

BRITISH LITERATURE IN TRANSITION,  
1940–1960: POSTWAR

'Postwar' is both a period and a state of mind, a sensibility comprised of hope, fear and fatigue in which British society and its writers paradoxically yearned both for political transformation and a nostalgic reinstatement of past securities. From the Labour landslide victory of 1945 to the emergence of the Cold War and the humiliation of Suez in 1956, this was a period of radical political transformation in Britain and beyond, but these changes resisted literary assimilation. Arguing that writing and history do not map straightforwardly one onto the other, and that the postwar cannot easily be fitted into the explanatory paradigms of modernism or postmodernism, this book offers a more nuanced recognition of what was written and read in the period. From wartime radio writing to 1950s travellers, Cold War poetry to radical theatre, magazine cultures to popular fiction, this volume examines important debates that animated postwar Britain.

GILL PLAIN is Professor of English at the University of St Andrews. She has research interests in British literature and culture of the 1940s, war writing, crime fiction, British cinema, feminist theory and gender studies. Her publications include *Women's Fiction of the Second World War* (1996), *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction* (2001), *John Mills and British Cinema: Masculinity, Identity and Nation* (2006) and *Literature of the 1940s: War, Postwar and 'Peace'* (2013). She has also edited a number of volumes including *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism* (co-edited with Susan Sellers, 2007) and *Scotland and the First World War: Myth, Memory and the Legacy of Bannockburn* (2017). She is General Editor of the *British Literature in Transition* series.

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# BRITISH LITERATURE IN TRANSITION, 1940–1960: POSTWAR

EDITED BY

GILL PLAIN

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## CHAPTER 10

*Public Intellectuals and the Politics of Literature:  
The Causes and Collaborations of J. B. Priestley and  
Jacquetta Hawkes Priestley*

Ina Habermann

In John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956), the 'angry young man' Jimmy Porter singles out J. B. Priestley as an old-fashioned establishment figure: 'He's like Daddy – still casting well-fed glances back to the Edwardian twilight from his comfortable, disenfranchised wilderness.'<sup>1</sup> Ironically, Porter's main grievance, that people appear only half-alive, lacking enthusiasm and purpose and meekly accepting mediocrity, had already been voiced by Priestley himself in the 1920s and throughout the interwar period, and was being voiced again in the 1950s. In fact, Porter's reference to the 'disenfranchised wilderness' recalls Priestley's 'Thoughts in the Wilderness', published in September 1953 as the first of a series of articles in the *New Statesman* where Priestley takes issue with the apolitical nature of an increasingly affluent British society, stating that 'there is a wilderness atmosphere just now, with little that appears to be blossoming and fruitful',<sup>2</sup> and that progress is stalled by 'two vicious circles, one of frustration, rage, and violence, the other of apathy, triviality, and exhaustion'.<sup>3</sup> While large parts of the population may be caught in the latter, the former vicious circle describes a feeling of smouldering revolt, as expressed in the work of such 'angry' younger authors as Osborne and the contributors to the 'Movement', among them John Wain, Philip Larkin, Kingsley Amis and D. J. Enright. Judging from these writers' work, the 1950s is an incubation period, leading to an eruption which Larkin sees happen in the pivotal year 1963, as evoked in his poem 'Annus Mirabilis' (1967) – although the transition was already evident in such works as Antony Burgess's fictional exploration of juvenile delinquency,

*A Clockwork Orange* (1962), and Doris Lessing's evocation of social fragmentation, *The Golden Notebook* (1962).<sup>4</sup> The mindset of the rebels is anatomised in Colin Wilson's critically acclaimed study *The Outsider* (1956), which offers the theory, as it were, to Jimmy Porter's practice. Lumping together such diverse writers and artists as Kafka, D. H. Lawrence, Van Gogh, Nietzsche and Dostoevsky, Wilson argues that psychological dislocation is intrinsic to artistic creativity in Western culture. This bold philosophical essay, seen as the 'classic study of alienation, creativity and the modern mind', made Wilson instantaneously famous.<sup>5</sup> In a slightly disgruntled review of both *Look Back in Anger* and *The Outsider* in the *New Statesman*, Priestley opined that 'these young Outsiders are after one bound further *In* than most of us have ever been'.<sup>6</sup> Casting himself as an 'Inside Outsider or an Outside Insider'<sup>7</sup> and accusing the rebels of self-pity, egoism and negativity, he calls for a more positive vision, characteristically quipping that '[w]e are waiting for God, not for Godot'.<sup>8</sup> Rewards should not be offered for stating the problem, but for presenting solutions. The problems were pressing, however, since Britain, while increasingly affluent, was losing power on a global scale and the old élites of the political establishment were slow to adapt to the modern world.<sup>9</sup>

Always a politically committed writer, Priestley arguably had his 'finest hour' in 1940 when he broadcast his *Postscripts* to the nation. In the late 1940s and 1950s, he had the status – and influence – of a public intellectual, a powerful voice transmitted through various media that was, simultaneously, both outmoded and urgently relevant. This is less paradoxical than it may seem, since Priestley was expressing his vision from 'within', providing both a sense of continuity between the interwar period and postwar Britain and a critical reflection of society and its institutions. As Roger Fagge observes, 'Priestley had always seen culture in political terms, and he argued forcibly that mass culture was a politically conservative force that helped destroy what was left of the vibrant wartime spirit.'<sup>10</sup> In Alan Sinfield's seminal study of postwar British culture, Priestley makes

<sup>1</sup> John Osborne, *Look Back in Anger* (1956), I.

<sup>2</sup> J. B. Priestley, 'Thoughts in the Wilderness' in *Thoughts in the Wilderness* (Kingswood: The Windmill Press, 1957), pp. 1–7, 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.

<sup>4</sup> Burgess's novel is truly transitional in terms of the moral values expressed, paving the way for the more radically iconoclastic embrace of dystopian urbanism in the work of J. G. Ballard.

<sup>5</sup> Colin Wilson, *The Outsider* (London: Phoenix, 2001); quotation from cover.

<sup>6</sup> J. B. Priestley, 'The Outsider' in *Thoughts in the Wilderness*, pp. 174–80, 174 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179. <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed account of Britain in the 1950s and 1960s, see Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles* (London: Abacus, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> Roger Fagge, *The Vision of J. B. Priestley* (London: Continuum, 2012), p. 80.

a brief appearance as a 'middle-class dissident' guilty of an ultimately limiting 'Left-Culturism'.<sup>11</sup> Sinfield is right, I believe, to place Priestley in the same camp as Raymond Williams, a categorisation which is not contradicted by the fact that Priestley considered himself as 'at heart, an old-fashioned English 19th-century radical'.<sup>12</sup> There is also some truth in the image of Priestley as a wealthy member of the cultural establishment. Yet Sinfield's easy dismissal of Priestley is hardly fair, both because Priestley remained a perceptive and influential cultural critic, and because he responded to various crises with a political and philosophical vision that had an impact on British society.

Integral to Priestley's Janus-faced appeal in postwar society was his relationship with the archaeologist and writer Jacquetta Hawkes, whom he met in 1947 and married in 1953, amid the scandal of two rather public divorces. The couple worked and campaigned together, mobilising a counter-rhetoric of utopian wholeness that found widespread support, and that needs to be amplified in a representative account of the 1950s. Jimmy Porter's angry voice, the voice of the 'Outsider', should not dominate our understanding of a period where the emphasis was still more on wholeness than fragmentation. I argue that the Priestleys' work offers an excellent point of departure for an exploration of both the continuities and the disruptions of postwar culture. As an influential writing couple, they addressed, and engaged with, many pressing issues of the period, including the atomic threat and capitalist modernity. Coming together from very different backgrounds, they helped both to shape, and to anatomise, the postwar.

### From Victory in Europe to the Festival of Britain (1945–1951): Working for Britain

Priestley had become an important voice in the public sphere because of his continual presence over decades, and because, at various points during his long career, he had made a significant contribution to public discourse. In 1929, his upbeat novel *The Good Companions* became a bestseller by

challenging the mood of dejection following the stock market crash and the Great Depression, and in 1934, his *English Journey* presented a damning anatomy of interwar social conditions. This authority, together with Priestley's habit of choosing a 'wide channel of communication',<sup>13</sup> enabled him to boost British morale with his *Postscripts* in 1940 and, in his broadcasts to America, to make a powerful appeal to the United States to abandon their neutrality. In a domestic context, his most important message, memorably expressed in his pamphlet *Out of the People* (1941) and his 'Letter to a Returning Serviceman' (1944), was that people should take political action and demand a better deal for themselves after the war. Rejecting a concept of 'masses' which had always made him uncomfortable with socialism and communism, Priestley argues that individuals should forge a community to improve their quality of life and combat an exploitative capitalism cloaked in the 'fancy dress' of tradition<sup>14</sup> – a concern that would become even more relevant with the transition from austerity to affluence in postwar society.

In May 1945, Priestley broadcast a talk entitled 'Journey into Daylight' on the BBC Home Service which spelled out the message he wished people to draw from the war experience. Stating that 'we are . . . better people than we had imagined ourselves to be',<sup>15</sup> he celebrates the 'community with a noble common purpose'<sup>16</sup> and, evoking Shakespeare's phrase that 'life was but a flower', demands, 'with all the care and compassion at our command, let us tend the flower of life'.<sup>17</sup> While this is the kind of upbeat message that people had come to expect from Priestley the broadcaster and journalist, his novel *Three Men in New Suits* (1945) openly expresses a concern, voiced prophetically before a more general disaffection with postwar Labour politics could take hold, that promises made during wartime might yet again be broken. The novel *Bright Day* (1946) followed with a more personal take on the same problem, presenting an autobiographical portrait of a film scriptwriter at a dead end, exhausted with war work. Both the protagonist and the century are suffering from a midlife crisis, and the optimism expressed at the end of this novel is extremely

<sup>11</sup> Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), pp. 271, 273–8.

<sup>12</sup> Interview broadcast on Radio 3 on the occasion of Priestley's 80th birthday and reprinted in *The Listener*, 12 September 1974, p. 338. For Priestley's politics, see also Tom Henthorne, 'Priestley's War: Social Change and the British Novel, 1939–1945' *The Midwest Quarterly* (2004) 45(2) pp. 155–67. For a vindication of Priestley as a political thinker, see Roger Fagge, 'From the Postscripts to Admass: J. B. Priestley and the Cold War World' *Media History* (2006) 12(2) pp. 103–15, expanded in his *The Vision of J. B. Priestley*.

<sup>13</sup> J. B. Priestley, 'Too Simple?' in *Delight* (London: Heinemann, 1949), quoted in *The Priestley Companion: Extracts from the Writings of J. B. Priestley Selected by Himself* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1951), pp. 404–6, 406. For Priestley's place in interwar debates about literary value and cultural capital, often referred to as the 'Battle of the Brows', see Ina Habermann, *Myth, Memory and the Middlebrow: Priestley, du Maurier and the Symbolic Form of Englishness* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 31–42.

<sup>14</sup> J. B. Priestley, *Out of the People* (London: Collins, 1941), p. 25.

<sup>15</sup> J. B. Priestley, 'Journey into Daylight' in *The Listener*, 17 May 1945, pp. 543–4. <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 543.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 544.

qualified, with a faint hope for recovery coming from new initiatives in art and culture. As Priestley apparently felt that the situation called for direct action, he stood (unsuccessfully) as independent candidate for Cambridge in the 1945 election, and accepted leading positions in cultural institutions such as the British Theatre Conference and the London Philharmonic Advisory Council, also acting as a UNESCO delegate. In this capacity, with his spirits considerably dampened, he met Jacquetta Hawkes.

Hawkes was born in 1910 in Cambridge, daughter to the Nobel-Prize-winning scientist Sir Frederick Gowland Hopkins. Jacquetta Hopkins was a precocious child who decided that she would become an archaeologist at the age of 9. She went on to study archaeology and anthropology at Newnham College and married the eminent archaeologist Christopher Hawkes. During the war, she did civil service work, first at the Ministry of Post-War Reconstruction and subsequently at the Ministry of Education, where she was responsible for film. One of her many projects was the educational feature film *The Beginning of History* (1946), in which she employed innovative visual techniques and wrote a lyrical script read by Cecil Day-Lewis. Her filmic celebration of Barbara Hepworth, *Figures in a Landscape*, had its premiere at the 1954 Venice Film Festival. Through a passionate relationship with the poet Walter Turner, literary editor of the *Spectator* and music critic for the *New Statesman*, she became part of a highbrow artistic coterie while continuing her work on prehistoric Britain. Increasingly estranged from her husband, she moved in a widening circle of intellectuals and artists, among other things becoming archaeological correspondent for the *Spectator*. Priestley wrote to her during the early days of their affair that they had 'a colossal gap to bridge, but I am absolutely certain that we need each other in a very special way'.<sup>18</sup> In his view, they each had 'a very personal vision of mankind as a whole, you through the long vista of prehistory, and I through drama and politics. We turn into poets, though of different kinds, more or less at the same moment'.<sup>19</sup> Extremely different in background and outlook, Priestley and Hawkes were not obvious partners, but from their respective points of origin they came to share an urgent and holistic vision of human purpose. Undertaking a sustained project of cultural archaeology, they developed what amounts to a philosophy of the 'good life'.

<sup>18</sup> Christine Finn, *A Life On Line: Jacquetta Hawkes, Archaeo-Poet (1910–1996)* (2006), available at <http://humanitieslab.stanford.edu/ChristineFinn/9>, ch. 6 (last accessed 12 February 2017).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

In her capacity as civil servant, Hawkes was involved in setting up the Festival Pavilion for the Festival of Britain in 1951, designing the part which dealt with the land and people of Britain. The displays also featured her remarkable biography of Britain *A Land*, which became a bestseller, and in 1952, she was awarded an OBE in recognition of her services. The success of *A Land* established Hawkes as a well-known public intellectual in the 1950s and 1960s, although she has since been largely forgotten. This obscurity is arguably due to the idiosyncratic way in which she brought together the 'two cultures' of art and science, writing lyrically and philosophically about scientific findings, and bringing a scientifically trained mind to the mysteries of art.<sup>20</sup> In this, as the century progressed, she was increasingly out of sync with both the literary scene and the scientific community. The intense debate about the 'two cultures' began in October 1956 with a *New Statesman* article by the novelist and scientist C. P. Snow (later expanded into his famous Rede lecture of 1959, and published the same year as *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*). Snow argued that the lack of communication between these 'two cultures' was detrimental to the development of modern society. In particular, he criticised the British educational system for a comparative neglect of scientific teaching which was bound to have negative consequences for Britain's standing in a modern concert of nations.

While Hawkes would have endorsed this analysis, she looked primarily to artists to bridge the gap. In her biography of the Priestleys, Diana Collins quotes Hawkes's article 'Art in the Crystalline Society', published in *Penguin New Writing* in 1949, as an early articulation of Hawkes's philosophy. It also presents evidence of her engagement with the emerging 'two cultures' debate. Hawkes argues that artists must 'bring imagination to science, and science to imagination where they meet in the myth'.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, in an article 'The Proper Study of Mankind' written for the journal *Antiquity*, she explains that the technical aspects of science must be,

<sup>20</sup> Hawkes had been thoroughly forgotten, until Christine Finn, now her official biographer, saved her papers after her death and put a biography online in 2006. See her article 'A Rare Bird. Love Her or Hate Her, Jacquetta Hawkes, with Her Intuitive, Humanistic Approach to Archaeology, Still Has Us Talking', in: *Archaeology* (January/February 2001), pp. 38–43. In recent years, interest has revived; see Ina Habermann, 'England an Island. Englishness as a Symbolic Form in Jacquetta Hawkes's *A Land* (1951)' in: Jürgen Kamm and Gerold Sedlmayr (eds), *Insular Mentalities: Mental Maps of Britain* (Passau: Karl Stutz, 2007), pp. 89–102. For a perceptive reading of Hawkes's contribution to the Festival of Britain, see Hayden Lorimer, 'Memoirs for the Earth: Jacquetta Hawkes's Literary Experiments in Deep Time' *Cultural Geographies* (2012) 19(1) pp. 87–106. In 2013, Rachel Cooke devoted a chapter to Hawkes in *Her Brilliant Career: Ten Extraordinary Women of the Fifties* (London: Virago, 2013), pp. 217–57.

<sup>21</sup> Diana Collins, *Time and the Priestleys* (Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1994), p. 166.

as Collins puts it, 'integrated into explorations of the larger meanings of life', which 'prompted much positive response from people around the world'.<sup>22</sup> In practice, this meant that beyond her work as an archaeological correspondent, Hawkes wrote accessible and lyrical books about cutting-edge science, supplementing this with civic engagement. For example, she joined the Council for the Preservation of Rural England, became a founding member of the Homosexual Law Reform Campaign and, most importantly, of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Taking on board her husband's social criticism, she promoted a philosophy that was intensely private, at the same time speaking to the concerns of postwar culture and forming the basis for public and political commitment. Through her influence, the alternative lifestyle that Priestley had been calling for was brought more clearly into focus. Like many intellectuals at the time, the Priestleys had a strong belief in the philosophy of C. G. Jung, conceiving the world in terms of archetypes, of binaries and polar opposites, without conceding, however, that such binaries must necessarily be hierarchical.<sup>23</sup> In her much later autobiography, *A Quest of Love* (1980), Hawkes reiterates her belief that 'woman and man are poles apart, but like North and South, together forming the true axis of our single humanity'.<sup>24</sup> Looking back, she diagnoses phenomena of the modern world, such as the atomic threat and rampant capitalism, as evidence of a preponderant 'masculine principle' that has to be balanced out.

Committed to Labour and the Welfare State, Priestley continued to promote the political ideal of community as an antidote against apathy and discontent in a manner that might well be seen as anachronistic, judging by the standards of *The Good Companions*, which was revived as a feel good film in 1957.<sup>25</sup> As Roger Mellor states, the film was released while Osborne's *The Entertainer*, 'with Laurence Olivier as Archie Rice, was premiered at London's Royal Court Theatre', providing 'a fascinating counterpoint to the essential optimism of *The Good Companions*'.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, Priestley's

drama, cutting edge in terms of theme and dramatic form before the war with plays such as *Time and the Conways* (1937), *I Have Been Here Before* (1937) and *Johnson over Jordan* (1939), looked out of date in comparison with Osborne, Beckett and the activities of the Royal Court Theatre.<sup>27</sup> His novel *Festival at Farbridge*, published in 1951 and intended to support the Festival of Britain, although reasonably popular with readers, received mixed reviews.<sup>28</sup> With hindsight, the Festival of Britain is often seen as the 'last gasp'<sup>29</sup> of Labour's efforts to build a satisfactory postwar society, and Priestley felt called to promote it. Planned as a 'large-scale comic novel about postwar England',<sup>30</sup> *Festival at Farbridge* presents a variation on the story of *The Good Companions*: in the sleepy South Midlands town of Farbridge, a mixed group of characters, led by the resourceful Commodore Horace Tribe, team up to combat the general inertia with spirited festival preparations. Although the novel was a Book Society choice for May, it was not the book significantly to capture the mood of the time. That book, *A Land*, was written by Jacquetta Hawkes.

*A Land* is a 'biography' and celebration of Britain, beginning with the creation of the earth, then zooming in on Britain, and fusing geography, geology, topography, climate and cultural history into one holistic vision. As Hawkes explains:

... the image I have sought to evoke is of an entity, the land of Britain, in which past and present, nature, man and art appear all in one piece. I see modern men enjoying a unity with trilobites of a nature more deeply significant than anything at present understood in the processes of biological evolution; I see a land as much affected by the creations of its poets and painters as by changes of climate and vegetation. The nature of this unity cannot be stated, for it remains always just beyond the threshold of intellectual comprehension.<sup>31</sup>

For Rachel Cooke, Hawkes's *A Land* 'hums with something akin to what we would call New Age-ism',<sup>32</sup> but this assessment is misleading. Hawkes

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>23</sup> Early in their relationship, Priestley and Hawkes collaborated on the experimental Jungian 'platform drama' *Dragon's Mouth: A Dramatic Quartet in Two Parts* (London: Heinemann, 1952), in which four characters represented Jung's functions of sensation, emotion, intellect and intuition. Priestley also wrote an article entitled 'Jung and the Writer' for the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1954.

<sup>24</sup> Jacquetta Hawkes, *A Quest of Love* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1980), p. 15.

<sup>25</sup> The first film version of *The Good Companions* was directed by Victor Saville in 1933, starring Jessie Matthews and John Gielgud. This was remade as a musical comedy in 1957, directed by J. Lee Thompson, and starring Eric Portman and Celia Johnson.

<sup>26</sup> Roger Mellor, 'The Good Companions – The Movie (1957)' *Journal of the Priestley Society* (2000) 1, pp. 34–9, 36.

<sup>27</sup> This also applies to a certain extent to Priestley's best-known play *An Inspector Calls*, first performed in the Soviet Union in 1945 and in London in 1946. Towards the end of the twentieth century, the play was rediscovered and is now seen as a classic. Vincent Brome, *J. B. Priestley* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1988), p. 293.

<sup>28</sup> Brome, *J. B. Priestley*, pp. 334–7.

<sup>29</sup> John Braine, *J. B. Priestley* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1978), p. 131.

<sup>30</sup> J. P. Priestley, *Margin Released: A Writer's Reminiscences and Reflections* (London: Heinemann, 1962), p. 194.

<sup>31</sup> Jacquetta Hawkes, *A Land* (London: The Cresset Press, 1951), p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> Cooke, *Her Brilliant Career*, p. 222. This view appears to be shared to a certain extent by those who re-package the book as 'nature' writing. It was republished in 2012 in the Collins Nature Library; see



was an expert on prehistoric Britain, archaeology and ancient culture, and while extravagant, there is nothing bogus about her holistic view. Discussing stones and building materials in *A Land*, she states: 'Anyone who enters a Gothic cathedral must be aware that he is walking back into the primeval forest of existence, with birds, beasts, monsters and angels looking through the foliage.'<sup>33</sup> Hawkes considers fauna and flora of prehistoric times to be residual in sedimentary materials that have been used over centuries by artists to create a monument to religious faith, which enables contact with infinite layers of historical time. In her chapter 'Digression on Rocks, Soils, and Men', Hawkes discusses the cultural significance of building materials. Characteristically, the Victorians prefer to build with granite: 'the substance of wild moorlands was transformed into kerbstones, railway bridges, into post offices, public fountains and public houses, family fish-shops, and, above all, into banks'.<sup>34</sup> All these observations add up, as I have argued elsewhere, to a conception of cultural identity, and in Hawkes's case, English cultural identity, as a symbolic form which integrates the material world and the processes of perceiving and shaping it into a coherent cultural practice.<sup>35</sup> A visualisation of this unity is effected in the 'organic architecture' of Frank Lloyd Wright and artists promoted by Hawkes, such as Graham Sutherland, Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth. Through this lyrical approach to science, Hawkes seeks to bridge the gap between the 'two cultures'. Hawkes felt strongly about 'the similarity between the imaginative processes of poet and scientist', as she puts it in a tribute to her father.<sup>36</sup> Both needed intuition, a particularly intense visual imagination and a capacity to delight in the beauties of the natural world. Properly applied, Hawkes opines, these faculties also cannot be pressed into the service of destruction, but they will by their very nature be life-enhancing.

### From the Festival of Britain to Suez (1951–1956): Outsider Insiders

After their marriage in 1953, Hawkes and Priestley settled down to a joint writing life, and Hawkes, having found her voice in *A Land*, produced the second of her wide-ranging cultural archaeologies, *Man on Earth*

Robert Macfarlane's review in the *Guardian* on 11 May 2012 and his introduction to the new edition, where he sees *A Land* as a 'missing link' in the history of environmental writing.

<sup>33</sup> Hawkes, *A Land*, p. 141. <sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>35</sup> Habermann, 'England an Island' and *Myth, Memory and the Middlebrow*.

<sup>36</sup> Jacquetta Hawkes, 'Gowland Hopkins and Scientific Imagination' in *The Listener* (2 February 1950), p. 191.

(1954). Again, there is a focus on the development and heightening of human consciousness. Hawkes's poetic approach to science leads her to dismiss the received theory of evolution as too narrow: 'One cannot see landscape through a microscope.'<sup>37</sup> Looking at an Argus pheasant in the Natural History Museum, she becomes convinced that there are limits to what science can explain:

Standing in front of this prodigious fantasy of nature I found certainty had taken possession of me: the sexual selection of the hen standing primly near her mate could never even in millions of years have conjured up so wonderful a creation. Dear, demure hen pheasant, how could your natural preference for some dash and pretence in your mate produce this creation which would put Le Roi Soleil quite in the shade?<sup>38</sup>

In Hawkes's view, people need to transcend the limitations of Neo-Darwinism in order to form a more adequate idea of their being on earth.

The next item in Priestley and Hawkes's cultural archaeology was collaborative: in 1954, they visited the American South-West and wrote the travel(dia)logue *Journey Down a Rainbow*, which is dedicated to C. G. Jung and epitomises many of the authors' concerns with contemporary society. Their aim was to compare the ancient culture of the Pueblo Indians with the United States, which, as the most advanced urban Western civilisation, provided 'the social and cultural pattern of the mid-twentieth century',<sup>39</sup> thus anticipating the binary opposition that the structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss was to set up in 1959 between 'hot' and 'cold' societies, that is, societies characterised by change with a focus on history, and societies characterised by stasis, with a focus on myth.<sup>40</sup> Hawkes went to New Mexico to study Pueblo culture, while Priestley went to Texas, Dallas and Houston, to anatomise what he came to call 'Admass': 'the whole system of an increasing productivity, plus inflation, plus a rising standard of material living, plus high-pressure advertising and salesmanship, plus mass communications, plus cultural democracy and the creation of the mass mind, the mass man'.<sup>41</sup> Priestley's

<sup>37</sup> Jacquetta Hawkes, *Man on Earth* (London: The Cresset Press, 1954), p. 26. <sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 25–6.

<sup>39</sup> J. B. Priestley and Jacquetta Hawkes, *Journey Down a Rainbow* (London: Heinemann-Cresset, 1957), p. viii.

<sup>40</sup> See the interview in G. Charbonnier (ed.), *Conversations with Claude Lévi-Strauss*, transl. by John and Doreen Weightman (London: Cape, 1969).

<sup>41</sup> Priestley and Hawkes, *Journey Down a Rainbow*, p. 44. The 'empire' of *Admass* includes the 'kingdoms' of *Nomadmass*, inhabited by modern nomads tied to their cars, *Hashadmass*, denoting a bogus mixture of cultural styles, French, Italian, Spanish, Chinese, in areas such as food and architecture, and *Luxad*, the realm of conspicuous spending and the performance of cultural roles, dreamt up by the copywriters (pp. 43–5, 45). The equivalent of *Admass* 'behind the Iron Curtain' (p. 44) is

cultural analysis goes beyond a reflex reaction against the modern world, even though he deliberately overstates his case in order to throw into relief the contrast with Hawkes's evocation of Pueblo culture. One powerful symbol of Admass is a 'forty-storey bank building . . . sheathed in aluminium', glaring in the sun and erected at the cost of more than 25 million dollars, together with the 'gold-coloured ice-cream' offered at its monstrous 'formal dedication'.<sup>42</sup> Yet the fundamental alienation of capitalist over-reachers 'in oil' only gains its full significance when seen in contrast with Hawkes's private symbol for continuity, the ceremonial space of the *kiva*, 'a sacred underground chamber'.<sup>43</sup> Acknowledging the precarious existence of traditional societies in the modern world, Priestley and Hawkes set the phallic skyscraper, epitomising 'society entirely dominated by the masculine principle' against the womb-like *kiva*. Western alienation contrasts with the wholeness and 'universal participation' characteristic of the cultural continuity in traditional societies, performed, for example, through dances which 'express in the language of poetry the truth of man's unity with nature, the truth that science repeats to us, curing our delusions of grandeur'. These dances, they argue, 'offer us visions for which science has no eyes'.<sup>44</sup>

Despite their deliberate lightness of touch, the Priestleys are careful to cast themselves in the role of informed observers: Hawkes indulges in anthropological thick description, while Priestley, discussing the ills of mechanistic society, makes reference to Norbert Wiener, pioneer of cybernetics and advocate of automatisisation, and to Alan Valentine's book *The Age of Conformity* (1954), thus showing his familiarity with contemporary debates about American social politics.<sup>45</sup> For Priestley and Hawkes, American urban society, as the epitome of masculinist Western civilisation, sins against the 'green Earth', and against women, who are bribed and bullied into submission. As Priestley observes, 'defeated woman strips and teases'.<sup>46</sup> Finally, *Journey Down a Rainbow* leads to the Priestleys' principal concern, shortly before the launch of CND, with 'the society of the

hydrogen bomb'.<sup>47</sup> In his tongue-in-cheek 'Lay Sermon to Nomadmass', Priestley sketches a positive vision which revisits his earlier engagement with multi-dimensional time – a concept dramatised in his 'Time Plays'. The 'Lay Sermon' argues that in order to achieve their full potential, humans must transcend a restrictive notion of progress and linear time:

All moments of noble living, the ecstasy of love, the compassion and understanding that enter into every genuine personal relationship, the creation and rapt appreciation of great art, the adventures of the mind among significant ideas, even an amazed wondering about ourselves, all demand this unknown dimension, this timeless being. Every greatly heightened state of consciousness involves eternity.<sup>48</sup>

This statement may well stand as a brief summary of the Priestleys' credo, and the philosophical basis of their political activities. Just as the Suez crisis was powerfully bringing home to the British people that their country's role as a global player had been played out, the Priestleys opened up their horizon to vast times and spaces for the heightened consciousness to roam. It is no coincidence at this point that they are looking towards the new global leader America, dangerously locked into another binary, cold on both sides, and yet prone to explode.

According to the Priestleys, conscious human beings should read nature and their environment as a cultural palimpsest and take heart from its richness, longevity and resilience. Significantly, this feeling of the richness of life is absent from Los Alamos, 'cradle of the first atomic bomb',<sup>49</sup> which Hawkes visits during her tour. While the laboratories are of course surrounded by high fences of barbed wire and off limits for visitors, the pleasant bungalows for employees, painted in pastel colours, are showcased as ideal homes. For Hawkes, however, they have an impermanent and fraudulent feel. Surmising that people who live in a city that has 'a destructive purpose at its very heart' would inevitably become corrupted, she registers the 'paternalism, the standardization and model planning, the virtuousness of everything that leads only to the ghastly feeling of being institutionalized for life'.<sup>50</sup> Looking at the menacing Black Mesa, Hawkes wishes that 'Los Alamos had been built on its summit, then we'd have the devil's stronghold without disguise'.<sup>51</sup> Modern evil is clean and deceptive,

*Propmass*, dominated by direct propaganda. See also Priestley's satire on advertisement and the media *The Image Men* (London: Allison & Busby, 1984), first published as *Out of Town and London End* (London: Heinemann, 1968).

<sup>42</sup> Priestley and Hawkes, *Journey Down a Rainbow*, p. 36. <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 46.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 27, 60, 60.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74. For a detailed discussion of these issues, see Robert Genter, *Late Modernism: Art, Culture, and Politics in Cold War America* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

<sup>46</sup> Priestley and Hawkes, *Journey Down a Rainbow*, pp. 224, 112.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30. Priestley also briefly jibes at the Beat generation: 'Their grandparents left their homes to break the prairie: these go to break the monotony. But unless they are fairly clever, determined, courageous, they will arrive in *Nomadmass*' (p. 130).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134. <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181. <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 184, 185. <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

in tune with the duplicities of the Cold War, but it must be identified and resisted. In her activities for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), Hawkes acknowledges that there is only a chance of this 'if we can find the physical, mental, and above all moral courage to resist what is being done in our name. If we cannot, then we may deserve to burn.'<sup>52</sup>

### From CND to the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (1957–1963): Campaigning Sages

Throughout the 1950s, the Priestleys embraced political causes and committed themselves to the elaboration of a positive vision for society. This commitment proceeded from a belief, supported by Jung's psychology, in a duty that conscious human beings have on earth. Priestley famously helped to launch the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament with his Article 'Britain and the Nuclear Bombs' in the *New Statesman* of 2 November 1957, which powerfully denounced the received 'wisdoms' of the Cold War. After overwhelming responses from readers, the editor Kingsley Martin took the initiative to combine forces with another group of prominent people, including Bertrand Russell and Canon Collins, who were protesting against nuclear weapon tests, and the Campaign was officially launched early in 1958. Hawkes took part in the Aldermaston Marches and formed a women's group, publishing the above-quoted pamphlet *Women Ask Why*, which includes a contribution by the young Iris Murdoch.<sup>53</sup> As Jodi Burkett argues in *Constructing Post-Imperial Britain*, middle-class radicals such as the CND founders felt a particular responsibility for action, seeking to replace Britain's waning global dominance with a claim to moral leadership after the demise of the empire.<sup>54</sup> Priestley withdrew when the organisation left behind its bourgeois intellectual origins and the Marxist element became stronger, although Hawkes stayed on to produce a somewhat oblique contribution to the movement,

<sup>52</sup> Jacquetta Hawkes, 'The Way Out' in *Women Ask Why. An Intelligent Woman's Guide to Nuclear Disarmament, Reproducing Three Scripts from the Meeting for Women at the Central Hall on January 15, 1962* (London: Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, 1962), pp. 11–16, 11.

<sup>53</sup> Murdoch was a friend of the family and collaborated with Priestley on a dramatisation of her novel *A Severed Head*. The play was staged successfully in 1963 in Bristol and at the Criterion Theatre in London.

<sup>54</sup> Jodi Burkett, *Constructing Post-Imperial Britain. Britishness, 'Race' and the Radical Left in the 1960s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013). For classic accounts of CND, see Richard Taylor and Colin Pritchard, *The Protest Makers. The British Nuclear Disarmament of 1958–1965: Twenty Years On* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1980); and Paul Byrne, *The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament* (London: Croom Helm, 1988). For another recent study of the impact of the end of empire on British society, see Matthew Whittle, *Post-War British Literature and the 'End of Empire'* (London: Palgrave, 2016).

the book *Man and the Sun* (1962). This comprehensive history covers the time from the sun's creation and human beings' religious relationship with it up to the scientists' disastrous attempts at imitation. Towards the end, Hawkes sharply condemns the tests which took place in 1952 in the Marshall Islands: 'Man's first artificial sun rose above the Pacific, but it was not a star of peace. The Russians watched their own sun rise within a year. So now two chosen people, each confident that they were the children of light, confronted one another across the globe with suns in their bandoliers.'<sup>55</sup> Despite the magnitude of the threat, Hawkes remains optimistic, concluding that future sunrises 'may awaken us to a Good Morning'.<sup>56</sup> She may have felt justified in her optimism when, after the hairbreadth escape of the Cuban missile crisis, the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty was passed in 1963.

In *British Fiction and the Cold War*, Andrew Hammond argues that literary criticism still tends to underestimate both the power of Cold War discourse and its ubiquity in fictional writing. Certainly, the Priestleys' emphasis on wholeness, emerging from a sophisticated notion of the 'good life', can also be seen as a paradoxical result of the magnitude of the atomic threat which cast its shadow over postwar society.<sup>57</sup> They believed that a philosophical and cultural reaction against the threat of annihilation could not be piecemeal; it had to be cosmic in proportion, while yet embracing a Keatsian notion of 'negative capability': the ability to exist in 'uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason'.<sup>58</sup> As Hawkes states in *Man on Earth*, a psychological balance must be found between the tragic individual life and the enjoyment of mind and the senses, embracing the ignorance that is 'one of our few certainties. No religion, no philosophical or scientific system claiming any absolute or exclusive knowledge of truth is proper to our condition as inmates of one speck in a universe the vastness and wonder of which even our trifling minds are beginning faintly to apprehend'.<sup>59</sup> Priestley had already dramatised such sentiments in 1939 in *Johnson over Jordan*. After

<sup>55</sup> Jacquetta Hawkes, *Man and the Sun* (London: The Cresset Press, 1962), p. 239. <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>57</sup> Priestley's Cold War novel is *Saturn over the Water* (London: Companion Book Club, 1961), where a sinister organisation with a global network of laboratories and business enterprises, whose sign is Saturn over the Water, is plotting to destroy all humankind with a view to creating a clean slate for a new beginning. At the end of this mysterious novel, artists and creative people are gathering to break the 'Saturnian Chain'.

<sup>58</sup> Keats famously argues this in a letter to his brothers on 21 December 1817. See John Keats, *The Complete Poetical Works and Letters of John Keats* (Cambridge: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1899), p. 277.

<sup>59</sup> Hawkes, *Man on Earth*, p. 246.

his death and a surreal time in limbo, the businessman Robert Johnson is fetched away by a mysterious, angelic figure. He has his moment of insight:

I have been a foolish, greedy and ignorant man;  
Yet I have had my time beneath the sun and stars;  
I have known the returning strength and sweetness of the seasons,  
Blossom on the branch and the ripening of fruit,  
...

The earth is nobler than the world we have built upon it;  
The earth is long-suffering, solid, fruitful;  
The world still shifting, dark, half-evil.  
But what have I done that I should have a better world,  
Even though there is in me something that will not rest  
Until it sees Paradise ... ?<sup>60</sup>

After this, Johnson walks into the Unknown, an inconclusive ending that highlights the role of literature in a context of philosophical enquiry. Literature, with its use of imagery and multiple narratives, can afford to embrace negative capability. In *Literature and Western Man* (1960), Priestley argues that the inner and outer worlds must be brought into harmony, giving voice to the belief 'that Man lives, under God, in a great mystery, which is what we found the original masters of our literature, Shakespeare and Rabelais, Cervantes and Montaigne, proclaiming at the very start of this journey of Western Man'.<sup>61</sup> Against the urge of Promethean transgressive ambition, then, the Priestleys set a Jungian 'intuition' that not only refuses to be undermined by insecurity about intimations of the spiritual life, but also paves the way for a New Humanism, or a 'New Existentialism', in Colin Wilson's terms. At first glance, Wilson would not be expected to have much in common with the Priestleys. However, at the end of *The Outsider*, as Priestley did not fail to note in his review, Wilson sketches a way out of the 'outsider's' dilemma, by making recourse to William Blake and the visionary tradition that had some currency in the 1950s. 'Blake has solved the Outsider's problems',<sup>62</sup> suggests Wilson, but while 'Blake's way' might provide a symbolism to express the visionary experience, it cannot make sense of 'a mechanical civilization with atom bombs and electronic brains'.<sup>63</sup>

Wilson's emphasis on the visionary experience leads him, as it led Priestley, to George Gurdjieff and P. D. Ouspensky and their teaching

<sup>60</sup> J. B. Priestley, 'Johnson over Jordan' in *The Plays of J. B. Priestley* (London: Heinemann, 1948), vol. 1, pp. 335–6.

<sup>61</sup> J. B. Priestley, *Literature and Western Man* (London: Heinemann, 1960), p. 456.

<sup>62</sup> Wilson, *The Outsider*, p. 238. <sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240.

of the 'fourth way'. This technique of meditation was seen as a focused way to achieve higher consciousness, transcending the ordinary three dimensions of human experience and opening up the fourth dimension of time past and future, as well as alternative dimensions related to the multiverse hypothesis that the American physicist Hugh Everett elaborated in 1957. In a television interview, Priestley had asked viewers to send him accounts of their experiences of strange coincidences and precognitive dreams. He discusses people's enthusiastic responses in his book *Man and Time* (1964), in which he draws heavily on the theories of Jung, J. W. Dunne and Ouspensky, stating that 'our lives are not contained within passing Time – we may not be immortal beings – I do not think we are – but we are better than creatures carried on that single-line track to the slaughter-house'.<sup>64</sup> Expanding consciousness on earth thus becomes a political task: 'We cannot perform this service, just as we cannot even enjoy a good life, unless our minds and personalities are free to develop in their own fashion, outside the iron moulds of totalitarian states and systems, narrow and authoritarian churches, and equally narrow and dogmatic scientific-positivist opinion'.<sup>65</sup> Tying these general remarks about the nature of human consciousness back to British politics, Priestley advocates a return to the visionary and creative forces represented by the 'Britain of the Unicorn'. Presenting a symbolic reading of the British coat of arms, Priestley argues that the old imperial lion has had its day, and only the 'Unicorn' qualities – creativity, magic, eccentricity and imagination – will be able to stop Britain's decline.<sup>66</sup>

Setting Britain in the context of the wider Cold War, the ultimate trajectory of the Priestley-Hawkes philosophy is a vision of a common humanity, united in a mystical union, to bring about a better future. That this vision emerged not from the margins, but from sober, established intellectuals, is vitally important for our understanding of postwar British society. In their commitment to peace, equality and ecology, the Priestleys anticipate opinions voiced in the civil rights and 'green' movements of the late 1960s and beyond.<sup>67</sup> So while there is a recognisable shift of gears in the early 1960s, 'between the end of the "Chatterley" ban / and the Beatles' first

<sup>64</sup> Quoted in Collins, *Time and the Priestleys*, p. 212.

<sup>65</sup> J. B. Priestley, *Man and Time* (London/Amsterdam: Aldus Books in association with W. H. Allen, 1964), p. 308.

<sup>66</sup> J. B. Priestley, 'The Unicorn' in *Thoughts in the Wilderness*, pp. 162–8.

<sup>67</sup> For a discussion of ecology and the Left, see James Radcliffe, 'Eco-Anarchism, the New Left and Romanticism' in John Rignall and H. Gustav Klaus (eds), *Ecology and the Literature of the British Left: The Red and the Green* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 193–206. Radcliffe focuses on Theodore Roscak.

LP', as Larkin puts it in *Annus Mirabilis*, the problems had been around for some time, and so had a vision of the remedies. It is crucial not to reduce the 1950s to a sort of accident that intervened between wartime pressures and the 'Swinging 60s', but to realise that, even if it was ultimately unable to transform the fundamental shape of society, a distinctive idea of wholeness, and wholesomeness, was projected after the war whose practical side was the Welfare State. For postwar Britain, the Priestley-Hawkes philosophy combines Priestley's commitment to social critique and communalism with Hawkes's vision of a 'third culture' fusing science and art into a new spirituality. It was not, however, the only mystical and holistic vision to emerge from the centre of English culture in the 1950s, nor was it the most influential in the long run. This distinction is reserved for J. R. R. Tolkien's more fanciful as well as politically much more conservative *Lord of the Rings* (1954–5) which celebrates re-enchantment and salvation through charismatic kingship, looking back to an interwar English ruralism which leaves readers, after the great pageant of kings, orcs, elves and wizards has departed, with a vision of gardening Hobbits. When Priestley spoke after the war of tending the flower of life, this may not have been what he had in mind.

## CHAPTER II

*Prizing the Nation: Postwar Children's Fiction*

Lucy Pearson

At the start of Arthur Ransome's *Pigeon Post* (1936), Nancy Blackett complains that her absent adventurer uncle 'might just as well have stayed at home', asking, 'Why shouldn't he look for things here?'<sup>1</sup> It is fitting that this question is posed by the winner of the inaugural Carnegie Medal, for it expresses an attitude which was to characterise the first two decades of Carnegie prize-winners. These books 'look for things at home', both in seeking to promote British children's fiction and – more fundamentally – in mapping a sense of nationhood which is predicated on rediscovering history, heritage and the rural landscape. Jacqueline Rose has argued that children's fiction holds out the possibility of 'a primitive or lost state to which the child has special access', and the long association between the figure of the child and the natural world makes children's literature a potent venue for a construction of nationhood which is built around a pre-industrial past.<sup>2</sup> However, these books are not simply regressive or nostalgic: in employing the figure of the child, they look towards the future as well as the past, presenting change as both possible and desirable.

The years 1940 to 1960 straddle what have traditionally been seen as two distinct periods in the history of British children's literature: the 1950s, widely hailed as the beginning of a 'second golden age' of writing for children which continued throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s; and the preceding forty years, traditionally viewed as a somewhat disappointing era for British children's books.<sup>3</sup> A succession of commentators have characterised the children's literature of the interwar period and the years

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Ransome, *Pigeon Post* (London: Random House, 2001), p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan, or, the Impossibility of Children's Fiction*, rev. edn (London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> The nineteenth century saw the 'first golden age', which is associated with the emergence of children's literature focusing on the amusement as well as the education of the child reader (although inevitably, this too is now a contested notion). Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) is perhaps the most prominent text of the 'first golden age'.