engagement in a defensive war on the Continent, were presented as cultural touchstones during the war; their deep ties to European cultural movements were noted in articles in the popular newspapers and periodicals (Stock, 2010, 2011). When the poet-soldier Rupert Brooke died on the way to Gallipoli, the Belgian poet Émile Verhaeren wrote verses commemorating both his 'Englishness' and deep commitment to defending the common civilisation that the sacrifice – representing a broader Anglo-French brotherhood – entailed (Miller, 2017: 56–61). This spoke to a cultural bond underpinning the Allied cause but it was limited to certain nations: the enemy Germans and their *Kultur* was at this point broadly excluded from the brotherhood in Allied writings.

That said some – including Brooke – were keen to point out that the picture of Germany as a hotbed of jingoistic nationalism only told half the story, championing its liberal qualities and pointing out the strengths of its strong Social Democratic movement, particularly when weighed against the repressions of Czarist Russia, a position Brooke outlined in a letter to Eileen Wellesley on 1 August 1914 (Brooke, 1916: 221; Keynes, 1968: 603). With an eye on both long-term progressive agendas and neutral publics the liberal public intellectual Charles Masterman, who became head of the British propaganda outfit at Wellington House, was keen to employ the novelist Ford Madox Ford to write as a 'cosmopolitan' and a 'European expert' and, in Ford's own words, 'a good German' who had much to say about the carefully woven web of cultural links that traversed the Continent (Saunders, 1996: 469–70). Less official British voices including the Bloomsbury artists and writers also helped to shield and nurture the European movement across the war years, affirming what Grace Brockington has described as their 'expectation of a new artistic, social and political renaissance' on the horizon (Brockington, 2010: 31). Diplomatically, David Lloyd George's government appeared to be moving towards integration with British engagement with – and indeed outsized influence on – the League of Nations, the Covenant of which contradicted the pre-war Concert of Europe's more formal approach to dispute resolution between signatories. The compromise between Wilson and the British resulted in a League that 'placed much faith in democracy' and relied on the idea that 'public opinion could restrain governments from going to war'. This was overly optimistic even in 1919 and 1920, with the memory of the First World War fresh: Lloyd George had to move with

extreme caution to satisfy xenophobic voices at home that focused not on peace and integration but on reparations and the punishment of war criminals (Stevenson, 2004: 418–19).

Nonetheless, despite calls by some prominent British intellectuals for more substantive commitments, the main voices calling for a federated Europe between the two world wars were not, predominantly, from Britain.<sup>6</sup> A new journal, *Pan-Europa*, appeared in 1924. The political and economic construct proposed by its leader Count Coudenhove-Kalergi comprised an integrated conference of governments, a system of arbitration treaties and a customs union: a ‘blend of the fashionable geopolitical calculation and an eclectic cultural anthropology’. It attracted support from many French and German writers in particular, among them Heinrich Mann’s nephew (and Thomas Mann’s son) Klaus Mann. The federated system was explicitly modelled on the American constitution and spoke to the international appeal of the idealism and rhetoric of Woodrow Wilson (Stirk, 2001: 26–7).<sup>7</sup> Arguments about common cultural inheritance had proved indispensable to the president in convincing political elites and ultimately the American public to militarily (and sentimentally) invest in the European war from 1917 (Dayton, 2018: 11–17). The proposed system appeared – at least for a time – resilient: the United States had only recently successfully rebuffed attempts by the then Great (European) Powers to pick off parts of their polity and resources and to impose a peace, even as they fought their own Civil War (Foreman, 2010).

Particularly as it became clear that the First World War was likely to be followed by another war, the search for a material expression of a common European culture became more urgent. If the various European nations could recognise that they shared both common roots and common ideals, then perhaps they would stop seizing territory from each other and periodically killing one another’s citizens. Coudenhove-Kalergi’s efforts initially had some impact. The French Premier and Foreign Minister Édouard Herriot called on his people in 1924 to ‘create, if it is possible, a United States of Europe’ (qtd. in Urwin, 1991: 6). And even in Britain, the first pan-European conference in 1926 received a positive response in some newspapers. The *Manchester Guardian* ran an editorial entitled ‘The Oneness of Europe’ in which it stated that ‘[t]he United States of Europe is no longer a dream; it has entered on the world of realities’ (1926: 12). The historian Christopher Dawson – echoing the vague yet stirring language of civilisation and *Kultur* deployed by high-minded public intellectuals and politicians during the First World War – stated in 1932 that ‘if our civilisation is to survive it is essential that it should develop a common European consciousness and a sense of its historic and organic unity’ (Dawson, 1932: xxiii). Arguments that had been used to engage and

cement relationships between Allies during war were now repurposed to promote an integrated system that – it was hoped – could stabilise national and colonial competition and help to maintain the peace.

### **Britain, Germany and Europe**

The British writers who contributed to this discourse also had a brief moment of being taken seriously politically in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War – particularly T.S. Eliot, Stephen Spender, George Orwell and Storm Jameson. These writers came from quite different parts of the political spectrum in Britain, and worked to promote different political ends. But they all thought ultimately that national politics were less important than international co-operation and that even while countries were at war with each other, it was possible to remember what they had in common culturally and to use this as a basis for forming a stable peace. For all four of these figures – and much more broadly, for economists and politicians as well – the relationship between Britain and Germany was especially crucial here. Though these countries had been at war with each other for a decade by 1945, these writers were determined to argue that there was nonetheless as much uniting the British and the Germans as there was separating them. Furthermore after 1945 the ruins of Germany served as a tangible symbol for the need for a united Europe. These ruins in a sense formed the foundations of a new edifice of common suffering and a desire for collective construction that was to be cultural before it could be economic or political (Feigel, 2016).<sup>8</sup>

### ***Politics***

The politics of British integration in Europe were never straightforward. The moment when Britain looked set to be a major player in the early European Community, but ended up not being, provides a useful illustration of the complexities and internal divisions that dogged British Europeanists across the political spectrum. In the early days of the discussions about the European Coal and Steel Community treaty, it was expected that Britain as a major power and ally of the United States would play an important role. It did not, and this was largely the result of the actions and decisions of the Labour leader and foreign secretary Clement Attlee and Ernest Bevin in 1950, and subsequently of Conservatives Winston Churchill and Anthony Eden in 1951. The continuity between governments speaks to a common investment in ‘Churchillism’ predicated



on the 'collaboration between capital and labour' as well as a reading of recent history that was essentially insular, centred on the culmination of the British imperial journey in the triumph of the 'Finest Hour', El Alamein as the 'Hinge of Fate' in the Second World War, and the 'Mother of Parliaments' (Calder, 1992: 270–1). The myth of a nation that 'stood alone' would wind its way through debates about the European community going forward.

As a result, in the early 1950s aloofness from Europe received consistent political support, despite potential rewards for direct engagement. The French diplomat Jean Monnet said later: 'I never understood why the British did not join this, which was so much in their interest. I came to the conclusion that it must have been because it was *the price of victory* – the illusion that you could maintain what you had, without change.'<sup>9</sup> This was to some extent true. In the immediate post-war period, British politicians and the public were largely complacent about Britain's role in the world. Conservatives remained (over) confident about the role that would be played by the Commonwealth even as they were preoccupied with the challenges posed by a dwindling empire. Labour leaders were first and foremost concerned with the construction of the welfare state at home. Despite the intervening experience of another war, political formulations lagged behind the fledgling economic and cultural arguments for a closer union that some were beginning to advance. In a sense both parties accepted the original formulation proposed by Coudenhove-Kalergi with respect to the 'division of the world into competing blocs of continental dimensions', with Britain and its empire forming a separate entity to the European core (Stirk, 2001: 27). Neither of the major parties saw immediate value in focusing on Europe at the expense of their orthodox priorities. Justifications for the aloof British position ranged from the geopolitical to the anecdotal. Sir Frank Roberts, a senior diplomat at the time, recalled Eden saying that he had constituents with relatives in Canada or Australia or New Zealand or South Africa, but that none of them talked about their relatives on the continent of Europe.<sup>10</sup> Apparently this meant that Europe must be less close to his constituents' hearts.

Both Eden and Churchill hoped that Britain could somehow direct discussions in Europe without directly joining in or committing resources or political capital. This resulted in mixed messages, which must have been as confusing for Europeans as the mixed messages they are receiving from post-referendum Britain as this chapter is being written and Brexit 'negotiations' continue. At the University of Zurich in September 1946, Churchill sent a strong message of support to the burgeoning idea of a

federated Europe, rising against a backdrop of ruination, anxiety and tentative idealism:

What is the plight to which Europe has been reduced? Some of the smaller states have indeed made a good recovery, but over wide areas a vast quivering mass of tormented, hungry, care-worn and bewildered human beings gape at the ruins of their cities and homes, and scan the dark horizons for the approach of some new peril, tyranny or terror. Among the victors there is a babel of jarring voices; among the vanquished, the sullen silence of despair.

Yet all the while there is a remedy which, if it were generally and spontaneously adopted, would as if by miracle transform the whole scene, and would in a few years make all Europe, or the greater part of it, as free and as happy as Switzerland today. What is this sovereign remedy? It is to recreate the European family, or as much of it as we can, and provide it with a structure under which it can dwell in peace, in safety and in freedom. We must build a kind of United States of Europe. (Churchill, 1946)

Hearing this typically dramatic and sentimental speech,<sup>11</sup> it would be reasonable to assume that Churchill is pledging his support not merely to the United States of Europe existing, but to Britain being a part of it and hence taking on a leading role in standing against ‘tyranny or terror’ as a – it can be assumed – leading member of the ‘European family’ (Churchill, 1946). He was not. In 1950 the British Cabinet decided not to participate in Schuman Plan discussions.

It is also interesting to consider what exactly would have been required to push the Cabinet to join the deliberations, given rising unease among British cultural elites about French post-war cultural and political resurgence and resistance to Washington’s increasingly paternalistic, directive tone (Calder, 1992: 252–3). The French government had insisted that all parties partaking in the conversation should sign up in advance to being a part of the plan, without knowing quite what they were signing up to. This seemed to the British representatives unreasonable, and the Minister of State pleaded with the French to let the British join in on different terms, with the understanding that they would join the project if it seemed feasible to do so, after the initial formal discussions. The French refused this, leading to retrospective arguments that it was either their mishandling of diplomacy or their explicit wish that the British be kept out of the European project at this stage (O’Toole, 2018).<sup>12</sup> However it is as possible that, had the British government been allowed to contribute to the discussions on their own terms, they still would not have joined,

preferring to influence the organisation rather than commit to becoming a member of it.

British representatives believed that even though they were not members they were managing to influence the developing institutions without committing geopolitical capital. When Edmund Hall-Patch retired as representative of the United Kingdom on the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC) in July 1951, he reflected proudly if somewhat misguidedly that 'the Europeans look to us for leadership; they are delighted when we are able to give it; they respond to it in a remarkable manner' (Hall-Patch, 1951). Churchill concurred. Later that year, having returned to power, he was explicit in disassociating himself from the political and economic implications of his Zurich speech: 'I never thought that Britain or the British Commonwealth should, either individually or collectively, become an integral part of a European federation.' While he welcomed the Schuman Plan and thought it was a shame – if for no other reason than prestige – that Britain had not contributed directly to the discussions, he was clear that by no means would he want the nation to join the project as an equal partner to the other European states, and was determined to resist American pressure on this count.

Returning to the familiar rhetorical territory of defence of the island nation, Churchill concluded that none of the other committed states 'have the advantages of the Channel, and [they] were consequently conquered'. He went on to reiterate the broad, established goals of his government. 'Our first object', he stated, 'is the unity and consolidation of the British Commonwealth and what is left of the former British Empire. Our second, the "fraternal association" of the English-speaking world; and third, United Europe, to which we are a separate, closely – and specially – related ally and friend' (Churchill, 1951a). This all becomes even more explicit in a Foreign Office memorandum of 12 December 1951: 'The United Kingdom cannot seriously contemplate joining in European integration.' There was simply too much to lose with respect to the sterling area and the Commonwealth. But neither would they take an explicit stance against the formation of the bloc, for 'while it is neither practicable nor desirable for the United Kingdom to join the integration movement, there would seem to be an advantage in encouraging the movement without taking part in it' (Churchill, 1951b). The British government officially assumed the right to be both a benevolent balancer in the world order and a natural beneficiary of any continental integration.

Even those who did want to be part of it were unsure that the British ought to take on the responsibility of an equal player. Franks in his Reith Lecture quoted earlier went on to say that he thought the British ought to have country membership rather than ordinary membership – taking

his idiom from the language of the British gentlemen's club, where there were different memberships for those who lived in London and those who lived outside it: 'We pay our subscription and take on our obligations, but not the full subscription, or all the obligations of the regular members, our continental neighbours' (Franks, 1954: 6). The language reflects a deeper truth about the entrenched ideals at the core of the British establishment and how it framed its political and economic policies (Stone & Fawtier Stone, 1984),<sup>13</sup> even as the ancient regime shifted to embrace some Labour principles and lost its hold on an international empire.

### *British writers and Germany*

Broadly speaking this was the political picture with respect to the British political establishment, but what of its writers? During the Second World War, writers had been more anxious than many politicians to engage with a nuanced view of their European counterparts, and in particular with respect to the enemy to distinguish between Germans and Nazis – between good and bad Germans. Stephen Spender, during the war, had published articles in *Horizon* on German literature, urging British readers to read Hölderlin and Goethe and to see them as influences on British writers they admired. Together with T.S. Eliot, he also extolled the work of the German literary critic E.R. Curtius, who had been a mentor for him in the 1930s. Curtius himself had made the great case for reading the literatures of Europe collectively in his introduction to *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*. Here he insists on the impossibility of interpreting any of our 'national literatures' in artificial isolation from each other: 'European literature is an "intelligible unit" which disappears from view when it is cut into pieces' (Curtius, 1990 [1953]: 14–15). He went on to advance the idea of the "timeless present" which is an essential characteristic of literature, which meant that the 'literature of the past can always be active in that of the present. So Homer in Virgil, Virgil in Dante, Plutarch and Seneca in Shakespeare, Shakespeare in Goethe ... There is here an inexhaustible wealth of possible interrelations' (Curtius, 1990 [1953]: 14–15).

In January 1945 George Orwell mocked the simplicity of the British anti-German fervour in two of his regular columns in the socialist magazine *Tribune*. Reading a copy of the *Quarterly Review* from the Napoleonic wars, he was impressed to find French books respectfully reviewed at a time when Britain was fighting for its existence in a bloody and exhausting war. He complained that no such reviews of German literature could appear in the press now, although the situation was very similar. In fact, as Orwell well knew, the situation was very different; any works of

literature to come out of Nazi Germany would be endorsed by the fascists. The Allies were fighting partly in the name of all the German cultural figures who had been persecuted by the Nazis. But Orwell's complaints the following week were more convincing. Visiting a London exhibition of waxworks illustrating German atrocities, he was sickened by captions inviting people to '[c]ome inside and see real Nazi tortures, flogging, crucifixion, gas chambers' and advertising a children's amusement section at no extra charge. Nazi-hating was being used to justify sadist pornographic voyeurism: 'If it were announced that the leading war criminals were to be eaten by lions or trampled to death by elephants in the Wembley Stadium, I fancy the spectacle would be quite well attended' (Orwell, 1945a: 19).<sup>14</sup> Writers who took this kind of position tended to emphasise that what they were fighting for was not to destroy Germany, but to create a new, united Europe.

Storm Jameson, who was president of English PEN, the international society for writers, published a pamphlet in 1941 called 'The End of This War'. Here she said that although they were fighting so that National Socialism could be 'discredited and broken', the Allies should not hope for total victory. They should not simply destroy Germany and restore pre-war Europe, or even pre-Hitler Europe. Europe before Hitler was better than the present but it was not in itself desirable: 'In any event we cannot restore it: we can only neglect our duty to begin creating a unified Europe, and so come to a bad end' (Jameson, 1941a). They needed to convince the nations of Central and Eastern Europe to co-operate, to restore half-destroyed countries, and to convince German citizens of the evils of pan-Germanism. And here she set out plans for a European federation, arguing specifically that culture can lead the way in creating political unity: 'The German nation can and must be educated to take its place in Europe. In a Europe reorganised on a dual principle. A) that no nation is able to concentrate sufficient military power to overrun the rest of Europe ... B) that no nation is tempted to assault Europe by the economic instability of the greater numbers of their countries' (Jameson, 1941a).

She rejected a relativistic reading of how the German people and nation had so debased themselves, and posited the British as those best placed to direct their collective reinvention within a European whole:

while it is childish to pretend that the Germans are savages, it is equally childish not to realise that they are politically backward, and to draw the necessary conclusions. Our hope lies in being able to re-educate them, in being able to make good Europeans of them. Europe was once a cultural entity, and at a time when national cultures were diverse and lively. To live, it must become an economic entity, with whatever diversity of

political needs. Security with freedom. Can we offer this to Europe? Nothing less is worth the cost we are paying for the chance. Nothing less offers any hope of peace. (Jameson, 1941a: 31–2)

Ironically, for Jameson, the Nazis had begun this process – they had demonstrated energy and vision in creating their New Order, even if it was demonic energy. Now the Allies needed to display the same kind of energy in saving Europe.

Later that year she made explicit in her speech at the PEN Congress that she was also calling on the British to see themselves as Europeans. The ‘English writer’, she said here, has two duties. One was to remind the reconstruction commissions that the unit of value in the world was the single human being – that a German child therefore needed the same chance as a British child. The other duty was ‘to persuade the English that we are responsible to Europe, and cannot out of indifference or modesty evade our responsibility. The responsibility is to the future of every child: this includes every English child’ (Jameson, 1941b: 16). She did not make light of the challenge implicit in the project: ‘Only a fool would make light of the immense difficulties of creating a new European order: only Englishmen who are ignorant, or tired, or discouraged, will refuse to try’ (Jameson, 1941b: 16).

### *Ruins*

After the war, some of these writers visited Germany, and what they found there contributed specifically to their vision of a federated Europe. This was also the case for some politicians who went to Germany, but they had to temper their enthusiasm with a consciousness of the prevailing views among the public at home. George Orwell visited Germany in April 1945 and wrote a series of articles for the *Observer*, describing the destruction.<sup>15</sup> Afterwards in London, waiting to return to Europe, he wrote an article for the *Observer* insisting that a rural slum of the kind envisaged by Morgenthau would not help Europe. Germany was Europe’s problem and the rest of Europe had to realise that the impoverishment of one country would impact unfavourably on the world as a whole. He thought it was absurd to debate the ethics of bombing – ‘war itself is inhuman’ – and the important question concerned the ethics of reparations versus reconstruction (Orwell, 1945b: 5).

A few months later, Orwell wrote an essay called ‘Toward European Unity’ for the *Partisan Review*. Here he said that if he was a bookmaker, he would give the odds of the survival of civilisation within the next few hundred years as low. It seemed very likely that the atom bomb would destroy everything. He thought the only way to avoid this was through a

federated socialist Europe. They needed to present 'somewhere or other, on a large scale, the spectacle of a community where people are relatively free and happy and where the main motive in life is not the pursuit of money or power. In other words, democratic Socialism must be made to work throughout some large area' (Orwell, 1947: 5). This could only be Europe and therefore Europe must be federated.

These ideas received greater and fuller consideration in the work of Stephen Spender, who visited Germany for two long stretches in 1945 and then wrote a book, *European Witness*, describing his impressions of post-war Germany and France. This book explores many of the ideas that resonate in cultural debates about Britain and Europe today. What is particularly interesting is the way that Spender sees the destruction of the war itself as an act of European scientific collaboration that in some way sets the scene for a new form of creative collaboration.

He begins the book with the destruction of the ruined cities that shocked everyone in Germany. Devoting several pages to Cologne, where the people resemble 'a tribe of wanderers who have discovered a ruined city in a desert and who are camping there, living in the cellars and hunting amongst the ruins for the booty, relics of a dead civilisation' (Spender, 1947 [1946]: 22), he goes on to write how '[t]he great city looks like a corpse and stinks like one also, with all the garbage which has not been cleared away, all the bodies still buried under heaps of stones and iron' (Spender, 1947 [1946]: 22–3). The act of devastation and its implicit violence is embodied in the ruins: 'In the destroyed German towns one often feels haunted by the ghost of a tremendous noise. It is impossible not to imagine the rocking explosions, the hammering of the sky upon the earth, which must have caused all this' (Spender, 1947 [1946]: 23).

This is where Spender suggests that the destruction itself is an act of collaboration, and that it is a collaboration that offers itself to one form of philosophy: 'The destruction is *serious* in more senses than one. It is a climax of deliberate effort, an achievement of our civilisation, the most striking result of co-operation between nations in the twentieth century. It is the shape created by our century as the Gothic cathedral is the shape created by the Middle Ages' (Spender, 1947 [1946]: 23–4; emphasis in original). After this, Spender describes his own feeling of nausea, which grew as he spent more time in Germany. What depressed him most was a 'potentiality in my environment, as vivid as the potentialities of Nazism in 1931. This was the potentiality of the ruin of Germany to become the ruins of the whole of Europe: of the people of Brussels and Paris, London and New York, to become herds wandering in their thousands across a continent, reduced to eating scraps and roots and grass.' As he walked along the streets of Bonn with a wind blowing the disgusting smell of dust

out of the ruins, he thought that the whole of their civilisation could be blown down in a day like this city had been. There were now two possibilities: creation and destruction. And the more constructive one required 'resolution, unity, will' (Spender, 1947 [1946]: 68).

So what was this constructive solution and who was going to achieve it? In Spender's view, the kind of creation that was going to redeem Europe was going to be best achieved by artists: 'We are confronted with this choice between creation and destruction immediately after a period in our history when it had seemed that morals were simply an affair of private conduct and that no necessity of making a moral choice confronted the whole of society' (Spender, 1947 [1946]: 92). For a long time, as technology had multiplied, society had become more automatic. It had been accepted that books could not change very much because society was no longer run by a few individuals; it had become an automaton. In Spender's view, 'All the arts could do was to save a few individuals from becoming as mechanically minded as other people in the age in which they lived by opening their eyes to other kinds of reality'. With the war, however, everything had changed. The social automatism had developed a means of destroying itself – the end result of technology was the atom bomb. So a new pattern of world society 'designed for the end of securing peace' had to come into being, and this involved 'a majority of the peoples of the world' assuming 'complete and conscious responsibility for the future pattern of the world' (Spender, 1947 [1946]: 92).

That use of 'conscious' is important, because for Spender the most conscious people were likely to be writers or artists, and therefore the solution was at least in part humanist and, hence, cultural. 'We have got to set the whole *human* interest in front of the existing power-and-wealth interests, at a time when we have almost abandoned thinking of politics in terms of humanity'; they would do this by uniting Europe (Spender, 1947 [1946]: 93; emphasis in original).

He went on to provide a useful metaphor, writing that 'one might compare the countries of the world to-day to clocks. Each country registers a different time, but outside their time there is one time for the whole world, registered on one clock, with a time-bomb attached to it. Unless the countries of the world can synchronise their time and their sense of reality, that time-bomb is likely to explode' (Spender, 1947 [1946]: 96). The world was now truly global: everyone needed to see this:

all the time, behind London, Paris, Prague, Athens are those shadows, those ghosts, the destroyed towns of Germany which are also the part of the soul of Europe which has collapsed visibly into chaos and disintegration. Their ruin is not just their ruin, it is also pestilence, the



epidemic of despair spreading over and already deep-rooted within Europe, the black foreshadowing of the gulf which already exists in us – the gulf which we can still refuse. (Spender, 1947 [1946]: 97)

Here a finite entity – a federated Europe – provides an answer to existential anguish. It is inevitable that this solution should be built on cultural principles, because the fundamental malaise it is addressing is psychological as much as it is political and economic.

This response to Germany was not of course limited to the British. It seems telling that it was directly after visiting Germany in conjunction with a production of his play *The Flies*, that Jean-Paul Sartre wrote an article in *Politique Etrangère* demanding that the cultural unity of Europe should be transformed into political unity. He began here by talking about culture: ‘Can French culture be defended as such?’ he asked.

To this, I answer simply: No ... Is there some other way of saving the essential elements of that culture? Yes. But on condition that we attack the problem in an entirely different manner, and that we understand that today there can no longer be a question of a French culture, no more than of a Dutch, a Swiss, or a German culture. If we want French culture to survive, it must be integrated within the framework of one great European culture. (Sartre, 1949: 245)

Sartre added political conclusions almost as though it was against his will: ‘Naturally, this cultural unity cannot be constituted of itself. To be sure, we can even now ask governments, associations, private individuals to inaugurate a cultural policy; to be sure, we can have cultural interchange, more translations, personal contacts, we can draw up a program for books, for international newspapers.’ He addressed the frailty of such efforts: ‘All this was tried before the 1939 war. Such attempts, though very interesting, would be fruitless today, because they would create a superstructure for cultural unity, which would not be matched by any unity in the infrastructures. Therefore we must conceive – and I shall stop here because I wish to avoid the political question – European cultural unity as the only one capable of saving what is valid in each country’s culture.’ The rewards would be both specifically national and collective: ‘By striving for a unified European culture, we will save French culture. However, a unified culture would have no meaning, would be a purely verbal achievement unless set within the framework of far more profound efforts to bring about Europe’s political and economic unity’ (Sartre, 1949: 247).

Sartre’s unwillingness to take responsibility for the political implications of his cultural argument were shared by T.S. Eliot and articulated – if

not resolved – in ‘The Unity of European Culture’, which he delivered as a series of lectures on German radio in 1946. Eliot distinguished here between Europe as a political organisation (a union to be created) and Europe as a cultural organisation (an existing entity). In defining the unity of European culture he began with language, suggesting that English was the richest language for poetry, largely because it comprised Germanic, Scandinavian, Norman French, French Latin and Celtic influences. As a result of these influences, and cross-fertilisations, he thought that poetry only flourished when the languages were able to cross-pollinate; this was a particular problem during the war when writers were cut off from each other and this was true of the other arts as well.

For years, there had been a fraternity of artists, based partly upon a sense of this interdependency, which had enabled them to come together and discuss ideas collectively whatever differences of national loyalties and political philosophy they had. The problem now was that this situation had reversed: ‘nowadays we take too much interest in each other’s domestic politics, and at the same time have very little contact with each other’s culture.’ This made nations intolerant of other cultures. It meant that Germany had wanted to create a world state with a uniform world culture. There was a danger that in calling for a unified Europe, politicians even in 1946 were calling for yet another version of this totality. Eliot thought this was dangerous – and his language here recalls Spender’s – because it turned the world into a machine, and incorporated culture within it. In fact, though, ‘culture is something that must grow; you cannot build a tree, you can only plant it’ (Eliot, 1949: 196).

So Eliot’s European federation had to retain its sense of differentiation as well as become a political machine – and it was not clear whether or not he was prepared to accept that political machine or not:

The Western World has its unity in this heritage, in Christianity and in the ancient civilisation of Greece, Rome and Israel, from which, owing to two thousand years of Christianity, we trace our descent. I shall not elaborate this point. What I wish to say is, that this unity in the common elements of culture throughout many centuries, is the true bond between us. No political and economic organisation, however much goodwill it commands, can supply what this culture unity gives. If we dissipate or throw away our common patrimony of culture, then all the organisation and planning of the most ingenious minds will not help us, or bring us close together.

This unity of culture, in contrast to the unity of political organisation, does not require us all to have only one loyalty: it means that there

will be a variety of loyalties. It is wrong that the only duty of the individual should be held to be towards the State; it is fantastic to hold that the supreme duty of every individual should be towards a Super-State. (Eliot, 1949: 201)

There is something quite evasive here – because what would a unity of culture mean without political unity? What does it require of writers and artists and how are they going to achieve anything practical? Eliot seems actively to resist this possibility at the same time as he offers it up as the only hope for the future.

### Brexit

It is unclear where this would have left Eliot in relation to the current Brexit crisis, but it is helpful nonetheless in 2019 to look back at this mid-century cultural moment. To many the developments in Britain in the time since the referendum of June 2016 have been both shocking and existential: the vote itself, the shallowness of the debate that preceded it, and the self-righteous racism and isolationism that has followed.

The Remainers, however, must take their share of the blame. We were too busy taking our European links for granted to read the books where we could find, laid out fairly explicitly, the dissatisfaction that was brewing with the European Union. In 2014 a book published by Daniel Beddowes and Flavio Cipollini called *The EU: The Truth About the Fourth Reich – How Adolf Hitler Won the Second World War* claimed that the European Union had been Hitler's idea and that it had been a success for him because the only country it was benefiting was Germany: 'It was [Walther] Funk who predicted the coming of European economic unity. Funk was also Adolf Hitler's economics minister and his key economics advisor ... The Nazis wanted to get rid of the clutter of small nations which made up Europe and their plan was quite simple. The EU was Hitler's dream' (Beddowes and Cipollini, 2014).<sup>16</sup> In Britain there has been a steady stream of statements, articles and speeches – provided by the likes of the UKIP MEP Gerard Batten and the Conservative MP Boris Johnson – to this effect for years (Bennett, 2014; Stone, 2016). As construed by prominent Brexiteers, the 'new German invasion, cloaked in the guise of peaceful co-operation, is more damnable [than the imagined Nazi invasions of the past] because it does not give the English Resistance a proper physical target' (O'Toole, 2018: 52). It introduced a new form of 'vassalage' encrusting the former colonial masters: to quote the Irish journalist and critic Fintan O'Toole, Brexit 'may be the last stage of

imperialism – having appropriated everything else from its colonies, the dead empire appropriates the pain of those it has oppressed’ (O’Toole, 2018: 151, 21).

This feels a useful moment, then, to look at the dissenting voices from the past – to see that the scepticism has always been there. It is also a useful moment to look at what motivated the most passionate proponents of European federation in Britain – to see that it was the spectacle of the ruins of Germany. We can see from Spender’s writing that the enthusiasm for the EU was fundamentally born out of war – and out of the Manichean world it conjured. This was a generation who had seen what hell looked like and knew that they had to prevent it from spreading its flames across the Continent. They also accepted, and even yearned for, a European Union that the cultural historian James Sheehan has described as a ‘super *civilian* state’ as opposed to a superpower; an entity that is fundamentally concerned with preserving civilian institutions and individual well-being as opposed to compelling its citizens to ‘kill and die’ (Sheehan, 2009: 220–1; emphasis in original). It was therefore easy to sacrifice some self-determination, though not everyone in Britain was prepared to do so.

If European federation was supported by cultural figures at this point, it seems to have been both because culturally the sense of a common foundation was already strong, and because they were more likely to have been exposed to the images of destruction overseas – to have visited or at least directly confronted the physical and psychological ruin that was post-war Germany. But it was also because the move towards a conception of Europe that excluded nationalism was itself a vision compatible with culture, with its focus on the value both of the individual and of collective, rather than of the nation state. Spender argued that art itself mattered again – and here we could think of the constitution of UNESCO (another organisation that Britain is in the midst of leaving), suggesting that if wars began in the minds of men it was in the minds of men that the defences of peace would be constructed.<sup>17</sup> For Spender, in order to create a society where life itself is valued, the arts had to be mobilised again.

This perhaps is something to reflect on again now: the dreams that motivated European idealists in the mid-century. For those who dreamt then of an integrated Europe that included Britain, culture and mainstream politics and economics came together to a greater extent than they appear to do now. Perhaps it’s still possible to reignite the dream of cultural unity. Certainly, the Remain campaign could have tried harder to promote a positive image of Europe, rather than simply talking pessimistically about the perils of leaving. Or perhaps in the end we need simply to accept that those who are still enthusiastic about European unity are

culturally motivated. Either way, we need to do all that we can to keep the European project alive as a cultural vision.

## Notes

- 1 lara.feigel@kcl.ac.uk and alisa.m.miller@kcl.ac.uk. This chapter has been made possible by funding from the European Research Council (ERC) for the project 'Beyond Enemy Lines: Literature and Film in the British and American Zones of Occupied Germany, 1945–1949' [FP7/2007–2013; grant agreement No. 335101]. Many thanks also to Dr Anne Chapman of the Centre for Modern Literature and Culture at King's College London for her assistance in preparing the chapter for publication.
- 2 Much has, of course, been written about the complex geopolitical, diplomatic and economic evolution of the European project. With particular attention to the United States and its attempts to direct the Anglo-European relationship in the immediate post-war period, see for example Urwin (1991), Gillingham (2004), Ellwood (2014) and Scott-Smith (2003) the latter which takes a particular cultural-political angle in its analysis of the Congress for Cultural Freedom. For a succinct, historical analysis of European integration against a backdrop of political and cultural scepticism see Crespy and Verschueren (2009) and specifically of Britain as the 'awkward partner' see Ludlow (2018).
- 3 The conference at which Victor Hugo spoke was convened in Paris from 21 to 24 August 1848. Hugo's speech was published in Hugo (1937: 68–9), quoted in Pegg (1983: 5).
- 4 For an expansive study of Germany's nineteenth-century renaissance and the role this played in advancing calls for a common European culture, see Watson (2011).
- 5 His writing on the topic were later collected and published in Mann (1960), cited in Schonfield (2012: 260).
- 6 See for example Peter Wilson's work on individuals including the English classicist Gilbert Murray – with his emphasis on the integration liberalism stemming from a common Hellenic heritage – and Leonard Woolf's attitude towards the League of Nations (Wilson, 2011, 2015).
- 7 For further discussion of the influence of the United States on post-First World War discourses, and in particular of the spread of Wilsonian rhetoric and its international influence during and after the First World War, see Manela (2007).
- 8 For a portrait of the British in Germany in this period, an analysis of the meaning of the ruins of Germany for politicians and writers throughout the world in 1945 and for a discussion of the ideas of Spender and Orwell, see Feigel (2016) and see also the Beyond Enemy Lines project ([www.beyondenemylines.co.uk](http://www.beyondenemylines.co.uk)) for which this chapter is an output. For another perspective on Anglo-German 'Kulturpolitik' see also Clemens (1994).

- 9 Monnet quoted in Charlton (1983: 307; emphasis in original) as part of a retrospective oral history project, with no exact date provided.
- 10 Roberts was speaking on the WideVision Productions/Channel 4 television series, *What Has Become of Us?* for its third programme entitled 'The Last Roar' that was later broadcast on 11 December 1994. Cited in Hennessy (2006: 681).
- 11 It is interesting to note that another Second World War leader seeking a return to power, Charles de Gaulle, mirrored Churchill in his invoking of a language of desolation that was potentially an even more alarmist vision of the future, in January 1951 in Nimes speaking of the potential destruction of Notre-Dame in Paris and the Colosseum in Rome destroyed by bombs in a future world war, should some new way forward not be located (with him at the helm of national politics). Charles de Gaulle quoted in Jackson (2018: 422).
- 12 For an analysis of reactions to this period and how they echoed through British discourse about Europe, see in particular 'The Pleasures of Self-Pity' (O'Toole, 2018: 1–25).
- 13 For a history of the landed English establishment and its legacy see Stone (1984) and Clark (1985).
- 14 For an assessment of Orwell's ideas on post-war Germany and Europe, see Feigel (2016: 175–6). For a broader discussion of how various writers and critics contemplated German culture in the immediate post-war and subsequently over the course of the second half of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, see Rau (2013).
- 15 For a discussion of Orwell's visit to Germany and his impressions of the country in April 1945 see Feigel (2016: 51).
- 16 Sections of Beddowes' and Cipollini's arguments were subsequently reprinted verbatim and reported on in the right wing British daily the *Express* (Bennett, 2014), thereby reaching a significant readership.
- 17 It is both cheering and depressing to take note of one of the winners of the 2017 English Pen Award: see Åsbrink (2017), which speaks eloquently about the themes of Europe, war, and individual and collective trauma.

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