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Listen to This:
Sound Film and the Late Modernist Novel in Britain,
1929-1949

Lara Ehrenfried

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English Studies &

Centre for Visual Arts and Culture

Durham University

2019

Abstract

Listen to This: Sound Film and the Late Modernist Novel in Britain,

1929-1949

Lara Ehrenfried

The introduction of synchronised sound to the British film industry presents a watershed moment in the cultural history of Britain by marking a further step in the development of an audio-visual media and entertainment experience in the twentieth century. In parallel, the literary marketplace of the 1930s and 1940s underwent significant change with a generation of late modernist writers gaining momentum on the literary scene. Broadly speaking, these writers are neither comfortably aligned with the first generation modernists of the early twentieth century, nor with conventional “Auden Generation” accounts of the 1930s. This thesis connects these two developments and brings them into dialogue.

Using the arrival of the first feature-length British talking film, Hitchcock’s *Blackmail* (1929), as a starting point for mapping a newly emerging media context, this thesis analyses the relationship between film and the late modernist novel in 1930s and 1940s Britain through a methodological commitment to *reading for sound*. This analytic strategy maintains the individual specificity of film and the novel as two distinct media forms: it does not read fiction as if it were a film. Instead, this work builds on sound studies, film studies, and literary studies to develop a new approach for the comparative study of media. I argue that a reading for sound discloses how synchronised sound film and the late modernist novel develop in parallel throughout the 1930s and 1940s and that these two media share a number of concerns regarding their future, politics, aesthetics, and their status in the media system. Discussing case studies of musical revue, film noir, documentary, and Ministry of Information-sponsored war propaganda alongside novels by Patrick Hamilton, Elizabeth Bowen, George Orwell, Lewis Grassic Gibbon, Jean Rhys, Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, and Walter Greenwood, this thesis demonstrates how studying sound productively reframes and extends our understanding of late modernist fiction and of the relationship between sound film and the novel in the twentieth century.

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The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the author's prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

This thesis follows the MHRA style and referencing guidelines (3rd edn). For the purpose of clarity, the fan magazine *The Picturegoer* is referenced by giving volume and issue number as well as month and year of publication.

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Introduction

But, in 1929, the fascination of radio was nothing to the great innovation in the cinema. 'Have you heard *The Singing Fool* yet?' Eric Williams asked me. That *heard* was operative; we took for granted that we could see.

Anthony Burgess, *Little Wilson and Big God*

"Click!"

In the first volume of his autobiography *Little Wilson and Big God* (1986), Anthony Burgess tells his readers of early childhood visits to the cinema.¹ Although Burgess, as a writer, only came of age in the 1950s, his memories of visiting the cinema with his father to *hear* an early film with synchronised sound provides a glimpse of the fascination with being able to listen to synchronised dialogue, sound effects, and music on screen for the very first time. Indeed, Burgess, for whom "hearing film" was such a memorable event, was in very good company in the plush seats of the newly built "dream palaces": Jean Rhys, Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, Elizabeth Bowen, Lewis Grassic Gibbon, Patrick Hamilton, and many other British writers of the 1930s and 1940s were there when *it* happened, when synchronised sound joined the movies, creating an unprecedented entertainment experience that would considerably reconfigure the British media system and the way people spent their leisure time.

Given the lasting impression early sound film made on the young Burgess, readers might wonder whether the experience of sound-on-film, and the increasing sophistication and consolidation of sound film as a staple feature of the 1930s and 1940s media system, had any kind of bearing on or relationship with writing? A starting point for such reflections might reasonably be one of the best remembered novels of the 1940s, Patrick Hamilton's *Hangover Square* (1941), a text to which I will return in chapter four of this thesis. The novel, set in 1939, tells the story of George Harvey Bone and his obsession with the cold-hearted Netta. George's life is friendless, so he fills it with drink, occasional encounters with a stray

¹ Anthony Burgess, *Little Wilson and Big God* (London: Vintage, 2012), pp. 103-104.

cat, and lonely wanderings through his familiar haunts in London's Earls Court. He suffers from schizophrenia, aggravated by the cruel treatment he receives from Netta and her circle of fascist friends. The novel conveys George's illness as follows:

Click! ... Here it was again! He was walking along the cliff at Hunstanton and it had come again ... Click! ... Or would the word 'snap' or 'crack' describe it better? It was a noise inside his head, and yet it was not a noise. It was the sound which a noise makes when it abruptly ceases: it had a temporarily deafening effect. [...] It was as though a shutter had fallen. It had fallen noiselessly [...]. It had come over his brain as a sudden film [...]. [...] A film. Yes, it was like the other sort of film, too – a 'talkie'. It was as though he had been watching a talking film, and all at once the sound-track had failed. The figures on the screen continued to move, to behave more or less logically; but they were figures in a new, silent, indescribably eerie world. Life, in fact, which had been for him a moment ago a 'talkie', had all at once become a silent film. And there was no music.²

George experiences mental illness as the abrupt breakdown of the soundtrack in a talking film. The novel introduces a silence-sound dichotomy by opposing two semantic fields: sound, noise, and the onomatopoeic "snap", "crack", and "click" are used alongside words such as "deafening", "noiselessly", and "silent". George conceives of his life as a "talkie" in which, occasionally, the "sound-track" fails. The switch from sound to silence underscores how George's perception of reality is shaken, how his illness transports him into a surreal world that feels far removed from his everyday life. Whenever George falls into his schizophrenic "moods", as he calls them, this shift is represented as something akin to a loss of hearing, a disorienting sensory deprivation. During his schizophrenic episodes, George moves in a "noiseless world [...] as though he had suddenly gone deaf".³ These phases or episodes become more frequent as George's illness intensifies in the course of the novel. The interplay between film sound and its occasional failure is an instrumental part of the novel's strategy of representation, employed to narrate consciousness and the disrupted experience of everyday life for a character struggling with mental illness.

Hangover Square is commonly described as a late modernist novel which maps out both the psyche of a schizophrenic murderer as well as his everyday routines and

² Patrick Hamilton, *Hangover Square: A Story of Darkest Earl's Court* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 15.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

movements.⁴ The novel experiments with free indirect discourse, stream-of-consciousness narration, fragmentation, and collage which may remind readers of earlier, “high” modernist writing.⁵ The text weaves together realist attention to everyday life, modernism’s interest in psychology, and experimental forms of narration, exploring new ways of narrating consciousness which are fundamentally connected to the experience of Hamilton’s contemporary mediascape. I shall argue that this is a key point which makes Hamilton’s work both innovative and distinctly late modernist in character: he creates a new literary idiom for narrating consciousness which derives from the shift from silent to sound film in the late 1920s. The novel suggests that the advent of sound film, and its status in the 1930s mediascape, give rise to a new way of representing consciousness in Hamilton’s writing. *Hangover Square* draws the reader’s attention to the role of sound, and particularly to the role of the film soundtrack, and establishes an intricate connection between forms of literary representation in the novel and the imaginative possibilities derived from the experience of synchronised sound in the cinema.

Hamilton’s novel raises a number of questions about the relationship between sound film and the novel. Why does it use sound and the shift from silent to sound film to convey a character’s mental illness? In what way does film sound, and its failure or breakdown, offer Hamilton a specific way of narrating consciousness in the socio-cultural and technological context of the 1930s and 1940s media system? Is this a feature only found

⁴ See Laura Frost, *The Problem with Pleasure: Modernism and its Discontents* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), pp. 162-208 for a discussion of both Hamilton and Jean Rhys as late modernist writers. See also John Mepham, “Varieties of Modernism, Varieties of Incomprehension: Patrick Hamilton and Elizabeth Bowen”, in *British Fiction after Modernism: The Novel at Mid-Century*, ed. by Marina MacKay and Lyndsey Stonebridge (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2007), pp. 59-76.

⁵ On the modernist novel and discussions of “high” modernism, see, for instance, Marina MacKay, “The Modernist ‘Novel’”, in *The Cambridge History of Modernism*, ed. by Vincent Sherry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 307-325; David Trotter, “The Modernist Novel”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, 2nd edn, ed. by Michael Levenson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 69-98; *The Cambridge Companion to the Modernist Novel*, ed. by Morag Shiach (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Pericles Lewis, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 95-108. See also Armstrong’s excellent discussion on “Mapping Modernism” in Tim Armstrong, *Modernism: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), pp. 23-47.

in *Hangover Square* or is Hamilton's novel possibly indicative of a broader cultural concern with sound, and specifically film sound, which, in turn, interacts with the novel's strategies of representation? What exactly was the relationship between the novel and sound film at the time of *Hangover Square*'s publication? And, crucially, why should we attend to the fact that a fictional character of a 1940s novel experiences his life as if he were dipping in and out of the soundtrack of a talking film?

Using the arrival of the first feature-length British talking film, Alfred Hitchcock's *Blackmail* (1929), as a starting point for mapping a newly emerging media context, this thesis analyses the relationship between film and the novel in 1930s and 1940s Britain through a methodological commitment to *reading for sound*. In this study, I use the introduction of synchronised sound film and the parallel emergence of the late modernist novel as a test case for demonstrating the productivity of my methodological approach. The aims of this thesis are therefore twofold: first, to show how reading for sound can be productively mobilised as a method for conducting a comparative analysis of two media forms in a historically specific context. And second, for the test case of synchronised sound film and the late modernist novel, to demonstrate how these two historically specific media forms address and negotiate some of the same fundamental questions: what is their status, their present and future, in a rapidly expanding media system? How do they define themselves on the back of, but also against, their literary and cinematic predecessors? How do they negotiate some of the aesthetic, social, political, and economic pressures of their time? And, centrally, how do they deal with sound in an increasingly audio-visual mediascape? My case studies explore how films and novels of the period responded to these questions. I argue that the "lateness" of the late modernist novel is not diametrically opposed to the "beginning" of sound film, but that these two media forms, in fact, share the above concerns and develop in parallel throughout the 1930s and 1940s. In what follows, I will explain the methodological approach of *reading for sound* and then map out the fields

pertaining to my test case in this thesis: late modernism and sound film. The final part of this introduction will provide a brief overview of my chapters.

Reading for Sound

The methodological commitment to *reading for sound* follows, broadly, a two-step process: first, it examines closely the deployment of sound in films and the novels and, second, it extrapolates from these findings what a specific use of or reference to sound tells us about the novel and film within the media system of the period. I examine how these two media forms negotiate their status and future, how they respond to the new challenge of sound, and how they negotiate some of the aesthetic and ideological pressures of their time. In this thesis, sound not only functions as an object of study, but also as a way of reflecting on issues that, on the surface, do not seem to be about sound at all.

Such a reading, admittedly, poses specific problems that derive from the nature of its object of study. Sound historian Jonathan Sterne reflects on the specific difficulties of studying sound:

If our goal is to describe the historical dynamism of sound or to consider sound from the vantage point of cultural theory, we must move just beyond its shifting borders—just outside sound into the vast world of things that we think of as not being about sound at all. The history of sound is at different moments strangely silent, strangely gory, strangely visual, and always contextual. This is because that elusive inside world of sound—the sonorous, the auditory, the heard, the very density of sonic experience—emerges and becomes perceptible only through its exteriors. If there is no “mere” or innocent description of sound, then there is no “mere” or innocent description of sonic experience. [...] Sound is an artifact of the messy and political human sphere.⁶

Sterne reminds us that the experience of sound is personal and individual, but also historically and socially constructed, often disclosing itself “only through its exteriors”. For this reason, Sterne rejects approaches that merely seek a speculative reconstruction of

⁶ Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 13.

subjective listening experience.⁷ Instead, he proposes a combination of social, cultural, and technological lines of enquiry that attend to this “outside world” of sound, thus producing a “constructivist and contextualist” history of sound and sound reproduction.⁸

Unless preserved by recording, we cannot hear the sounds of the past. Even when a recording survives, our listening experience will be different from any prior listening experience of the same sound due to the difference in our historical situatedness and the individuality of our sensory perception. Each listening experience of the past, then, is a unique, historical event that can never be fully recovered or re-enacted in exactly the same way.⁹ Documents, ephemera, films, and recordings of the past allow us to carefully attempt a critical scholarly assessment of sound as long as we maintain an awareness of the fact that a complete recovery of sound as it was experienced at a specific historical moment is literally and figuratively out of earshot. As recent works in sound studies have shown, interdisciplinary approaches are well suited to negotiating the complexities of studying sound, because they enable the mobilisation of a more comprehensive range of sources and critical concepts beyond disciplinary boundaries. Building on the interdisciplinary, methodological moves of recent works in sound studies,¹⁰ this thesis uses concepts and

⁷ On this point, see also Douglas Kahn, “Art and Sound”, in *Hearing History: A Reader*, ed. by Mark M. Smith (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2004), pp. 36-50.

⁸ Sterne, *The Audible Past*, p. 5.

⁹ This reflects a wider problem in the historical and cultural study of the senses and holds for other domains, too: smell, taste, touch, and sight are equally ephemeral objects of study. See, for instance, Mark M. Smith, *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), p. 3: “The senses are historical, [...] they are not universal but, rather, a product of place and, especially, time, so that how people perceived and understood smell, sound, touch, taste, and sight changed historically.” See also Constance Classen, *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2012) and the six-volume series *A Cultural History of the Senses*, ed. by Constance Classen (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

¹⁰ In 1999, Rick Altman announced that sound studies was “a field whose time has come”. Indeed, the last twenty years have seen a rapid expansion of the field. See, for instance, Rick Altman, “Sound Studies: A Field Whose Time Has Come,” *Iris*, 27 (Spring 1999), 3-4; Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999); Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-*

approaches from media studies, film studies, cultural history, and literary studies to develop a new strategy for the comparative analysis of sound across different media forms. Regarding sources, this thesis primarily draws on films and novels, but also examines sound recordings, diaries, film reviews, trade journals, fan magazines, interviews, and interview transcripts from the British Entertainment History Project. Across all of these sources, I examine descriptions, representations, renditions of, and responses to sound as well as the means of its technological and textual mediation in its immediate socio-cultural contexts. Reading for sound means to study twentieth-century media culture through the “surface-level expressions” of sound and to ask how and why sound features across different media forms in the way it does.¹¹

This method requires special attention to the language of analysis. The fleeting and immaterial nature of sound necessitates a vocabulary for description and analysis that is sensitive to the difficulties of working with and writing about the sonic dimension. For the purpose of this study, I consciously seek to avoid an over-reliance on terminology grounded in vision or visual metaphors, unless explicitly required by the discussion (this includes the use of terms like “montage”, “cross-cutting”, “flashes” and “cuts”, but it also relates to verbs

1933 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004); *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening and Modernity*, ed. by Veit Erlmann (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Don Ihde, *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound*, 2nd edn (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007); Karin Bijsterveld, *Mechanical Sound: Technology, Culture, and Public Problems of Noise in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008); Veit Erlmann, *Reason and Resonance: A History of Modern Aurality* (New York: Zone Books, 2010); Carolyn Birdsall, *Nazi Soundscapes: Sound, Technology and Urban Space in Germany, 1933-1945* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012); Alexandra Hui, *The Psychophysical Ear: Musical Experiments, Experimental Sounds, 1840-1910* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2013); Georgina Born, *Music, Sound and Space: Transformations of Public and Private Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); *Sounds of Modern European History: Auditory Cultures in 19th and 20th Century Europe*, ed. by Daniel Morat (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014).

¹¹ Siegfried Kracauer, “The Mass Ornament”, in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, tr. and ed. by Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 75-87 (p. 75): “The position that an epoch occupies in the historical process can be determined more strikingly from an analysis of its inconspicuous surface-level expressions than from that epoch’s judgment about itself. Since these judgments are expressions of the tendencies of a particular era, they do not offer conclusive testimony about its overall constitution. The surface-level expressions, however, by virtue of their unconscious nature, provide unmediated access to the fundamental substance of the state of things.”

such as “illuminate”, “highlight”, or “illustrate”). Where applicable, I use terminology from musicology or modify vocabulary from film studies and literary studies to express my points as precisely as possible (I speak, for instance, of “sound montage” in my discussion of *Blackmail* in the next chapter). In addition, I employ terminology from the field of sound studies. The principal term here is “soundscape”. This term offers a way of holistically describing a sonic environment and also provides an important conceptual dimension to my study. The term was first coined in the 1970s by Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer, denoting “an acoustic field of study” at the intersection of “science, society and the arts”.¹² It was originally more attuned to environmental concerns such as “sound pollution”, but it has since undergone modification by historians, literary and cultural studies scholars, musicians, and sociologists.¹³ Most notably, Emily Thompson refined the term in her study of twentieth-century architectural acoustics and has since significantly influenced its current application in cultural studies and histories of technology. Thompson defines the soundscape

as an auditory or aural landscape. Like a landscape, a soundscape is simultaneously a physical environment and a way of perceiving that environment; it is both a world and a culture constructed to make sense of that world. The physical aspects of a soundscape consist not only of the sounds themselves [...] but also [of] the material objects that create, and sometimes destroy, those sounds. A soundscape’s cultural aspects incorporate scientific and aesthetic ways of listening, a listener’s relationship to their environment, and the social circumstances that dictate who gets to hear what. A soundscape, like a landscape, ultimately has to do more with civilization than with nature, and as such, it is constantly under construction and always undergoing change.¹⁴

¹² R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1994), pp. 4, 7.

¹³ Since Schafer’s coinage of the term, a range of works from different fields have used the idea of the “soundscape” or “auditory landscape”. See, for instance, Alain Corbin, *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the Nineteenth-century French Countryside* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); John M. Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); *Soundscapes of the Urban Past: Staged Sound as Mediated Cultural Heritage*, ed. by Karin Bijsterveld (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013); Alexander J. Fisher, *Music, Piety, and Propaganda: The Soundscape of Counter-Reformation Bavaria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity*; Birdsall, *Nazi Soundscapes*.

¹⁴ Thompson, *Soundscape of Modernity*, pp. 1-2.

Thompson's definition of the soundscape emphasises how sound is situated in both the technological-material (physical) world as well as in the socio-cultural, aesthetic, economic, and political spheres. The soundscape is socially and culturally constructed, shaping and, in turn, shaped by our world.¹⁵ Thompson's influential take on the term has broad application that allows for a consideration of aesthetic, political, social, and technological factors and how they converge in and through the study of sound.

In this thesis, I build on Sterne's methodological reflections and Thompson's definition of the soundscape. Not only does my reading for sound attend to how sound features in the late modernist novel and in early sound film, but it also takes sound as an opportunity to examine how films and novels responded to the set of core questions outlined above. My understanding of sound for this purpose is broad and inclusive. It considers the obvious domains of music, speech, voiceover narration, and sound effects as well as more covert forms of sound such as narrative voice in fiction, references to sound reproduction technologies, descriptions and representations of sound, and silence as that which signifies the absence of sound, its supplement in the Derridean sense.¹⁶

Reading for sound across different media forms necessitates a preliminary discussion of my understanding of media and of how media relate to each other and to our world. These reflections are here tailored specifically towards film and literature in the media system of interwar Britain as they comprise the test cases of this thesis. However, the underlying theoretical commitment to the parallel development of media forms and to the social construction of technology (SCOT) approach towards media could reasonably also find application in other contexts and with other media as their target. Media historian William Uricchio argues that "moments of tension and instability offer particularly sharp

¹⁵ Thompson, *Soundscape of Modernity*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁶ On the concept of the supplement, see Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, tr. by Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), pp. 141-164.

insights into the construction of a media form”.¹⁷ As my first chapter will show in greater detail, the introduction of synchronised sound technology to the film industry in the late 1920s exemplifies such a specific cultural moment of tension which, in turn, can serve as the starting point for an investigation into how film and the novel construct themselves around such a moment of instability.

To conduct such a study across two media, I build on the model of parallel development proposed by David Trotter and used by Andrew Shail in their works on cinema and literary modernism.¹⁸ Trotter argues that a comprehensive approach towards analysing media relationships must step beyond the bounds of constructing arguments by analogy and, instead, begin its work on the basis of different media and their histories as “sharing the same groundwater”.¹⁹ In the context of my thesis, this shared ground is the introduction of synchronised sound technology and the wider changes in the mediascape effected by this development. Trotter suggests that twentieth-century literature and film “can best be understood as constituting and constituted by parallel histories”,²⁰ and I build on this suggestion throughout the thesis to show how developments in sound film run parallel to developments in the late modernist novel. The model of parallelism further posits that “both filmic and literary practice drew ‘on a fund of shared preoccupation’”,²¹ but the extent to which these shared concerns and preoccupations are made evident differs. Not all writers,

¹⁷ William Uricchio, “Historicizing Media in Transition”, in *Rethinking Media Change: The Aesthetics of Transition*, ed. by David Thorburn and Henry Jenkins (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), pp. 23-38 (p. 31).

¹⁸ This approach was proposed by David Trotter in *Cinema and Modernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007) and also built upon by Andrew Shail in *The Cinema and the Origins of Literary Modernism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012). See also David Trotter, *Literature in the First Media Age: Britain Between the Wars* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), pp. 1-37 for Trotter’s account of Britain’s “First Media Age” which further examines the relationships between different media in the interwar years.

¹⁹ Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), p. 153. Trotter also draws on Gitelman’s helpful account for developing his media theory in *Literature in the First Media Age*.

²⁰ Trotter, *Cinema and Modernism*, p. 3.

²¹ Shail, *Origins*, p. 2.

for instance, directly comment on or write about how they might engage with or respond to sound film in their fiction. Vice versa, not every director or producer acknowledges or reflects on how their films draw on literature. While testimonies of direct engagement or response supply additional evidence in individual cases, my reading for sound does not rely or build its arguments upon such foundations. Instead, by assuming a model of parallel development, I examine how film and the novel construct individual responses to a shared set of issues and key questions that are triggered by the culturally and historically specific moment of synchronised sound. This approach acknowledges that both film and the novel are fundamentally embedded in and responsive to the socio-cultural, political, aesthetic, and economic conditions of Britain in the 1930s and 1940s.

The benefit of the model of parallel development is that it offers a more refined, carefully crafted take on how to conduct a comparative analysis of different media than analyses based on arguments by analogy which have frequently appeared in studies of literary modernism and cinema. Alan Spiegel, for instance, argues that the development of modernist narrative from Flaubert to Joyce is essentially characterised by the emergence of “cinematographic form” and that “the film image and the verbal image that is like a film must both ‘show us not only a piece of reality [...] but a point of view as well’”.²² More recently, Susan McCabe’s *Cinematic Modernism* has read works by H. D., William Carlos Williams, Marianne Moore, and Gertrude Stein in direct comparison with early twentieth-century avant-garde and experimental film, arguing that modernist poetry is “like a film” and that film has a direct “impact” on writing.²³ Such analyses create direct analogies between film

²² Alan Spiegel, “Flaubert to Joyce: Evolution of a Cinematographic Form”, *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 6.3 (1973), 229-243 (p. 232). Spiegel’s criteria for “cinematographic form” in literature have also found application in the work of other critics. See, for instance, Francis P. Devlin, “A ‘Cinematic’ Approach to Tennyson’s Descriptive Art”, *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 3.2 (1975), 132-144.

²³ Susan McCabe, *Cinematic Modernism: Modernist Poetry and Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 99, 2.

and literary production that tend to oversimplify the issue at stake.²⁴ It is crucial to recognise that both film and text are and remain separate media forms which operate in different ways; one cannot be exactly like the other.²⁵ Therefore, it would perhaps be more appropriate to speak of a process of translation, i.e. to consider how one medium might *translate* representational strategies, experiences, or effects of a different medium into its own processes of representation.

A further implication of arguments by analogy is the assumption of a cause-and-effect relationship between different media forms that is (at least implicitly) grounded in ideas of technological determinism. If we were to argue, for instance, that modernist writing is like an avant-garde film, then we would also imply that film had a certain unilateral “impact” on modernist literature, that writing had somehow adapted itself to film. The model of parallel development cautions against such arguments and conclusions. For this project, this means that I reject a reading that interprets literature as if it “sounded like a film” or as if it were written with the intention to sound “like a film”. Indeed, this thesis will not suggest that sound film had a direct, unilateral impact on the development of the late modernist novel. Instead, I consider film and the novel as separate media forms with parallel histories and the introduction of synchronised sound as a moment of tension that raises a number of shared concerns for both film and the novel in the 1930s and 1940s.

In offering an alternative view to that of an “impact narrative”, my study also responds to some influential studies in media history, notably Friedrich Kittler’s

²⁴ For a criticism of this approach, see also David Trotter, “T. S. Eliot and Cinema”, *Modernism/modernity*, 13.2 (2006), 237-265 and Trotter’s review of McCabe’s *Cinematic Modernism* in the same issue (394-396). Further recent studies constructing arguments by analogy and developing “impact narratives” can be found in David Seed, *Cinematic Fictions: The Impact of the Cinema on the American Novel up to World War II* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009) and Scarlett Baron, “Flaubert, Joyce: Vision, Photography, Cinema”, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 54.4 (2008), 689-714. A similar tone is also struck in Michael Wood, “Modernism and Film”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, ed. by Michael Levenson, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 268-283.

²⁵ On this point, see also Maria DiBattista, “This is not a movie: *Ulysses* and Cinema”, *Modernism/modernity*, 13.2 (2006), 219-235.

Gramophone, Film, Typewriter and Julian Murphet's *Multimedia Modernism*. Kittler's media theory works towards the erasure of the human experiential dimension of media and technology and "uncouples 'media and the human senses'".²⁶ This view of media and technology has a number of serious consequences for our understanding of human agency involved in cultural production: as media and technology become more advanced, their reach and operation completely escape human perception, agency, and control. For the case of literature specifically, Kittler argues that the twentieth century experiences a "total use of media instead of total literacy: sound film and video cameras as mass entertainment liquidate the real event".²⁷ One of the many reasons for sound film's popularity, according to Kittler, is that it "presents audiences with their own processes of perception with a precision that is otherwise accessible only to experiment and thus neither to consciousness nor to language".²⁸ In the age of twentieth-century entertainment media, literature suffers death by film, or, as Kittler writes, "under the conditions of high technology, literature has nothing more to say".²⁹ In his work on modernist literature and the twentieth-century mediascape, Murphet adopts a view based on Kittler's media theory and acknowledges that his account of modernism verges on technological determinism.³⁰ He argues that "relations among the media governed the material complexities of modernist forms" and that the

²⁶ Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Nicholas Gane, "Friedrich Kittler: An Introduction", *Theory, Culture & Society*, 23.7/8 (2006), 5-16 (p. 11).

²⁷ Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, tr. and with an introduction by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 133.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

³⁰ See Julian Murphet, *Multimedia Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 2: "I will want to show that the medium really is the master in modern culture [...]. [...] it is an essay, that is to say, on the 'real' of technological determinism. By pursuing the proposition that writers of the early Anglo-American avant-garde behaved as if new media technologies were 'causing' the series of formal and technical breaks internal to their work, this study seeks to literalize, for critical purposes, a new myth of cultural modernism – that relations among the media governed the material complexities of modernist forms."

development of modernism is a process of the arts “becoming media”.³¹ Elsewhere, Murphet expands on his concept of the emergent “media ecology” in the twentieth century and its relation to modernist literature:

What we are calling the media ecology is just this radically transformed cultural terrain whose new technologies of mediation are doing the critical work of transmission, communication, dissemination, and entertainment at speeds and levels of efficiency undreamed of by literature in its nineteenth-century heyday. It is an environment where literary prose has no serious option but to meditate formally and discursively on the newfound redundancy of its own procedures.³²

Murphet adopts a stance akin to Kittler, arguing that the story of modernism is a story of “literary practice as media practice”.³³ Such thinking is extremely suspicious of, if not outright hostile to, a social or social constructivist understanding of technology. Murphet criticises what he terms “residual idealism”, namely a stance in scholarly works assuming or arguing that “new technologies alter the public imagination, which in turn transforms the raw material and formal strategies of artists and writers”.³⁴ In short, there is no space for the “social imaginary” in a branch of media theory of which Murphet and Kittler are two influential proponents.³⁵

Proposing an alternative view to that of Murphet and Kittler, this thesis will allow for some “residual idealism”. While I do take the same starting point as Murphet and broadly agree with his account of the media ecology in the twentieth-century, my way of reading and interpreting literature’s participation in this particular media environment is different. Murphet states:

As the newer mechanical and electronic media stole an increasingly greater share of the cultural marketplace over the first few decades of the twentieth century, those older, non-mechanical arts and media such as sculpture, dance, painting, chamber and symphonic

³¹ Murphet, *Multimedia Modernism*, pp. 2, 5.

³² Julian Murphet, “New Media Ecology”, in *The New Cambridge Companion to William Faulkner*, ed. by John T. Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 14-28 (p. 20).

³³ Murphet, *Multimedia Modernism*, p. 38.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

music, and (more complicatedly) writing internalized the threat, not by turning backwards in fits of nostalgic pique, but by homeopathically transferring this or that technical feature of the new media system into their own methods of representation.³⁶

This, as we will see in the next chapter on the coming of sound, is doubtlessly the context in which British writers were moving in the period under investigation in this thesis. It is, as my case study on the musical revue and Evelyn Waugh's *Vile Bodies* will show, a system of media competition in which literature has to rethink its strategies of representation to carve out its unique niche in the market. Yet, Murphet and Kittler apply a hostile vocabulary to their language of analysis that consistently devalues the contribution of writing to the media ecology: literature is "threatened", its response is merely one of "transfer of technical features" in the absence of any other "serious option" and it is faced with its own "redundancy". The problem with this version of media history, however, lies in the fact that it invokes a system in which literature passively registers changes and practices of an evolving media system of which it is no longer a key player. This lacks a consideration of literature's capacity to actively respond and contribute to ongoing processes of media development.

A further problem derives from the negation of a "social imaginary" insofar as one of the central functions of literature (as well as of film and photography) is representation. Murphet himself does not disavow this fact when he writes of technological features being assimilated into and recorded by literature's "methods of representation". Gitelman succinctly summarises that media "represent and delimit representing, so that new media provide new sites for the ongoing and vernacular experience of representation as such".³⁷ Because media are so intimately tied to the concept of representation, it is impossible to cut their ties with the human experience, understanding, and sensory perception of processes

³⁶ Murphet, "New Media Ecology", p. 16.

³⁷ Gitelman, *Always Already New*, p. 4. She writes further that media are "integral to a sense of what representation itself is".

of representation. Indeed, Gitelman takes this view one step further and defines media directly vis-à-vis representation. She writes that media are

socially realized structures of communication, where structures include both technological forms and their associated protocols, and where communication is a cultural practice, a ritualized collocation of different people on the same mental map, sharing or engaged with popular ontologies of representation.³⁸

Gitelman builds on and refines foundational works in media history by Raymond Williams and William Uricchio who conceive media as cultural practices.³⁹ Gitelman's definition of media does not negate the role of technology for analysing media and media relationships, but it consciously emphasises the socio-cultural dimension of media and their intricate ties to representation. My reading for sound adopts and extends such a theoretical stance, exploring the deployment of sound in both film and literature to examine the way in which sound features in their respective "ontologies of representation" in the 1930s and 1940s. In a second step, as I have explained earlier, the findings of such an analysis can then be used to reflect on how these two media respond to the shared questions and concerns raised by

³⁸ Gitelman, *Always Already New*, p. 7.

³⁹ I refer here to Raymond Williams's reflections on media and society in *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London: Collins, 1974). Williams offers an analysis of "television as a particular cultural technology [...] to look at its development, its institutions, its forms and its effects, in this critical dimension". Instead of subscribing to a technologically determinist view, Williams offers a "social history" approach. See Williams, *Television*, pp. 10, 13-31. See also Uricchio, "Historicizing Media in Transition", pp. 23-38. My thinking about media and technology is further shaped by approaches foregrounding the "social shaping of technology" as developed by Donald MacKenzie and Judy Wajcman in *The Social Shaping of Technology*, Wiebe Bijker, Thomas Hughes, and Trevor Pinch in *The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology*, and Susan J. Douglas' "Some Thoughts on the Question 'How Do New Things Happen?'". What unites these theories of media and technology is a rejection of technological determinism or "impact narratives" in which technology is understood as independent of any social context and taken as the predominant catalyst for cultural and social change. See Donald MacKenzie and Judy Wajcman, "Introductory Essay: The Social Shaping of Technology", in *The Social Shaping of Technology*, ed. by Donald MacKenzie and Judy Wajcman (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999), pp. 3-27; *The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology*, ed. by Wiebe Bijker, Thomas P. Hughes, and Trevor Pinch (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012); Susan J. Douglas, "Some Thoughts on the Question 'How Do New Things Happen?'", *Technology and Culture*, 51.2 (2010), 293-304. The idea of media as cultural practices has its roots in the work of cultural theorists of the twentieth century, notably Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer. See, for instance, Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, tr. Harry Zorn (London: Bodley Head, 2015) and Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, tr. and ed. by Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

sound. A socio-cultural and constructivist approach towards media is necessary to explore more fully the interaction and interrelationships between the human experience of sound and its representation in film and text and to enhance our insights into the “construction” of these two media forms and their communicative and representational strategies. As such, this study is not about literature playing catch-up with film and sound technology, but it is about the parallel development and shared concerns of both media vis-à-vis sound in the interwar years and during the Second World War.

A further argument for taking a social constructivist approach vis-à-vis media and questions of representation can be garnered from work in cognitive linguistics, particularly George Lakoff and Marc Johnson’s theory of conceptual metaphor. Contrary to the assumption that metaphor and metonymy are devices only found in literature and rhetoric, Lakoff and Johnson demonstrate that our everyday language, indeed our everyday actions, are conceived of and shaped by metaphorical concepts, such as “time is money” (which leads to metaphorical everyday language such as “wasting time” or “spending time”).⁴⁰ Another example is the metaphorical concept “argument is war”, which leads to such everyday expressions as “to win an argument”, “to defend an argument”, or “to attack someone’s view”. Lakoff and Johnson argue that metaphorical concepts like “argument is war” influence how we act, think, and understand everyday activities such as arguing. Simultaneously, “these expressions have a basis in our physical and cultural experience”.⁴¹ In other words, the human experience of activities, emotions, and objects forms the basis of our conceptual system. This system mutually reinforces itself, but there is space for development and change:

Many of our activities (arguing, solving problems, budgeting time, etc.) are metaphorical in nature. The metaphorical concepts that characterize those activities structure our present reality. New metaphors have the power to create a new reality. This can begin to happen when we start to comprehend our experience in terms of a metaphor, and it becomes a deeper reality when we begin to act in terms of it. If a new metaphor enters the conceptual

⁴⁰ George Lakoff and Marc Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980), pp. 7-9.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

system that we base our actions on, it will alter that conceptual system and the perceptions and actions that the system gives rise to. Much of cultural change arises from the introduction of new metaphorical concepts and the loss of old ones.⁴²

Thinking back to the example of Patrick Hamilton's *Hangover Square* at the beginning of this introduction, we can now develop a more nuanced view of the novel as an indication of the systemic conceptual change assumed by Lakoff and Johnson. The experience of sound film inspires a new conceptual system for the representation of cognition, emotion, and mental illness in Hamilton's novel. Vice versa, the strategies of representation employed by the novel strengthen and reinforce a real-world application of this conceptual system in which the dichotomy between sound film and silent film becomes an important basis for thinking about how we feel, perceive, and act in our everyday lives. In this sense, the "social imaginary" does play a significant role in thinking about the relationship between media, their strategies of representation, and the human experience and interaction with representations created and disseminated by media. Lakoff and Johnson maintain that

what is real for an individual as a member of a culture is a product both of his social reality and of the way in which that [social reality] shapes his experience of the physical world. Since much of our social reality is understood in metaphorical terms, and since our conception of the physical world is partly metaphorical, metaphor plays a very significant role in determining what is real for us.⁴³

Lakoff and Johnson's theory of conceptual metaphor further supports the idea that the human experience of sound film, as well as the experience of other sound recording and reproduction technologies, did indeed interact with processes of language and conceptual development. Building on Lakoff and Johnson's ideas, my reading for sound suggests that the experience of sound film interacted with new conceptual systems and everyday language as well as literary and cinematic forms of representation and communication.⁴⁴

⁴² Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*, p. 145.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

⁴⁴ The extent to which the experience of sound technologies in the twentieth century interacted with processes of language formation is also evidenced by new words that were entering everyday language: the word "talkie" is, of course, a central example, as is the idiomatic expression "listening in" for the case of radio.

On the basis of these theoretical reflections, reading for sound emerges as a method that depends on both close reading and contextualisation. In a first step, I identify, analyse, and contextualise the way sound participates in the representational strategies of both film and the novel. In a second step, I then consider what a specific deployment of or reference to sound tells us about the relationship between film and the novel, their shared concerns, and their ongoing processes of construction in the media system of 1930s and 1940s Britain. Reading for sound thus performs a double function: it examines how sound participates in cinematic and literary idioms and it makes audible the parallel histories of sound film and the late modernist novel.

Late Modernism and Sound Film

There is a long-standing and extensive critical tradition of writing on the relationship between cinema and literature which begins with cinema's inception at the end of the nineteenth-century. Laura Marcus' seminal work *The Tenth Muse* examines how cinema's earliest "reviewers, critics, [and] theorists [...] developed aesthetic and cultural categories to define and accommodate what was called 'the seventh art' or 'the tenth muse'".⁴⁵ Amongst those who critically reflected on cinema, its status as an art form, and its strategies of representation, were also a large number of writers who pondered the relationship between the new medium and literary production specifically. Virginia Woolf's essay "The Cinema" (1926), for instance, defends the novel against silent film.⁴⁶ Elizabeth Bowen's essay "A Matter of Inspiration" (1951) examines the style of American prose fiction, stating that in some cases "in effect, the page is like a cinema screen".⁴⁷ Evelyn Waugh concluded in

⁴⁵ Laura Marcus, *The Tenth Muse: Writing about Cinema in the Modernist Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 1.

⁴⁶ Virginia Woolf, "The Cinema", in *Selected Essays*, ed. by David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 172-176.

⁴⁷ Elizabeth Bowen, "A Matter of Inspiration", in *People, Places, Things: Essays by Elizabeth Bowen*, ed. by Allan Hepburn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), pp. 263-268 (p. 266).

1948 that “it is the cinema which has taught a new habit of narrative”.⁴⁸

Taking its cue from twentieth-century authors’ own reflections on cinema vis-à-vis literary practice, a large body of scholarly work has discussed the relationship between modernist literature and film at least since the 1960s. Beginning with foundational reflections by André Bazin on cinema and literature more broadly (“In Defense of Mixed Cinema”), works such as Edward Murray’s *The Cinematic Imagination*, Alan Spiegel’s *Fiction and the Camera-Eye*, and Keith Cohen’s *Film and Fiction: The Dynamics of Exchange* suggest that cinematic techniques and modernist narrative strategies are intricately related, and that cinema ought to be considered foundational for the emergence of modernist forms of narration.⁴⁹ In the wake of the “New Modernist Studies”, which began, as outlined by Mao and Walkowitz, around 1999 with the establishment of the Modernist Studies Association (MSA) and the launch of new journals in the field (*Modernism/modernity*; *Modernist Cultures*), the study of modernist literature and cinema has received renewed critical attention that addresses the topic from a multi-national and increasingly interdisciplinary perspective.⁵⁰ Tim Armstrong’s *Modernism, Technology, and the Body*, Garrett Stewart’s

⁴⁸ Evelyn Waugh, “*Felix Culpa? Review of the Heart of the Matter by Graham Greene*”, in *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. by Donat Gallagher (London: Methuen, 1983), pp. 360-365 (p. 362).

⁴⁹ Murray analyses the work of modernist writers (Beckett, Dos Passos, Faulkner, Joyce, Robbe-Grillet) and compares stream-of-consciousness techniques in film and fiction. See Edward Murray, *The Cinematic Imagination: Writers and the Motion Pictures* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1972). Spiegel studies works by James, Conrad, Faulkner, and Nabokov, arguing that their works display a “cinematographic form”. See Alan Spiegel, *Fiction and the Camera-Eye: Visual Consciousness in Film and the Modern Novel* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1976). Keith Cohen’s work discusses parallels in the narrative strategies between film and the modernist novel of Joyce and Proust. See: Keith Cohen, *Film and Fiction: The Dynamics of Exchange* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979). Bibliographies and a brief discussion signposting further important works on film and literature can be found in Peter S. Gardner, “Literature and Film: an Annotated Bibliography of Resources”, *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 20.2 (1992), 156-165 and Timothy Corrigan, *Film and Literature: An Introduction and Reader*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2012).

⁵⁰ Matthijs Engelberts, “Literature and Film: Take Two”, *Modernism/modernity*, 20.4 (2014), 771-778. Engelberts reviews recent developments in scholarly work on film and modernist literature. On the “New Modernist Studies”, see Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, “The New Modernist Studies”, *PMLA*, 123.3 (2008), 737-748. This new wave of scholarship has contributed to a revision of conventional “Auden Generation” accounts of the 1930s, recuperating previously marginalised or

Between Film and Screen: Modernism's Photo Synthesis, Thomas L. Burkdall's *Joycean Frames*, Sara Danius' *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics*, and Susan McCabe's *Cinematic Modernism* explore the links between cinematic modes of representation, cinema technology, and their relationships to the works of modernist writers.⁵¹ David Trotter's *Cinema and Modernism* discusses the films of D. W. Griffith and Charlie Chaplin alongside the writings of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and T. S. Eliot; and Laura Marcus' *The Tenth Muse* explores critical writing on cinema in the first two decades of the twentieth century. More recently, Andrew Shail has examined early cinema's role in the emergence of modernism by revising critical conceptions of cinematic "influence" on literature.⁵² While Shail's work offers a productive approach for uncovering new links between modernist literature and early cinema, his core concern with the beginnings of literary modernism reflects a wider trend in the field of modernist studies noted by Tyrus Miller. Miller writes that the "grand narrative in the study of modernism has been that of its beginnings: 'origins,' 'rise,' 'emergence,' 'genealogy'."⁵³ While this observation has given new impetus to a study of modernism "from the perspective of its end", surveys of the modernist canon, as well as studies of modernist writing vis-à-vis film specifically, still give

neglected writers. Furthermore, the New Modernist Studies have given new impetus to an examination of the intricate and complex relationships between avant-garde cultural practices and mass culture.

⁵¹ Further works with discussions of cinema and modernist literature include Mark Wollaeger's *Modernism, Media, and Propaganda: British Narrative from 1900 to 1945* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), Keith Williams' *British Writers and the Media, 1930-1945* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), and Karen Jacobs' *The Eye's Mind: Literary Modernism and Visual Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).

⁵² Shail, *Origins*, p. 3: Shail considers cinema as both "image type *and* institution" which allows him to "tackle[] cinema as a popular experience rather than as a stylistic toolkit to be sampled and emulated". His analysis "charts an influence exerted on the machinery of literary production that occurred in ways too complex to have caused literature to become merely like (or unlike) the filmic image. It details a history in which modernism was not an aesthetic reformation in response to cinema, but a consequence in literary practice of its appearance."

⁵³ Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts between the World Wars* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), p. 5.

pride of place to the works of first-generation modernist writers such as Eliot, Pound, Richardson, Joyce, and Woolf.⁵⁴ This emphasis runs parallel to a noticeable scholarly interest in cinema of the silent period, particularly avant-garde film, and tends to foreground film as a *visual* medium.⁵⁵ Although silent film was never silent and normally accompanied by live music, live narration, and the noise of its contemporary audiences,⁵⁶ little attention in studies of literature and film has been devoted to the sonic dimension of cinema and the rise of synchronised sound technology from the late 1920s onwards. Some twentieth-century writers, such as Christopher Isherwood, have arguably helped to direct critics' attention to the visual domain. Isherwood's *Berlin Novels* are frequently cited for

⁵⁴ Miller, *Late Modernism*, p. 5. Building on Miller, a number of critics have recently engaged with modernism's later stages, its continued development after the 1920s, and its response to the cultural, social, and political pressures of the 1930s and 1940s. See, for instance, Jed Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Marina MacKay, *Modernism and World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Thomas S. Davis, *The Extinct Scene: Late Modernism and Everyday Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016). Kristin Bluemel's work on "intermodernism" also examines a continuation and reconfiguration of modernist aesthetics from the years of the economic depression to the end of the Second World War. Although Bluemel does not use the term "late modernism", she shares other critics' interest in the fate of modernism after its apex in the 1920s. See Kristin Bluemel, "Introduction: What is Intermodernism?", in *Intermodernism: Literary Culture in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain*, ed. by Kristin Bluemel (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), pp. 1-18. I discuss late modernism in greater detail later in this introduction. On the prevalent critical focus on first-generation modernists and a persistent fascination with origins, beginnings, and early modernist works, see also David Trotter "Literature between Media", in *The Cambridge History of Modernism*, ed. by Vincent Sherry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 386-403 (pp. 388-389). Trotter notes that even for the group of canonical first-generation modernist writers, there is a tendency in criticism to privilege their early works of the 1910s and 1920s.

⁵⁵ Trotter notes the overwhelming critical interest in avant-garde film at the expense of, for instance, "films made after [the First World War] for a mass audience". See Trotter, *Cinema and Modernism*, p. 8.

⁵⁶ In film studies, there is a growing body of work examining sound as a crucial part of silent film screenings. See Martin Miller Marks, *Music and the Silent Film: Contexts and Case Studies, 1895-1924* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Rick Altman, *Silent Film Sound* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); *The Sounds of the Silents in Britain*, ed. by Julie Brown and Annette Davison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); *The Sounds of Silent Films: New Perspectives on History, Theory and Practice*, ed. by Claus Tieber and Anna K. Windisch (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2014). Regarding experiments with technology, attempts to combine sound reproduction (e.g. phonographs) with early film had been taking place since the late nineteenth-century. On this point, see Charles O'Brien, *Cinema's Conversion to Sound: Technology and Film Style in France and the U.S.* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), p. 3.

their self-proclaimed visuality through statements like “I am a camera”.⁵⁷ Cases like this may have encouraged the direct transfer of terminology from film studies to literary studies. Critics now easily and perhaps too comfortably apply terms such as “montage”, “flashes”, “cuts”, “camerawork”, or “chiaroscuro” to a literary text. Such borrowings are also problematic, because film studies itself still predominantly relies on visual terminology to the exclusion of a more comprehensive audio-visual vocabulary.⁵⁸ Due to the efforts of a small number of scholars, notably Rick Altman, Mary Ann Doane, Michel Chion, John Belton, and Elisabeth Weis, attention to sound in film studies has slowly increased since the late 1980s.⁵⁹

As film studies scholars have gradually become more attuned to cinematic sound, a similar development has taken place within modernist studies: leading scholars in the field have acknowledged the coming of synchronised sound to film and the subsequent rise of the “talkie” from about 1927 as a watershed moment for the study of British interwar literature and culture. In *Literature in the First Media Age*, Trotter mentions the rise of sound film as an important milestone in the twentieth-century mediascape.⁶⁰ Similarly, Marcus concludes *The Tenth Muse* with an important coda on the coming of synchronised sound to

⁵⁷ Christopher Isherwood, *The Berlin Novels* (London: Vintage, 1993), p. 243.

⁵⁸ Rick Altman, “The Evolution of Sound Technology”, in *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, ed. by Elisabeth Weis and John Belton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 45-53.

⁵⁹ See *Sound Theory, Sound Practice*, ed. by Rick Altman (New York: Routledge, 1992); Mary Ann Doane, “Ideology and the Practice of Sound Editing and Mixing”, in *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, ed. by Elisabeth Weis and John Belton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 54-62; Sarah Kozloff, *Overhearing Film Dialogue* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000); Douglas Gomery, *The Coming of Sound: A History* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Michel Chion, *Audio-vision: Sound on Screen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Charles O’Brien, *Cinema’s Conversion to Sound: Technology and Film Style in France and the U.S.* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005); James Lastra, *Sound Technology and the American Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Barry Salt, *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis* (London: Starword, 2009); Donald Crafton, *The Talkies: American Cinema’s Transition to Sound, 1926-1931* (New York: Scribner, 1997).

⁶⁰ Trotter, *First Media Age*, p. 11.

film.⁶¹ More recently, a volume on *Sounding Modernism* features an essay by Steven Connor which directly addresses aspects of film sound in relation to modernist literature and culture.⁶² In addition, there is also a burgeoning field of studies examining the relationship between sound technologies, music, and auditory experience in literature more broadly.⁶³ These works by Garrett Stewart, Steven Connor, Melba Cuddy-Keane, John Picker, Angela Frattarola, Sam Halliday, Josh Epstein, Laurel Harris, and Anna Snaith have established new frameworks and ideas for analysing sound and the sonic dimension in literature.⁶⁴ Cuddy-

⁶¹ Marcus, *The Tenth Muse*, pp. 404-437. See also Marcus' recent chapter on "Talking Films", in *A History of 1930s British Literature*, ed. by Benjamin Kohlmann and Matthew Taunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 177-193.

⁶² See Steven Connor, "Two-Step, Nerve-Tap, Tanglefoot: Tapdance Typologies in Cinema", in *Sounding Modernism*, ed. by Julian Murphet, Helen Growth, and Penelope Hone (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), pp. 211-227.

⁶³ These relatively recent studies of sound and literature notably take their cue from work in sound studies, an interdisciplinary field that investigates sound by drawing on the history of technology, musicology, physics, engineering, literary and cultural studies, the arts, medicine, acoustics, and sensory history. Ongoing debates in sound studies on whether the field constitutes an actual discipline demonstrate the innate drive to synthesise knowledge and critical concepts beyond disciplinary boundaries. For an overview of these debates, see Michele Hilmes, "Is There a Field Called Sound Culture Studies? And Does It Matter?", *American Quarterly*, 57.1 (2005), 249-59 and Michele Hilmes, "Foregrounding Sound: New (And Old) Directions in Sound Studies", *Cinema Journal*, 38.1 (2008), 115-117. Scholarly works that have supported the development of sound studies are Alain Corbin's *Village Bells* (1994), Jacques Attali's *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (1985) and R. Murray Schafer's *The Soundscape* (1977). Overviews of the field of sound studies, its emergence, its practices, and its varied applications can be found in *The Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies*, ed. by Trevor Pinch and Karin Bijsterveld (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) and in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. by Jonathan Sterne (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012).

⁶⁴ I refer here to the following works: Garrett Stewart, *Reading Voices: Literature and the Phonotext* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990); Steven Connor, "The Modern Auditory I", in *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present*, ed. by Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 203-223; Melba Cuddy-Keane, "Modernist Soundscapes and the Intelligent Ear: An Approach to Narrative through Auditory Perception", in *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, ed. by James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 382-398; Angela Frattarola, "Developing an Ear for the Modernist Novel: Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, and James Joyce", *Journal of Modern Literature*, 33.1 (2009), 132-153; Sam Halliday, *Sonic Modernity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013); Josh Epstein, *Sublime Noise: Musical Culture and the Modernist Writer* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014); and Laurel Harris, "Hearing Cinematic Modernism in the 1930s: The Audiovisual in British Documentary Cinema and Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*", *Literature & History*, 21.1 (2012), 61-75. In her inaugural lecture at King's College London, Anna Snaith spoke about "The Art of Noise" and interwar modernism. She is currently editing a new volume on sound and literature for Cambridge University Press.

Keane suggests that “auditory perception” is of major importance to modernist writers like Virginia Woolf. She notably speaks of the emergence of a “new aurality” in modernist literature that is grounded in the rise of sound reproduction technologies such as the gramophone and the phonograph from the late nineteenth century onwards.⁶⁵ She suggests that the shift towards recognising hearing as an important sense in the twentieth century necessitates greater scholarly precision in the analysis of modernist texts and proposes, for instance, to replace or complement critical terms in narratology with new terminology that is more attuned to sound and hearing.⁶⁶ The importance of sound to modernist literary production is also stated by Angela Frattarola, who argues that modernism’s literary experiments, such as stream-of-consciousness, fragmentation, and “poetic prose” crucially “hinge on a shift in sensibilities from the eye to the ear”.⁶⁷ Frattarola, Epstein, Halliday, and Cuddy-Keane develop insightful close readings of sound in modernists texts by, for instance, pairing the modernist deployment of sound in literature with an examination of music and its technological dissemination and reproduction (Epstein, Halliday) or by focussing on sound recording technologies (Cuddy-Keane, Frattarola).

In addition, there has also been increasing scholarly interest in the relationship between twentieth-century literature and radio broadcasting, examining radio’s role in the emergence and dissemination of modernist aesthetics. While themes such as propaganda (and the writer’s involvement in propaganda through radio), the merging of avant-garde and mass culture in radio broadcasts, or the relationship between the writer and broadcasting corporations often take centre stage in these discussions, they all draw critical attention to radio as a new sound medium that significantly increases sound’s reach and

⁶⁵ Cuddy-Keane, “Modernist Soundscapes and the Intelligent Ear”, p. 383.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 385-386. Cuddy-Keane suggests to replace Gérard Genette’s term “focalization” with “auscultation”.

⁶⁷ Frattarola, “Developing an Ear for the Modernist Novel”, p. 148.

relevance in the twentieth-century mediascape.⁶⁸

There is, in short, a long tradition of writing about cinema and literature as well as a more recent drive to engage with different sound media and sound reproduction technologies (such as radio or the phonograph) in modernist studies. This thesis stands at the intersection of both these fields by developing a new reading of film and late modernist novels through sound. On the one hand, the following case studies build on the debate surrounding cinema's relationship with modernist writing, expanding it to include the implementation and consolidation of sound film and the parallel development of the late modernist novel. On the other hand, this study contributes to the relatively new scholarly conversation about sound media in the twentieth century by offering an exploration of 1930s and 1940s soundscapes, their role in an increasingly audio-visual media and entertainment culture, and literature's place within such a culture.

As I have suggested earlier, the thesis will apply the methodology of reading for sound to the parallel development of sound film and the late modernist novel in Britain. There are a number of reasons why late modernism serves as a test case in this study. Works by Miller, Esty, MacKay, and Davis have examined the productivity of this concept and outline features of late modernist literature as a "distinctive literary type".⁶⁹ Broadly defined, the idea of late modernism denotes a "transformation and persistence of modernism and the function of modernist aesthetics in different historical situations".⁷⁰ The

⁶⁸ See, for instance, *Broadcasting Modernism*, ed. by Debra Rae Cohen, Michael Coyle, and Janet Lewty (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2009); Emily C. Bloom, *The Wireless Past: Anglo-Irish Writers and the BBC, 1931-1968* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Todd Avery, *Radio Modernism: Literature, Ethics, and the BBC, 1922-1938* (Abingdon: Ashgate, 2016); Melissa Dinsman, *Modernism at the Microphone: Radio, Propaganda, and Literary Aesthetics during World War II* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015); Keith Williams, *British Writers and the Media, 1930-1945* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996); *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio, and the Avant-Garde*, ed. by Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992).

⁶⁹ See Miller, *Late Modernism*; Esty, *A Shrinking Island*; MacKay, *Modernism and World War II* and Davis, *The Extinct Scene*. Tyrus Miller first spoke of late modernist literature as a "distinctive literary type". See Miller, *Late Modernism*, p. 20.

⁷⁰ Thomas S. Davis, "Late Modernism: British Literature at Mid-Century", *Literature Compass*, 9.4 (2012), 326-337 (p. 328).

necessity of re-examining modernism's later stages arose from sustained scholarly efforts to periodise modernism, to determine its end point, and to trace the beginnings and characteristics of postmodernism (the latter has been the focus of seminal works by Alan Wilde, Andreas Huyssen, Brian McHale, and Fredric Jameson).⁷¹ Late modernist literature as a "distinctive literary type" has been characterised by diverse features such as "new attention to surface" (Wilde), an "outward turn" (Davis), a shift from "stream of consciousness" to "stream of talk" (Lodge), and an "anthropological turn" (Esty).⁷² None of these features are the sole characteristics of late modernist literature, nor are they mutually exclusive. Rather, the idea of late modernism has encouraged critics to study anew mid-century literature's responsiveness to the political, historical, and socio-cultural forces of its time.⁷³ It denotes an important period of transition in the literary history of the twentieth century, drawing critical attention to a renegotiation and transformation of modernist form, style, and themes in the context of its specific historical situation.⁷⁴ As such, late modernism has allowed scholars of twentieth-century literature and culture to recover marginalised writers and artistic movements which had previously been suppressed from the modernist

⁷¹ See Alan Wilde, "Surfacings: Reflections on the Epistemology of Late Modernism", *boundary 2*, 8.2 (1980), 209-227; Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986); Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1987); Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991). On the relationship between modernism and postmodernism, see Patricia Waugh, *Practising Postmodernism: Reading Modernism* (London: Arnold, 1992).

⁷² Wilde, "Epistemology of Late Modernism", p. 211; Davis, *The Extinct Scene*, pp. 2-4; David Lodge, *After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 81; Esty, *A Shrinking Island*, p. 2.

⁷³ Esty, for instance, suggests a link between Britain's imperial decline and the emergence and consolidation of late modernist style. MacKay argues that the Second World War, and the changes the war brought to both political and private spheres, encouraged the development of late modernist writing. See Esty, *A Shrinking Island*, pp. 1-22 and MacKay, *Modernism and World War II*, pp. 1-21 for initial outlines of their arguments.

⁷⁴ On the idea of "transition" as a central element of the period, see Charles Ferrall and Dougal McNeill, "Introduction: Futility and Anarchy? British Literature in Transition", in *British Literature in Transition, 1920-1940: Futility and Anarchy*, ed. by Charles Ferrall and Dougal McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 1-26.

canon as well as from conventional “Auden Generation” accounts of the 1930s.⁷⁵ Both the “New Modernist Studies” and the concept of late modernism have encouraged new studies of twentieth-century literature vis-à-vis its contemporary forms of popular culture and its interaction with other media, thus contributing to our understanding of the blurring boundaries between modernism, popular culture, and mass media as well as between lowbrow, middlebrow, and highbrow writing.⁷⁶

The film historian Miriam Bratu Hansen describes this phenomenon of blurring boundaries as the emergence of a “vernacular modernism” which

encompass[es] cultural practices that both articulated and mediated the experience of modernity, such as the mass-produced and mass-consumed phenomena of fashion, design, advertising, architecture and urban environment, of photography, radio, and cinema.⁷⁷

According to Hansen, the contemporaneity of these phenomena with modernism and their mutual influence, transformation, and shaping of each other became particularly pronounced from the 1920s to the 1950s, a time frame coinciding with the implementation of synchronised sound and the consolidation of sound film as a key player in the

⁷⁵ For the standard narrative of the “Auden Generation”, see Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (London: Pimlico, 1992). First published in 1976, Hynes’ study suggested that the central 1930s writers were all white, middle-class men born in or after 1900 (and thus too young to fight in the First World War). They were well-educated, English intellectuals with left-leaning political sympathies. This definition includes primarily W.H. Auden, Christopher Isherwood, Louis MacNeice, Stephen Spender, and, to a lesser extent, George Orwell. Hynes’ concept of the Auden Generation erases women’s writing from the map. A detailed criticism of several studies which neglect women’s writing of the 1930s can be found in Janet Montefiore, *Men and Women Writers of the 1930s: The Dangerous Flood of History* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 19-25. Hynes’ account is also problematic for its exclusion of working-class writers and of those who were not born in England.

⁷⁶ An overview of studies of modern literature vis-à-vis different media (such as cinema and radio) has been provided on pp. 18-23 of this introduction. On the mixing and mingling of lowbrow, middlebrow, and highbrow forms, see for instance Joseph McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing in Britain 1914-1950* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992); Nicola Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s: Class, Domesticity and Bohemianism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Nicola Humble, “Sitting Forward or Sitting Back: Highbrow v. Middlebrow Reading”, *Modernist Cultures*, 6.1 (2011), 41-59; Clive Bloom, *Bestsellers: Popular Fiction since 1900* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2002); *Transitions in Middlebrow Writing, 1880-1930*, ed. by Kate Macdonald and Christoph Singer (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2015).

⁷⁷ Miriam Bratu Hansen, “The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism”, *Modernism/Modernity*, 6.2 (1999), 59-77 (p. 60).

mediascape.⁷⁸ Hansen's essay points to an important period of transition and convergence between modernist artistic practices, popular culture, and entertainment media and as such, Hansen's work certainly anticipates recent studies of late modernism which foreground its "outward turn", its renewed interest in the details of everyday life, mass entertainment, and print and visual culture.⁷⁹

I suggest here that, from about 1929, there is something at work that leads Hansen to speak of "vernacular modernism", that makes Lodge describe the shift from modernism to late modernism as a shift from "stream of consciousness" to "stream of talk", something that accompanies what Davis identifies as the "outward turn" of late modernism, and something that inspired Juan A. Suárez to rethink modernism's relationship with noise in his thought-provoking work on *Pop Modernism*.⁸⁰ This, I will demonstrate throughout this study, is the sonic dimension of late modernist literature and film. As sound film became one of the key players of the 1930s and 1940s mediascape, its strategies of representation and its deployment of synchronised dialogue, voiceover narration, sound effects, and music increased sound's presence in the media system.

I do not argue that late modernist writers were exclusively inspired by sound film

⁷⁸ Hansen's essay is primarily interested in classical Hollywood film. However, the process of convergence between modernist practices and popular culture which she examines arguably also holds true for film production outside Hollywood as the conventions of classical Hollywood cinema develop and migrate to the British film industry in the 1930s.

⁷⁹ On this point, consider, for instance, Juan A. Suárez, *Pop Modernism: Noise and the Reinvention of the Everyday* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2007), which draws on early film, photography, and surrealist art alongside modernist fiction. See also Davis, *The Extinct Scene*, pp. 141-186 ("War Gothic") which discusses Henry Moore's sketches of tube shelters as articulations of late modernism's renewed interest in everyday life.

⁸⁰ Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, p. 81. See also Davis, *The Extinct Scene*, pp. 1-25, 187-224. One of Davis' central arguments for late modernism's outward turn is the emergence of what Davis calls "vernacular fictions". See also Suárez, *Pop Modernism*, pp. 8-10 for his definition of noise and his interest in the everyday in modernism. Suárez finds that "the presence of noise in modern textuality – it got louder the more directly modernism tackled the everyday – confirms Friedrich Kittler's insight, developed at length in his *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900*, that the most distinctive feature of modern art may be the pervasiveness of the unsignifiable, not as the outside of sense but as its constitutive support and inevitable shadow" (p. 10).

or that other forms of sound reproduction and communication technologies such as the gramophone, phonograph, radio, or telephone played less influential roles in the media system (in fact, discussions of the gramophone, the phonograph, as well as references to radio and the telephone will also feature in this thesis). Neither do I want to claim that the late modernist novel was somehow better suited to mediate the experience of sound than the literature of any other period or any other literary form. However, I want to shift critical attention to how both literature and film underwent a significant period of transition from the late 1920s onwards. This is a period which witnesses crucial changes in the media system: the coming of synchronised sound technology to cinema, the consolidation of sound film as a key player in the twentieth-century entertainment industry, and the emergence of what we now term “classical” film.⁸¹ In parallel, modernism experiences its “outward turn”, its shift to streams of talk, its turn toward the “vernacular”. In this thesis, I forge a connection between these two developments, suggesting that both the late modernist novel and sound film of the 1930s and 1940s gain intelligibility if listened to and read with sensitivity to sound.

Structure

My chapters apply the methodological commitment to reading for sound to a set of core case studies that move roughly chronologically from the late 1920s to the late 1940s. On the one hand, these case studies attend to film genres and productions frequently associated with

⁸¹ For a definition and examination of “classical cinema”, see David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 1-59. Regarding film sound specifically, Helen Hanson has recently discussed the period of 1931 to 1948 as the defining period for the emergence of “classical” film sound. She describes how conventions for the deployment of film soundscapes were negotiated and increasingly consolidated by technicians, studio practices, and networks of sound labour (e.g. unions and labour associations). Hanson identifies the 1930s and 1940s as an important period of technological development and as a phase of negotiation for the representational and communicative practices of cinema. From the point of view of sound labour, the 1930s and 1940s emerge as an important time of transition in the relationship between sound and classical cinema with a view to film production, style, aesthetics, and conventions. See Helen Hanson, *Hollywood Soundscapes: Film Sound Style, Craft and Production in the Classical Era* (London: BFI, 2017).

the period (commercial musical revue, the noir thriller, British documentary film, state-sponsored war propaganda). On the other hand, the case studies undertake readings of a range of late modernist texts which encompass English, Scottish, Anglo-Irish, and Anglo-Caribbean writers. Each chapter bar the first (which provides a survey of the coming of sound to Britain) conducts parallel discussions of film and the novel grouped around the core issue of sound. Throughout my case studies, I attend to the following key questions through reading for sound: what is the relationship between sound film and the novel in the interwar years and during the Second World War? How do these two media forms negotiate their status, their present and future, in a rapidly expanding media system? How do they define themselves on the back of, but also against, their literary and cinematic predecessors? How do they address and respond to some of the most pressing social, political, and cultural issues of their time, such as, for instance, the sense of impending war or the 1930s drive to record, observe, and monitor the details of everyday life?

The first chapter, "The Coming of Sound to Britain", situates my case studies more firmly within the technological and socio-cultural context of the rise of synchronised sound film in Britain by providing a partial overview of the media system in the late 1920s and early 1930s and by giving an account of some initial responses to the coming of synchronised sound to film. A discussion of Alfred Hitchcock's first feature-length sound film *Blackmail* provides the key example to discuss synchronised sound's reception in Britain. The chapter surveys how film producers, exhibitors, intellectuals, film critics, and audiences responded to the new phenomenon. I then proceed to give an overview of the literary marketplace and discuss how *Blackmail's* clever deployment of sound and silence resonates with some important developments in the literary marketplace of the 1930s. As such, my first chapter provides the necessary historical and cultural context to the developments I analyse in the four subsequent case studies.

Chapter two then proceeds to examine *sonic translations of revue entertainment*. It discusses how early sound film derived its success from a clever and increasingly

sophisticated appropriation of theatrical forms, such as the musical revue, to market synchronised sound to audiences. I will show this through a discussion of *Elstree Calling* (1930) and *Evergreen* (1934). In parallel, I read Evelyn Waugh's *Vile Bodies* (1930) as one possible literary response to this development. I argue that Waugh emulates and parodies the musical revue in his novel to demonstrate literature's own capacity to capitalise on theatrical entertainment. In this chapter, sound emerges as a matter of contention and contest between the novel and sound film, with both media asserting their ability to exploit dramatic forms for their own commercial benefit.

The third chapter discusses "Documentary Sound and Auto-Ethnographic Fiction" in the 1930s, suggesting the emergence of *hybrid idioms* that appear characteristically late modernist. The chapter explores sound's role in both state-sponsored documentary film and in the auto-ethnographic novel of the late modernist period. I analyse three of the most influential films produced by the British Documentary Movement prior to the outbreak of the Second World War: *Housing Problems* (1935), *Coal Face* (1935), and *Night Mail* (1936). I read these documentary productions alongside George Orwell's early novels *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935) and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936), Walter Greenwood's *Love on the Dole* (1933), and Lewis Grassic Gibbon's *Sunset Song* (1932) to show how sound participates in the period's drive to observe, report, and record everyday life. In this chapter, my reading for sound discloses the ties between social realism and modernist experimentation and resolves standard narratives of divide that pitch social realism as antagonistic to modernism.

Chapter four then moves to a parallel discussion of film noir and the writing of anxiety in the late 1930s and early 1940s by suggesting that both the late modernist novel and film noir build their strategies of representation on *patterns of difference*. As political events produce a period sense or mood of fear and anxiety, some novels and films diverge from and reconfigure earlier representations and deployments of sound to give expression to a nightmarish world of instability, violence, and threat. I read sound in Graham Greene's

Brighton Rock (1938), Jean Rhys' *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939), and Patrick Hamilton's *Hangover Square* (1941) in conjunction with scoring practices in Thorold Dickinson's *Gaslight* (1940), Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (1944), and Carol Reed's *The Third Man* (1949) to argue that both the novel and film noir show a parallel concern with integrating sound to present worlds and minds that have become unstable and violent and that they modify the themes and tropes of their predecessors in an attempt to formulate an appropriate aesthetic response to their socio-cultural and political circumstances.

The fifth chapter then turns to the real and fictional soundscapes of the Second World War and to the *politics of wartime soundscapes*. I read for sound in Ministry of Information-sponsored propaganda films and in the Anglo-American co-production *The True Glory* (1945), the final World War II campaign documentary, alongside Orwell's *Coming Up for Air* (1939), which anticipates the outbreak of war, as well as Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* (1948) and Patrick Hamilton's *The Slaves of Solitude* (1947), which were written during the war and published after it. I argue that government-sponsored film offers a structured and politicised take on wartime sound with the aim of casting its audiences as a united community of listeners. In contrast, the novel refuses to deploy sound as a structuring principle to construct a narrative of the national community at war. Instead, Bowen, Hamilton, and Orwell underscore the disruptive and dangerous implications of sound and interrogate the misuses of sound in the context of total war. The coda on "Sound Fiction" offers a discussion of Tom McCarthy's *Remainder* (2005) and Evelyn Waugh's *The Loved One* (1948), drawing together my arguments from the case studies and suggesting several perspectives for future research.

Chapter One

The Coming of Sound to Britain

This chapter provides a partial overview of the British mediascape of the late 1920s and 1930s and outlines the conditions under which synchronised sound entered the British market. While the first part of the chapter mainly traces developments in the film industry, the latter part of the chapter provides an overview of the literary marketplace of 1930s Britain to give a clearer account of how both cinema and literature experienced a period of transition, transformation, and diversification in the 1930s. Although the chapter touches on the period pre-1925, it is more concerned with the post-1927 period of diffusion of the new technology. As will become clear, the coming of sound technology was by no means a sudden revolution (although it may have felt like this to some observers), but more of a gradual evolution that had long-lasting effects on the media system.

One of the central concerns emerging from the transition phase was the question of control over the new medium: those who would be able to “master” cinematic sound would also gain economic power over the market and assert their position within the film industry. Hitchcock’s *Blackmail*, produced for British International Pictures, exemplifies the British film industry’s pursuit of controlling sound and of marketing the new technology to audiences. As the first feature-length “talkie” produced in Britain, the film is a significant stepping stone in national cinema history, but also an important testament to Hitchcock’s early experiments with sound effects, sound editing, and voice. The film expertly handles sound, paradoxically to make silence the crucial theme of the film. Demonstrating the possibilities of cinematic sound, *Blackmail* successfully capitalised on the new technology while simultaneously offering audiences the familiarity of silence as a stylistic device in the cinema. The example of *Blackmail*, however, is also crucial for another reason: through *Blackmail*’s processes of negotiating its cinematic heritage (silence) to construct its future (sound), we can begin to trace the shared concerns and parallel development of early sound

film and the late modernist novel. As British writers were facing the need to reevaluate the purpose and status of their craft in a rapidly expanding mediascape, filmmakers like Hitchcock also had to rethink their practices and the function and purpose of film in the wake of the advent of sound. The chapter suggests that both early sound film and the novel in the late modernist period were simultaneously concerned with their socio-cultural and aesthetic past and future, negotiating their role and status as part of a larger cinematic and literary trajectory.

The Media System

The interwar period saw an unprecedented rise of mass media and popular entertainment culture, a development partly due to “a growing lower middle class, greater discretionary income [an overall trend despite the Great Depression] and more leisure time” as working hours were reduced on average from circa 55 hours to 48 hours per week after the First World War.¹ Such conditions played a central role in the increasing demand for, as well as the rising supply of, mass media. The expanding education system and growing literacy in Britain also led to an expansion in radio, national and regional newspapers, magazines, and domestic film production.² National daily newspaper supply rose from 3.1 million in 1918 to 10.6 million in 1939 and the number of authors, editors, and journalists rose from approximately 6,000 in 1891 to 19,000 in 1931, “a rate of increase six times that of the whole population”.³ While these figures are estimates, they provide an idea of the scale and

¹ D. L. LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy: Mass Communication and the Cultivated Mind in Britain between the Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), p. 9.

² John Baxendale and Christopher Pawling, *Narrating the Thirties. A Decade in the Making: 1930 to the Present* (London: Macmillan, 1996), p. 3.

³ Baxendale and Pawling, *Narrating the Thirties*, p. 3. On these figures, see also Adrian Bingham, “‘An Organ of Uplift?’ The Popular Press and Political Culture in Interwar Britain”, *Journalism Studies*, 14.5 (2013), 651-662. Bingham writes that “the circulation of daily newspapers doubled in the 20 years after 1918, and by 1939 some two-thirds of the population regularly read one” (p. 651). The most recent edition of the *Dictionary of Media and Communication Studies* also provides similar figures for the period: “Between 1920 and 1939 the circulation of national dailies went from 5.4 million to 10.6

extent of changes that happened within a relatively short period in the media ecology of interwar Britain.

The British film industry also experienced rapid expansion and growth. While, in 1926, its output was extremely low “with only 37 films produced and a mere 5 per cent share of British screen time”, national production had steadily increased by 1929, with 65 films produced that year.⁴ This development was supported by the first Cinematograph Films Act of 1927 which introduced a quota requirement for British films that exhibitors had to adhere to. The quota created a new, albeit artificial, national market for films produced under the auspices of British-owned or British-controlled production companies and helped to stimulate moderate growth of the British film industry.⁵ Three major exhibition circuits operated in 1930s Britain: Gaumont British, Associated British Cinemas, and Odeon.⁶ By 1931, Gaumont British already owned over 300 cinemas in Britain. Oscar Deutsch’s Odeon chain could pride itself in owning over 200 cinemas by 1937.⁷ Unsurprisingly, cinema-going rose dramatically as a leisure-time activity throughout all classes and social groups in Britain. Simon Rowson’s survey of cinema admissions in 1934

million, while Sunday paper circulations rose from 13.5 million to 16 million.” See “Press Barons”, in *Dictionary of Media and Communication Studies*, 9th edn, ed. by James Watson and Anne Hill (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), pp. 245-247 (p. 246). For further discussion of the press in interwar Britain, see also Adrian Bingham, “Cultural Hierarchies and the Interwar British Press”, in *Middlebrow Literary Cultures: The Battle of the Brows, 1920-1960*, ed. by Erica Brown and Mary Grover (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2012), pp. 55-68.

⁴ Laraine Porter, “The Talkies Come to Britain: British Silent Cinema and the Transition to Sound, 1928-30”, in *The Routledge Companion to British Cinema History*, ed. by Ian Hunter, Laraine Porter and Justin Smith (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), pp. 87-98 (p. 88).

⁵ Government intervention was only partially successful in its attempt to protect the national film industry against American, French, and German films: The critic C. A. Lejeune remarked in 1935 that “it is perfectly simple, even in these days of protection, for an Englishman to go regularly once a week to the cinema without ever seeing an English film.” See C. A. Lejeune, “The British Film and Others”, *The Fortnightly*, 143 (1935), 285-294 (p. 287).

⁶ LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy*, p. 13.

⁷ Ibid.

calculates a total of just over 963 million visitors.⁸ According to Jeffrey Richards, admissions rose to “1,027 millions in 1940. The number of cinemas increased to meet the extra demand, rising from some 3,000 in 1926 to 4,967 in 1938”.⁹ Furthermore, Richards estimates that “five-eighths of the total expenditure on entertainment in Britain in 1937-1938 went on the cinema.”¹⁰

There certainly was a “concentration of economic power within various media”, such as film.¹¹ However, the media ecology was driven simultaneously by both production and consumption, supply and demand, producers’ options and limitations. LeMahieu outlines how the media were largely dependent on consumers’ approval to remain successful. For the case of cinema, such an “indication of approval” could be gathered through ticket sales, attendance numbers, and box-office receipts.¹² Writers and producers responded to audience feedback and box office sales: “By identifying pragmatically with the needs of their audience, and then measuring success by actual sales, commercial culture evolved through a process of trial and error.”¹³ The advent of synchronised sound technology set into motion such a process of “trial and error” in the film industry. The technology gave rise to new economic and creative opportunities for producers and filmmakers, but it also posed some initial problems and constraints on the processes of filmmaking and exhibition. The transition to sound and its economic and creative impact on

⁸ Simon Rowson, “A Statistical Survey of the Cinema Industry in Great Britain in 1934”, *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, 99.1 (1936), 67-129 (pp. 70-71).

⁹ Jeffrey Richards, “Cinemagoing in Worktown: Regional Film Audiences in 1930s Britain”, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 14.2 (1994), 147-166 (p. 147).

¹⁰ Richards, “Cinemagoing in Worktown”, p. 147. On these astonishing figures, see also Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 419-456. McKibbin states that “throughout the 1930s, there were 18-19 million weekly [cinema] attendances” (p. 419).

¹¹ LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy*, p. 14.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

Hollywood and the American film industry have been well-documented in a range of scholarly works.¹⁴ However, considerably less work has been done to uncover the implications and effects of early synchronised sound technology on the British film industry.¹⁵ The next section summarises some key developments pertaining to Britain and outlines the initial audience and trade response to early sound film.

The Coming of Sound Film

The development of synchronised sound technology had its origins in early experiments to combine versions of the kinoscope and kinematograph with phonograph recordings. Although Thomas Edison is most commonly named as a pioneer in this field, other crucial experiments to design sound film were conducted by Eugène Augustin Lauste, Léon Gaumont, Ernst Rühmer, Joseph Tykocinski-Tykociner, and Lee de Forest throughout the early twentieth century.¹⁶ Kaganovsky states that “the first public demonstration of sound recorded simultaneously with pictures on film took place at the University of Illinois Urbana

¹⁴ See, for instance, Charles O'Brien, *Cinema's Conversion to Sound: Technology and Film Style in France and the U.S.* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005); James Lastra, *Sound Technology and the American Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Barry Salt, *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis* (London: Starword, 2009); Donald Crafton, *The Talkies: American Cinema's Transition to Sound, 1926-1931* (New York: Scribner, 1997).

¹⁵ The transition to sound in Britain tends to be the subject of individual journal articles or book chapters. See Porter, “The Talkies Come to Britain”, pp. 87-98; Robert Murphy, “Coming of Sound to the Cinema in Britain”, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 4.2 (1984), 143-160; Geoff Brown, “When Britannia ruled the Sound Waves: Britain's Transition to Sound in its European Context”, *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image*, 12.2 (2018), 93-119; Rachael Low, *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939: Film Making in 1930s Britain* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1985) and the coda in Laura Marcus' *The Tenth Muse*.

¹⁶ Lilya Kaganovsky, *The Voice of Technology: Soviet Cinema's Transition to Sound, 1928-1935* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2018), p. xv. For the vital contributions of Lauste, Gaumont, Rühmer, Tykociner, and de Forest in the development of synchronised sound film, see for instance *A Technological History of Motion Pictures and Television: An Anthology from the Pages of the Journal of the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers*, ed. by Raymond Fielding (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967). See also the special issue of *Film History*, 11.4 (1999), ed. by Rick Altman and Richard Abel. The issue is devoted to a discussion of “Global Experiments in Early Synchronous Sounds”.

campus on June 9, 1922".¹⁷ The event showcased an important milestone in Tykociner's efforts to achieve synchronised sound on film (Fig. 1).



Figure 1: Tykociner film of voice. Photograph undated, possibly taken in or around 1922. Negative on glass, 5 x 7 in. Bain News Service. George Grantham Bain Collection. Image Credit: Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C. [reproduction number LC-DIG-ggbain-34791]

In addition to research, such as Tykociner's, that was aimed at combining synchronised sound and image technologically, the screening of films in the silent era was usually accompanied by sound in the form of live music, actors speaking behind the screen, or a

¹⁷ Kaganovsky, *The Voice of Technology*, p. xv.

lecture-style narration.¹⁸ Laura Marcus notes the strong ties between the silent film era and early sound film, stating their shared heritage:

The exhibition of sound technology, through the Vitaphone and Movietone shorts of the late 1920s, forms a strong connection between early sound film and early silent film as, in Tom Gunning's model, 'a cinema of attractions', which directly solicited the attention of the spectator, through visual spectacle and the direct address to the audience. These dimensions of the early 'cinema of attractions' re-emerged with the coming of sound and the cinematic display of its technical possibilities. The early sound-movie shorts returned, however, to film origins (newsreel documentaries (Fox) and vaudeville performances (Warner Bros.)), in order to show, as Michael Rogin argued, 'how they could improve on silent pictures. The silent versions of these shorts had exposed the limitations of the stage; the sound versions revealed the shortcomings of the silents'.¹⁹

Contrary to conceiving the introduction of sound as a radical break with silent cinema, it is more accurate to understand the introduction of sound as the result of a longer developmental trajectory in the global film industry that was working towards the connection of sound and moving image to produce a new entertainment experience.

After the successful introduction of sound film shorts in the form of newsreels and vaudeville film clips, there were concerted efforts to extend the use of sound technology to feature-length films. Warner Brothers' *The Jazz Singer* starring Al Jolson is now commonly discussed as one of the first feature-length movies with synchronised sound in an Anglo-American context. It was a sensation with American audiences in 1927, but was shown in just a few cinemas in Britain in 1928. A follow-up production, *The Singing Fool* (1928), also

¹⁸ Murphy, "Coming of Sound to the Cinema in Britain", p. 145. See also Rick Altman, *Silent Film Sound* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); *The Sounds of the Silents in Britain*, ed. by Julie Brown and Annette Davison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Charles O'Brien writes of early experiments to combine phonographs with silent film. See O'Brien, *Cinema's Conversion to Sound*, p. 3.

¹⁹ Laura Marcus, *The Tenth Muse: Writing about Cinema in the Modernist Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 409. On the "cinema of attractions", see Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attraction[s]: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde", in *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. by Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), pp. 381-388. Marcus draws here on Michael Rogin's discussion of *The Jazz Singer*, one of the first American feature films produced with synchronised sound. See Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 90-91.

featured Jolson and achieved great success with audiences in Britain.²⁰ In the wake of *The Singing Fool's* resounding success, "sound films began to be taken seriously and the installation of sound equipment in [British] cinemas began in earnest".²¹ Accordingly, a wave of sound systems for cinemas and film production companies flooded the American and British markets in the 1928/1929 season: RCA's Photophone, Western Electric's Vitaphone, American Powers-Cinephone, German Tobis-Klangfilm, British Phototone, British Acoustic, Marconi-Visatone and many more.²² Broadly speaking, those systems could be divided into two categories: sound-on-disc and sound-on-film systems. Sound-on-disc, for instance Vitaphone, was a system for which the soundtrack was recorded on a separate disc and, during exhibition, the soundtrack had to be played separately from the film. While sound reproduction with this system offered relatively good intelligibility and fidelity, it defied accurate synchronisation. Sound-on-film, for instance the German Tobis-Klangfilm or RCA's photophone, contained both image track and soundtrack on the film strip. This allowed for better results with synchronisation, but the sound quality of the recording was less convincing than those of sound-on-disc systems.

Different film production companies were using different technologies and these were not always compatible or interchangeable with each other which led to some trouble for exhibitors. Cinema-owners had to make significant decisions regarding equipment. Murphy explains how exhibitors usually had to choose between expensive, but reliable high-quality equipment and more inexpensive systems which tended to be less reliable and not as well supported by manufacturers.²³ Despite these initial problems, the transition to

²⁰ The film critic of the *Daily Mail* called *The Singing Fool* "a Talking Film Triumph", elaborating further that "the entire picture was a revelation of what the real Al Jolson can do. [...] To hear the star sing 'There's a Rainbow Round my Shoulder' makes this first really arresting talking picture to be shown in London a significant and a deeply enjoyable entertainment." See "Talking Film Triumph", *The Daily Mail*, 10 November 1928, p. 13.

²¹ Murphy, "Coming of Sound to the Cinema in Britain", p. 146.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 147.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

sound was largely driven by audience popularity and box-office sales.²⁴ Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that the popularity of sound film may have played a crucial role in allowing American and British cinema exhibitors to survive the economic downturn and depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s.²⁵

Within the relatively short time span between 1929 and 1933, the majority of British cinemas had been equipped with sound and this was very much seen as a viable financial investment since “expenditure could usually be recuperated easily as sound equipment would generally mean increased attendance and services of live musicians could cease”.²⁶ While it is correct that professional musicians lost work opportunities in cinema venues due to the advent of synchronised sound, the technology also created new jobs and a whole new professional sector, namely that of the film sound recordist and film sound engineer. Initially, sound technicians were drafted from radio, but rising numbers of recordists, technicians, editors, and mixers were trained by film studios and found new livelihoods in one of the British studios or with cinema exhibitors. Another professional opportunity created by sound film was that of the voice coach.²⁷

While sound technology thus created new jobs and significant revenue for exhibitors, film producers experienced the advent of sound a little more ambivalently. Early sound film production came with new requirements and changed the practicalities of filmmaking: cameras had to be soundproofed (“blimped”), microphone placement had to be devised carefully on set (often adversely affecting lighting and set design), and both early microphones and heavy soundproofed cameras restricted movement for actors and made

²⁴ Porter, “The Talkies Come to Britain”, p. 94: “exhibition drove transition to sound”.

²⁵ Murphy, “Coming of Sound to the Cinema in Britain”, p. 151.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

²⁷ See Porter, “The Talkies Come to Britain”, pp. 88, 96.

on-location filming with sound virtually impossible.²⁸ For the performer, accent and voice became paramount and sound doubtlessly required a completely new approach to acting and speaking. As with the case of the sound recordist, sound engineer, and voice coach, sound film established a number of new work opportunities for actors, writers, stagehands, and performers who had previously worked in the theatre.

An increase in new, purpose-built movie theatres to accommodate the specific requirements of screening sound film demonstrates how the introduction of sound not only changed the film industry, production practices, and the professional opportunities available to performers and technicians, but also the architecture of the interwar entertainment industry. In *The Soundscape of Modernity*, Emily Thompson traces how the science of modern acoustics came into being at the fin-de-siècle. Thompson argues that modern technology and machinery created new acoustic phenomena which, in the form of sound, needed to be optimised and, in the form of noise, needed to be absorbed and directed away from people.²⁹ The new science of acoustics and the emerging profession of the acoustic engineer notably developed from a need to control modern sound in its different forms.³⁰ Unsurprisingly, cinema acoustics became a new key concern in the late 1920s and early 1930s, participating in this cultural drive to both experience and control modern sound. Purpose-built movie theatres were constructed from scratch and manufacturers advertised systems to resolve poor acoustics in existing venues. The trade paper *Kinematograph Weekly*, for instance, regularly advertised new inventions such as the “Acousticos Sound Absorbing Treatment” which promised to be a system for improving the acoustics of exhibitors’ venues. The advertisement claimed that “poor sound projection will

²⁸ The problems raised by early sound equipment for the film production process are also discussed by Barry Salt, “Film Style and Technology in the Thirties: Sound”, in *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, ed. by Elisabeth Weis and John Belton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 37-43. See also Mark Cousins, *The Story of Film* (London: Pavilion Books, 2006), pp. 117-122.

²⁹ Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1933* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), pp. 115-168 and pp. 229-272.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 321.

be reflected in the box office” and that “sound films must have proper acoustics, or their effects, otherwise attractive, become mere noise”.³¹ Such advertisements exploited exhibitors’ wishes to attract large audiences and to profit from the newness of sound film as much as possible, but it also indicates the wide-reaching consequences of the coming of sound, which affected film-making, film-exhibition, the development of new technologies and professions, and the architecture, acoustics, and interior design of the period.

The transition period also strengthened the market position of American film production companies over their British counterparts, which caused some anxiety in the British industry:

The American majors were all vertically integrated concerns with substantial interests in the exhibition side of the industry and had some measure of control over the time and the manner of the transition to sound. While Wall Street crashed, the ‘big five’ film companies (MGM, Fox, RKO, Warner Brothers, Paramount) were able to make record profits. Britain by contrast was subjected to a technological advance for which it was poorly prepared. Its inexperienced personnel, its limited [...] capital resources, its reliance on foreign technology [...] combined to make the coming of sound a traumatic period for the British film production industry.³²

To counteract Hollywood dominance over the national film industry, the British Cinematograph Films Act of 1927 sought to ensure that there was demand for British films during the early years of the transition period.³³ Although many of the “quota quickies” were cheaply produced for the sake of meeting the new quota regulations, these films nonetheless guaranteed jobs and revenue for the national film industry in Britain. Yet, fear of an “Americanisation” of the national entertainment industry took hold, which can also be seen from contemporary film reviews mentioning explicitly and often unfavourably the American accents that could be heard in Hollywood sound features screened in Britain.³⁴ In

³¹ “Acousticos Sound-absorbing Treatment”, Advertisement by Horace W. Cullum & Co Ltd., *Kinematograph Weekly*, 2 January 1930, p. 136.

³² Murphy, “Coming of Sound to the Cinema in Britain”, pp. 156-157.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

³⁴ See “Reviews of the Week”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, 2 January 1930, pp. 82-83. For the film *College Coquette*, the reviewer writes: “the recording is good, but strong American accents make it difficult

the course of the 1930s, the high number of American movies would come to shape new idioms and ways of speaking too, a development alluded to in Winifred Holtby's *South Riding* (1936): "Like most of her generation and locality, Elsie was trilingual. She talked BBC English to her employer, Cinema American to her companions, and Yorkshire dialect to old milkmen like Eli Dickson."³⁵

The advent of synchronised sound technology in Britain received mixed responses from the trade press, exhibitors, intellectuals, and the public. As early as 17 March 1928, *The Film Spectator* suggested that no one could "escape [the] fact that sound is here".³⁶ The magazine considered it "inevitable" that "screen art is going to advance until it fully embraces sound".³⁷ Reflecting on the changes sound technology had brought to the British film industry in 1929, *Kinematograph Weekly* not only urged caution in implementing the new sound technology, but also reviewed more critically the developments of the previous season:

There were those who rushed in talkie equipment at such speed that the apparatus could not possibly be expected to work properly, and there were those who, when good talkies were scarce, put on anything that talked with no thought of whether it entertained or not. This remarkable combination of atrocious reproduction and bad entertainment made thousands of enemies for the talkies and drove away numberless would-be patrons.³⁸

for one to follow the dialogue easily". See also Genevieve Abravanel, *Americanizing Britain: The Rise of Modernism in the Age of the Entertainment Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). On the complex relationship between the British film industry and the government, see, for instance, Margaret Dickinson and Sarah Street, *Cinema and State: The Film Industry and the Government, 1927-84* (London: BFI, 1985), pp. 5-75. The issue of Hollywood dominance over the British film industry remains a current topic. John Hill writes of the 1990s that "British film production [...] is still overshadowed by Hollywood, an industry whose films have dominated British screens since the end of the First World War". John Hill, "Cinema", *The Media in Britain: Current Debates and Developments*, ed. Jane Stokes and Anna Reading (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 74-87 (p. 76).

³⁵ Winifred Holtby, *South Riding* (Reading: Random House, 2011), p. 8.

³⁶ "Can't Escape Fact That Sound Is Here", *The Film Spectator*, ed. by Welford Beaton, 17 March 1928, p. 6.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ "1929-1930", *Kinematograph Weekly*, 2 January 1930, p. 113.

By 1930, the film reviews section of *Kine Weekly*, which commented on a number of categories for each film (“story”, “acting”, “production”, “setting”, and “photography”), had also gained a new category: “sound technique”. Review comments included information on whether a film’s recordings were of good quality and clear, whether the speech heard in the film was “pleasant” and intelligible, and whether accents were (too) strong.³⁹

A critical debate on the merits and shortfalls of sound emerged from intellectuals and film critics of the late 1920s as outlined by Marcus.⁴⁰ The British script writer and film critic Ernest Betts, publishing his monograph *Heraclitus, or the Future of Films* in 1928, wrote that cinema’s appeal stems from its poetic play of “light and shadow”. Betts saw film as a silent domain in which spoken dialogue had no place. He argued fervently and repeatedly against the use of synchronised sound.⁴¹ The art critic and psychologist Rudolf Arnheim published his *Film as Art* in 1933 shortly before his emigration to Rome due to Hitler’s rise to power in the Weimar Republic. In his work, Arnheim expresses his conviction that cinema’s appeal came from “the absence of the non-visual senses”, meaning film’s capacity to visualise what is normally not visible.⁴² Experiences of sound, touch, or smell, for instance, should be conveyed purely and exclusively by visual means. Arnheim was convinced that any attempt to include synchronised sound and dialogue would prove an unnecessary distraction for actors and audiences.⁴³ In *The Film till Now*, the British documentary filmmaker Paul Rotha equally stated his concerns over sound as a potential distraction for the viewer. He argued that having to follow dialogue on screen would take

³⁹ See “Reviews of the Week”, *Kinematograph Weekly*, 2 January 1930, p. 83.

⁴⁰ See Marcus, *The Tenth Muse*, pp. 404-437.

⁴¹ Betts summarises his attitude in the short journal article “Why Talkies are Unsound”. See Ernest Betts, “Why ‘Talkies’ are Unsound”, in *Close Up 1927-1933: Cinema and Modernism*, ed. by James Donald, Anne Friedberg, and Laura Marcus (London: Cassell, 1998), pp. 89-90. See also Ernest Betts, *Heraclitus or The Future of Films* (London: Kegan Paul, 1928).

⁴² Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1957), pp. 30-34.

⁴³ Arnheim, *Film as Art*, pp. 199-211.

the viewer's attention away from the image, thus potentially interfering with audiences' attentive reception of a film.⁴⁴ Some popular entertainers joined the anti-sound camp, among them Charlie Chaplin, who wrote in the *Daily Mail* in February 1931 that his "screen character" would remain "speechless from choice".⁴⁵ In addition, North, Donald, and Marcus note the animosity towards sound expressed by a group of avant-garde writers who were affiliated with the niche film journal *Close Up*.⁴⁶ Bryher, for instance, describes the silent film of the late 1920s as "the art that died". She asserts that "sound ruined [film's] development".⁴⁷ Similarly, as Marcus explains, Dorothy Richardson believed that the multiple elements of sound film, such as dialogue, sound effects, musical scoring, and silence would cause the disintegration of "the continuous stream provided by film music in silent cinema and its unifying aesthetic".⁴⁸

A tentatively positive reaction to sound came from the Soviet directors Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Alexandrov. They published their "Statement on Sound" in 1928 in Leningrad. An English translation for *Close Up* made the statement available to a wider, English-speaking audience just a few months later.⁴⁹ Eisenstein already enjoyed a reputation as a brilliant director due to the international success of his silent film *Battleship*

⁴⁴ Paul Rotha, *The Film till Now: A Survey of World Cinema*, rev. edn (London: Vision, 1949), pp. 405-409.

⁴⁵ Charlie Chaplin, "Why I Prefer Silent Films", *Daily Mail*, 7 February 1931, p. 10.

⁴⁶ *Close Up* was published between 1927 and 1933 by the Scottish critic and novelist Kenneth MacPherson, together with his wife Bryher, from their house in Switzerland. Donald, Friedberg, and Marcus' volume on this avant-garde cinema magazine devotes a whole section to the journal's take on the coming of sound. See *Close Up 1927-1933: Cinema and Modernism*, pp. 79-93. In addition, Michael North also provides a helpful discussion of the writers and artists affiliated with the journal who were critical of sound. See Michael North, *Camera Works: Photography and the Twentieth-Century Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 83-105.

⁴⁷ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis: A Writer's Memoir* (London: Collins, 1963), pp. 247-248.

⁴⁸ Marcus, *The Tenth Muse*, p. 405.

⁴⁹ See James Donald, "Introduction", in *Close Up 1927-1933: Cinema and Modernism*, ed. by James Donald, Anne Friedberg, and Laura Marcus (London: Cassell, 1998), pp. 79-82.

Potemkin (1925). He welcomed sound as a cinematic innovation, full of creative possibilities, and advocated treating sound as an additional element in the practice of montage which featured centrally in the Soviet director's aesthetic programme for film.⁵⁰ Colliding shots and creating conflicting impressions by means of image and sound montage would, according to Eisenstein, produce a layering of visual and acoustic effects.⁵¹ Akin to Benjamin's *shock effect* Eisenstein's aesthetic programme for sound aimed at the emotional, political, and cognitive "dynamisation of the audience".⁵² The "contrapuntal use" of sound and image was the Soviet directors' ideal for cinematic production under the conditions of the new technology. However, Eisenstein and his Soviet colleagues acknowledged the danger of misusing sound technology as a means for capitalist exploitation, fearing that sound could be used to solely increase industry profits and as a mere contributing factor to the proliferation of mass entertainment.⁵³ To Eisenstein and his colleagues, the use of sound for capitalist means would only lead to a "photographed presentation of theatrical order", which would return film to its "repressed other", the theatre.⁵⁴

Like Eisenstein and his co-authors, the Hungarian-born writer and film critic Bela Balázs initially welcomed sound technology as an opportunity to innovate film production and to create new cinematic experiences for the audience. In his monograph *The Spirit of Film* (1930), Balázs warned his readers not to understand sound as a mere complement to silent film. In his opinion, hearing was a more powerful sense than sight and thus sound film

⁵⁰ Sergei Eisenstein, W. I. Pudovkin, and G. V. Alexandrov, "Statement on Sound", in *The Eisenstein Reader*, ed. by Richard Taylor (London: BFI, 1998), pp. 80-81.

⁵¹ Sergei Eisenstein, "The Dialectical Approach to Film Form", in *The Eisenstein Reader*, ed. by Richard Taylor (London: BFI, 1998), pp. 93-110.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

⁵³ Eisenstein et al., "Statement on Sound", pp. 80-81.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* See also Altman, "The Evolution of Sound Technology", p. 51.

would open up a whole new dimension for reaching audiences.⁵⁵ While Balázs acknowledged that technological limitations would put an initial strain on filmmakers' and actors' creative freedom when working with sound, a far greater problem, he asserted, was "the untutored state of our hearing".⁵⁶ Hence, under the conditions of sound, the filmmaker's main task had to be the "creation of linguistic and acoustic landscapes".⁵⁷ Despite Balázs' positive outlook on synchronised sound in 1930, he later became disillusioned:

Twenty years have passed since I wrote down these conditions. The sound film has left them unfulfilled to this day. The arts did not accede to my theoretical wishes. During its evolution the human spirit has had many a fair prospect open up before it, which the great highroad of human culture then bypassed and left behind. No art exploits all its possibilities, and not only aesthetic factors influence the choice of the road that is ultimately followed in preference to many possible others. And I would not have repeated this my old demand if the sound film had since advanced farther along another road. But it has advanced nowhere.⁵⁸

While some film critics, avant-garde artists, and intellectuals thus sided more firmly with those who considered sound to be problematic, disruptive, and a threat to film's status as an art form, exhibitors and cinema audiences were generally more favourably disposed towards the talkies. The British fan magazine *The Picturegoer* published the following letter by a cinema exhibitor in January 1931:

As an exhibitor, I have noticed that for some time the talkies have received a considerable amount of adverse criticism from many sources. Highbrows are constantly denouncing the American accent, which they erroneously suggest is to be heard in all talking films. May I suggest, and I feel sure that most readers of *The Picturegoer* will agree, that a talking film made in America and dealing with American life would not have any pretensions to reality if it were not spoken in the tongue normally used by the characters the film portrays? It is a fact that many films made in Hollywood with an English cast and story, set in English surroundings, do not contain one word in the American accent. If we analyse the feeling underlying these criticisms, it will be evident that insular hypocrisy and humbug are responsible. As regards the music the new entertainment provides, "canned" is an expression which is often used, in such a tone of voice that one is left with little doubt as to the speaker's opinion of it. In reality, exhibitors find that talkie music is vastly more satisfactory than the music of silent days. It should be remembered that during the latter

⁵⁵ Bela Balázs, *Bela Balázs: Early Film Theory: "Visible Man" and "The Spirit of Film"*, ed. by Erica Carter, tr. by Rodney Livingstone (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), p. 184.

⁵⁶ Balázs, *Early Film Theory*, pp. 185-187.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

⁵⁸ Bela Balázs, *Theory of the Film*, tr. by E. Bone (London: Dobson, 1952), p. 198.

period, orchestras did not play during the whole of the continuous performance. [...] [W]ith talkies installed, a kinema provides an equally good show at every portion of the performance. When music is heard, it is now often the result of the efforts of the highest paid musicians in the world [...]. Talkies are held responsible for the displacement of large numbers of musicians. This is true, but we must remember that scores of new posts have to be filled from sources not originally connected with the kinema industry. The installation and service of equipment alone is responsible for a great increase in employment on behalf of talkie houses.⁵⁹

This defence of the talking film responds to some of the early criticism of cinematic sound, but it also suggests that exhibitors and audiences saw merit and potential in sound films despite early shortcomings. Some readers of *The Picturegoer* wrote to the journal to express their belief that an unfair comparison with silent film was held against the emerging technology: “talkies [...] are still in their infancy, though making rapid headway day by day, and it is unfair to compare the silent film of some fourteen years’ experience with the very immature talking picture.”⁶⁰ Such statements suggest that audiences were willing to allow for and forgive the initial technological shortfalls in light of sound film’s newness.

The preceding discussion has outlined some of the changing technological and economic factors introduced to the film industry through the implementation of synchronised sound and provided a partial overview of the range of trade and public responses to sound in the early transition phase. The conditions outlined above also necessitated an in-depth engagement with the limitations and possibilities of the new medium by filmmakers and studios. This engagement is best explored through the following case study of *Blackmail* to clarify the ongoing process of negotiating sound (and its limits) in the British entertainment system of the late 1920s.⁶¹

⁵⁹ “Truth about the Talkies”, Letter by F. Williams, *The Picturegoer*, 21.121 (January 1931), p. 52.

⁶⁰ “What do you think?”, Letter by M. L. Sheffield, *The Picturegoer*, 21.122 (February 1931), p. 54.

⁶¹ My choice of case study builds on Laura Marcus’ coda in *The Tenth Muse*, but extends the scope of the analysis to consider how *Blackmail*’s treatment of sound and silence exemplifies a broader dynamic of negotiating film’s past and future during the transition phase.

Alfred Hitchcock's *Blackmail*

Hitchcock made *Blackmail* in the Elstree studios for British International Pictures (BIP), which had been fitted with sound equipment by April 1929.⁶² The film was BIP's and Hitchcock's first venture into sound film, but it demonstrated beyond doubt the director's control over the new medium. Exhibiting a tightly controlled use of sound, the film foregrounds silence as its central theme. As such, the film provides audiences with the thrill and excitement offered by the new technology while also taking advantage of audience's familiarity with silent film. Reviews of one of the first sound films screened in Britain, *The Talking Fool* (1928), indicate that a strategy of mixing sound and silence would be highly successful with audiences. *The Talking Fool* interpolated synchronised dialogue with musical numbers and silent sequences carried by intertitles. According to the *Daily Mail* this mixture rendered the film particularly "arresting":

Not all of the film uses dialogue. Indeed, a most uncanny effect is created at moments where it suddenly and inexplicably reverts to silence and printed titles. It seemed as though a wall of glass had suddenly come between the actors and us.⁶³

Blackmail arguably refines the method of mixing sound and silence to impress audiences. The film tells the story of a young woman, Alice, who stabs the painter Crewe in self-defence when he assaults her in his studio. Too scared to go to the police, she tries to conceal the murder. Her fiancé Frank is a detective and gets assigned to the case. He suspects that Alice is the murderess but keeps this quiet until the couple are blackmailed by a man called Tracy.

The sound version of *Blackmail* was received positively, with *The Times* review notably pointing out that the director had succeeded in appropriately controlling the "recording of a variety of strange noises" without sacrificing image, acting, or sound quality:

More than the average significance [is] attached to the showing of *Blackmail*, as it was the first full-length talking subject to be made in a British film studio. Mr. Alfred Hitchcock, the director, should be well pleased with his work, which easily surpasses its forerunners in the peculiar gifts which the sound film is acquiring for itself. From the first Mr. Hitchcock has held firmly to the principles of movement which underlie his craft. *Blackmail* is a true motion

⁶² *Blackmail*, dir. by Alfred Hitchcock, starring Anny Ondra and John Longden (British International Pictures/Wardour Films, 1929). See also Murphy, "Coming of Sound to the Cinema in Britain", p. 155.

⁶³ "Talking Film Triumph", *The Daily Mail*, 10 November 1928, p. 13.

picture, and frees us from the idea that the camera must be transfixed and the pictorial flow of the film arrested merely for the pleasure of recording a variety of strange noises. [...] Indeed, the dialogue throughout is admirably written and enters with a frank and pleasing cadence into its graphic background. Considerable use is made of voices “off the set,” and the realistic note is heightened by this device.⁶⁴

Similarly, the *Daily Mail* called the film a “British Triumph” that was “far in advance of all other talking films which have hitherto been shown”.⁶⁵ The daily papers, the trade press, and even *Close Up* celebrated Hitchcock’s success. Kenneth MacPherson wrote enthusiastically that *Blackmail* “is far and away the most significant determinant to unification of sound-sight [...]. *Blackmail*, I want to establish, is the first sign of comprehension of the relationship of techniques”.⁶⁶ Writing in October 1929, MacPherson called on his readers to think more actively and reflectively about sound technology. Through *Close Up*, he hoped to create a new platform for the discussion of cinematic sound:

What a complicated, vast, never-ending science the investigation and psychology of sound is going to present to us, and some of us already are beginning to say that talkies are an art. When you think, nobody has translated sound, except into music. It has remained an unclassified, unqualified, imminent and unresolvable substance over and around us, without symbolic form [...] without any art form. And before we can use it as trimming or sewing thread even, we must set it an area, find terms for it and text books, know what sound is and what it does and what we do with it.⁶⁷

MacPherson’s enthusiasm is a little surprising, given *Close Up*’s record of publishing some rather critical pieces on sound (such as Ernest Bett’s aforementioned “Why Talkies are Unsound”).⁶⁸ Hitchcock’s film is of particular interest because it seems to have shifted film critics’ and intellectuals’ opinions in favour of sound while also becoming a firm favourite with the British public.

⁶⁴ “Regal Theatre: ‘Blackmail’. A British International Picture”, *The Times*, 24 June 1929, p. 12.

⁶⁵ “Best Talk-Film Yet”, *Daily Mail*, 24 June 1929, p. 11. The review states that “in this film for the first time intelligent use is made of sound”.

⁶⁶ Kenneth Macpherson, “As Is”, in *Close Up 1927-1933: Cinema and Modernism*, ed. by James Donald, Anne Friedberg, and Laura Marcus (London: Cassell, 1998), pp. 90-93 (p. 90).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁶⁸ On this point, see also Donald, “Introduction”, pp. 79-82.

Blackmail was filmed as a silent and as a sound version and the existence of both versions alongside each other allowed for a direct comparison, which showed sound's potential advantages and its creative possibilities for devising new cinematic strategies of representation.⁶⁹ Macpherson uses the following example to explain to his readers his positive stance towards *Blackmail*'s use of sound: Alice has just stabbed Crewe with a knife and flees the scene of the crime. She walks the streets of London for hours. The camera follows her steps with tracking shots; close-ups of her feet show the worn state of her heels. Suddenly, Alice spots a homeless man, sleeping on the pavement. The posture of his hand, stretched out in sleep, resembles that of the dead artist's hand after the stabbing. In the sound version, Alice screams at the sight of the hand. A cut to the artist's landlady shows her screaming upon discovering the dead body. The sound of the scream establishes an acoustic connection between these two shots. The link is enforced by cutting repeatedly between the action and close-ups of the stretched out hand (Fig. 2). The silent version of the same sequence moves faster, but it does not contain a silent scream. Alice merely stops before the sleeping man on the pavement and a cut subsequently shows the artist's landlady. A medium shot presents her discovering the body with her back to the camera. She is raising her shaking hands while looking towards the corpse. The silent version establishes continuity of action purely by visual means whereas the sound version adds another perceptual layer to the same sequence and bridges the two scenes by means of sound.

⁶⁹ Charles Barr compares the silent and sound version in his article "*Blackmail: Silent and Sound*", *Sight and Sound*, 52.2 (1983), 122-126.



Figure 2: The dead artist's hand in *Blackmail*. Screenshot by the author.

Macpherson describes this use of sound as “neat and dramatic”.⁷⁰ The sequence exemplifies how sound could provide new ways of connecting scenes with each other. Audiences might interpret the scream as linking the scenes of Alice and the landlady, illustrating a temporal “meanwhile”, or they could understand the shots as a chronological sequence. The sound introduces a new horizon of interpretations for the audience.

McDonald argues that Hitchcock’s sound version shows the director’s anxiety about a potential loss of control over his work due to the new technology,⁷¹ but I want to maintain here that the sound version of *Blackmail* should be seen first and foremost as an intricate engagement with the possibilities and limitations of the new technology, and specifically as an exploration of how both sound and silence can become powerful artistic devices in the new medium of sound film. Indeed, Hitchcock here demonstrates his mastery (rather than anxiety) over the new medium by consciously employing sound technology to draw out silence and speechlessness as the film’s central themes. The emphasis on silence is achieved by three strategies which all rely on the possibility of sound in film. First, Hitchcock

⁷⁰ Macpherson, “As Is”, p. 91.

⁷¹ Matthew MacDonald, “Hitchcock’s *Blackmail* and the Threat of Recorded Sound”, *Music and the Moving Image*, 8.3 (2015), 40-51.

contrasts Alice's speechlessness and other characters' verbosity; second, he excludes the audience from sonic information; and third, he manipulates and distorts dialogue and sound effects to foreground Alice's speechlessness and the unspeakability of her crime.

Hitchcock develops an obvious contrast between the female protagonist's speechlessness and other characters' loquaciousness. After committing the murder, Alice cannot confess her deed to anyone. She descends into silence while other characters around her talk incessantly. In one scene, her fiancé Frank begs her to "say something", but Alice remains silent. In this scene, her response to Frank is one of despair and speechlessness. She nervously moves her hands and her head in response to Frank's questions, but she avoids his gaze, withdrawing herself from the conversation. She rejects any verbal interaction while Frank is desperately trying to force her into a dialogue by showing her a piece of evidence and taking her hands. Belton argues that this scene suggests that *Blackmail* uses sound consciously "to foreground its central character's inability to speak".⁷² Alice's silence allows for the eponymous blackmail to unfold and for her and Frank to be threatened by Tracy. The film's entire plot is not only caused by silence but crucially hinges on Alice's continuous efforts to withdraw herself from Frank and to remain silent.

The film tends to avoid visible lip-synchronisation, meaning that the camera's perspective and editing of the film does not allow the audience to check whether there is accurate synchronisation between sound and image in some of the dialogue scenes. While this is certainly a strategy that simplifies the early process of adding sound to film, the lack of visible lip-synchronisation also disembodies the human voice, and specifically Alice's voice on screen. This sense of disembodiment culminates in the physical recording of *Blackmail's* soundtrack. Anny Ondra, the actress playing Alice, spoke English with a Czech accent. BIP decided that her accent made her voice unsuitable for *Blackmail's* sound version and hired the English actress Joan Barry to deliver Ondra's lines by standing just off-stage

⁷² John Belton, "Awkward Transitions: Hitchcock's 'Blackmail' and the Dynamics of Early Film Sound", *The Musical Quarterly*, 83.2 (1999), 227-246 (p. 243).

while Ondra only silently mimed her lines in front of the camera.⁷³ Here, silence becomes central to both the film's plot and production: the part of the speechless woman is acted by a woman whose voice was silenced for the performance. *Blackmail* not only foregrounds its central character's inability to speak, it also consciously plays with the fact that its main actress had to be muted, her voice substituted, for the production of the film.

In order to create suspense, Hitchcock also uses silence as a device to exclude the cinema audience from sonic information. This pattern recurs during the film and may deliberately frustrate the audience's expectation that a sound film should be audible at all times. When Crewe and Alice walk to Crewe's apartment while being observed by the future blackmailer Tracy, Tracy calls out to Crewe to speak to him. Crewe walks off screen and talks to Tracy, but the audience can hear only murmurs and indistinguishable sounds. Their conversation is clearly taking place, but audiences are excluded from hearing its content. Since Crewe will die that night and Tracy subsequently starts blackmailing Alice, the conversation between the two men raises important questions about their relationship and the content of their conversation. These questions are never answered for the audience and by withholding the men's dialogue, audiences are excluded from full access to contextual information. Other film scenes exploiting this technique involve various phone booths. When, for instance, Frank receives a call in a phone booth, the door of the booth is initially open and audiences can hear Frank's responses to the caller. When a significant piece of information is communicated to the policeman, he suddenly closes the door of the phone booth behind him and audiences can no longer hear his replies, thus effectively excluding the audience from his phone conversation. The phone booth is part of the shop owned by Alice's father and Alice and Frank frequently retreat to it for private conversations. When they close the door, they remain visible through the glass walls of the booth, but their

⁷³ The *Daily Mail's* review of the film makes a special point of telling its readers that Ondra does not talk in the film: "The finest talk in the film comes from the lips of the girl. But those tones are not the authentic voice of Miss Ondra. Miss Joan Barry 'doubled' for her in the dialogue. That fact, unhappily, is not mentioned anywhere in the programme or in the compendious list of characters." See "Best Talk-Film Yet", *Daily Mail*, 24 June 1929, p. 11.

conversations remain unheard. Marcus suggests that the phone booths allude to early soundproofed cameras which had to be installed in heavy cases to protect them from picking up surrounding noises.⁷⁴ These cameras could capture visual information but were prevented from picking up unwanted ambient sound. Analogously, the phone booths in the film exclude audiences from sonic information while still maintaining access to the visual image. In this way, the phone booths in the film align audience experience with that of the sound camera, suggesting that access to sonic information is a privilege and not a given.

Blackmail's sound design also contains the clever manipulation and distortion of dialogue and sound effects to foreground the protagonist's state of shock and silence. The most frequently cited example for this is a dialogue sequence in which Alice sits with her parents having breakfast. A visiting neighbour gossips about the murder with Alice's mother. Alice sits there in silence while the dialogue between her mother and the neighbour becomes increasingly unintelligible with only the word "knife" being audible loudly and distinctly (Fig. 3). The dialogue is distorted, drawing the listener's attention to the word "knife".



Figure 3: Alice at the breakfast table in *Blackmail*. The conversation centres on the word "knife". Screenshot by the author.

⁷⁴ Marcus, *The Tenth Muse*, p. 424.

Marcus argues that Hitchcock produces the equivalent of a close-up with sound (or words) rather than image by rendering all other words indistinguishable and by drawing the auditory focus to the word “knife”.⁷⁵ This technique demonstrates how early sound editing could be used to underscore a specific detail, expressing Alice’s silent anxiety and distorted perception in the aftermath of the crime.

Hitchcock also uses the volume of sound effects to emphasise Alice’s speechlessness. After the night of the murder, she gets dressed in her room at home, next to a bird in a birdcage. Although Alice is visibly distressed, she remains completely silent. The bird in its cage is singing disproportionately loudly with the sound forming a stark yet subtle contrast to Alice’s silence. At the end of the film, after the blackmailer has died in a police chase, the guilt of the murder weighs heavily on Alice. She decides to confess her deed and goes to Frank’s supervisor at Scotland Yard. When she is just about to confess the murder, the telephone in the office rings. It is a sharp and shrill sound which interrupts Alice’s confession. Frank steps in and leads Alice out of the office before she can confess the murder. She has been silenced by the telephone and the murder remains unspoken.

By contrasting Alice’s speechlessness with other characters’ verbosity, by withholding sonic information from the audience, and by manipulating and distorting dialogue and sound effects, Hitchcock cleverly employs early sound strategies that foreground silence and speechlessness. Such a strategy arguably resonated with audiences who, on the one hand, would still be familiar with the silent film, while also being fascinated and excited by the new technological possibilities that sound brought to the cinema. Hitchcock’s *Blackmail* was widely interpreted as a successful attempt at employing the new sound technology and achieving a successful unification of sound and moving image. *Blackmail* marked the emergence of a “sound-sight-aesthetic” in the British film industry and asserted sound film as an important medium in its own right: the visual and aural

⁷⁵ Marcus, *The Tenth Muse*, p. 422.

elements of this new medium played equally important roles.⁷⁶ As such, the film played an important part in securing Hitchcock's directorial career, but it also contributed to the popularity of sound film in Britain.⁷⁷ The combination of sound and silence in the film, however, also shows the film's intricate engagement with its own past and present. BIP's *Blackmail* embodies film at the intersection between silence and sound. Hitchcock's deployment of sound to foreground silence forms a metacommentary on the longer cinematic trajectory from which the sound version of *Blackmail* emerges and forges a connection, rather than a rupture, between silent film and sound film. In its self-conscious reflection on cinema's past and present, silence and sound, *Blackmail* raises broader questions about the status of film in the wake of the coming of sound. As we will see, such a development runs parallel to concerns emerging from the literature of the period. The following part of the chapter will take up this idea by addressing some developments in the literary marketplace before returning to *Blackmail*.

The Sound Film in Britain after *Blackmail* and the Literary Marketplace

Donald Crafton argues that there was a certain longevity to the shift from silence to sound.⁷⁸ Even though by 1931 the actual transition to sound had been largely completed, film industries in both the US and Britain subsequently worked towards improving and refining the technology and achieving greater fidelity. Western Electric and RCA had developed portable recording equipment by 1931 which made filming and recording on location easier

⁷⁶ On the success of Hitchcock's sound version and its assertion of sound film as a medium in its own right, see Belton, "Awkward Transitions", pp. 227-246.

⁷⁷ Low writes that "Hitchcock [...] had led the way in the use of non-realistic sound in *Blackmail*". See Low, *Film Making in 1930s Britain*, p. 88.

⁷⁸ See Crafton, *The Talkies*, p. 4: "The transition was years in the making and in the finishing. [...] This book emphasizes the longevity – not the suddenness – of the transition to sound."

and more feasible.⁷⁹ LeMahieu summarises the most important developments in film sound of the early 1930s as follows:

Western Electric and RCA perfected recording techniques that eliminated the extraneous noise of early recording. Microphones became mobile, and sound engineers developed ingenious techniques to reproduce music and dialogue of good fidelity. Actors adjusted their styles to the intimacy of movie dialogue. Other innovations enhanced the technical quality of films. Improvements in film stock and processing eliminated the graininess of film projected on to the newer, larger screens of giant cinemas. Better cameras and printing techniques improved the appearance of films in a variety of subtle ways. The development of Technicolor added a dimension to film which, like sound, initially seemed a gimmick but eventually became a commonplace.⁸⁰

The implementation of sound doubtlessly challenged and changed the way producers and audiences perceived and interpreted strategies of filmic representation and storytelling. Sound did raise some new issues that had been fairly unproblematic in the era of silent film. One such issue was, for instance, the question of language barriers: a sound film made in the UK could not be easily sold to French or German exhibitors and vice versa. While there were exceptions to this general rule (according to Low, Joseph von Sternberg's *The Blue Angel* was shown for four years in Paris without problems),⁸¹ film studios devised multiple solutions for how to avert the problem of language barriers for targeting international markets, such as the possibility of producing the same film in different languages, the use of subtitles, the possibility of remaking foreign films for English audiences (and vice versa), and the possibility of dubbing.⁸²

Another issue which remained pertinent throughout the 1930s and 1940s was the competition with Hollywood (as well as other successful Western European film industries such as Germany and France). A third issue was caused by the 1927 quota legislation: the

⁷⁹ See Low, *Film Making in 1930s Britain*, p. 84.

⁸⁰ LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy*, pp. 231-232. On these developments, see also Low, *Film Making in 1930s Britain*, pp. 73-90 and Salt, "Film Style and Technology in the Thirties", pp. 19-32.

⁸¹ Low, *Film Making in 1930s Britain*, p. 91.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 91-92. Low devotes a short chapter to the discussion of how studios were dealing with sound film production for international distribution.

Cinematograph Films Act de facto limited studios' options and forced them to run a large number of cheap productions made exclusively to fulfil the required quota. Only a small number of bigger, high quality, and more time-consuming film productions could actually be completed due to the pressure of having to meet a pre-set quota. The major studios BIP, Gaumont, Gainsborough, Herbert Wilcox' British and Dominion Picture Corporation, and Alexander Korda's London Film Productions managed these issues individually to a lesser or greater extent. They were among the largest and most successful production companies in the early 1930s.⁸³

The sound film in Britain after *Blackmail* experienced a surge in popularity and the early 1930s were filled with musical comedy and revue films, which appeared to be well-suited to market the new technology to cinema audiences. In addition to the musical comedy film, the costume drama and the crime film or thriller were regularly listed amongst the biggest box office successes of the decade.⁸⁴ Aside from commercial cinema, the introduction of sound to film also became a central concern for the state and its public relations activities. The General Post Office (GPO) Film Unit acquired their first sound equipment in 1934 and, just five years later, state-sponsored film-making under the auspices of the Ministry of Information (MoI) would play a crucial role in maintaining both public morale and Allied support during wartime. In chronological order, the four case studies in this thesis will address these developments in greater detail by examining musical revue and the noir thriller as popular forms of commercial cinema as well as GPO and MoI film production as two government-sponsored initiatives.

⁸³ For a detailed discussion of these companies and their film output in the 1930s, see Low, *Film Making in 1930s Britain*, pp. 115-197.

⁸⁴ See, for instance, the appendix of John Sedgwick's "Cinema-going Preferences in Britain in the 1930s", in *The Unknown 1930s: An Alternative History of the British Cinema, 1929-1939*, ed. by Jeffrey Richards (London: Tauris, 2000), pp. 1-35. See also Andrew Higson on "The British Film Industry and its Genres in the Mid-1930s", in *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 105-112. On the popularity of historical film and costume drama, see Jeffrey Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain, 1930-1939* (London: Routledge, 1984), pp. 257-272.

Before moving on to these case studies, however, we can already begin to trace some of the issues and shared concerns between early sound film and the novel through a survey of the literary marketplace vis-à-vis the analysis of *Blackmail*: despite the impressive figures in cinema-attendance cited at the beginning of this chapter, the publishing industry and the literary marketplace were far from reaching a standstill in the interwar years. Although some critics have claimed that “the 1930s in Great Britain was a discouraging time for book publishers” and that “trade publishing became stagnant”, such assessments neglect some important developments in the publishing industry.⁸⁵ In 1929, incidentally the same year *Blackmail* was shown in British cinemas, the first British book club was founded, The Book Society. In contrast to book clubs in the US, the British Book Society “was essentially a retailing organisation rather than a publisher [...]. It bought new books from the publishers, often in large quantities, for sale to its members”.⁸⁶ The system worked quite well, generating new revenue streams for publishing houses, and the success of the Book Society inspired Victor Gollancz, who had established his own publishing business in 1928, to eventually launch the Left Book Club in 1936.⁸⁷

The economic downturn of the late 1920s and early 1930s, in tandem with the increasing availability and accessibility of other information and entertainment media, meant that British publishers had to amplify their efforts, devising new marketing strategies, such as the formation of book clubs. Another highly successful marketing venture was Allen Lane’s launch of Penguin Books in 1935 with its affordable paperback editions.⁸⁸ Other publishers, such as Constable, Chatto & Windus, Faber, and the Hogarth Press, continued their work in the decade with an increased view to consumer demands. Melissa

⁸⁵ James L. W. West, “The Divergent Paths of British and American Publishing”, *The Sewanee Review*, 120.4 (2012), 503-513 (p. 505).

⁸⁶ John Feather, *A History of British Publishing*, 2nd edn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), p. 157.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ashley Dawson, *The Routledge Concise History of Twentieth-century British Literature* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p. 74.

Sullivan finds that “during the 1920s, and especially, the 1930s, the [Hogarth] Press addressed the changing needs and tastes of the British reading public through its work on politics and education and, although rarely mentioned, its engagement with a network of middlebrow women writers”.⁸⁹

Much to the dismay of Q. D. Leavis, a major part of the publishing industry was built on popular fiction (for instance romance and detective fiction), encouraging reading habits that the Leavises, amongst other cultural critics, found utterly wanting.⁹⁰ The Leavises’ critical view exemplifies a wider concern amongst intellectuals of the period regarding questions of cultural authority and taste. Developments in the cinema certainly contributed to this fear. Q. D. Leavis frequently compares the effect of reading popular fiction to that of going to the cinema.⁹¹ Despite such concerns, the best way to describe the literary marketplace in the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s is perhaps by drawing attention to its diversification.⁹² Alongside the cheap “two-shilling novels” derided by Leavis, the decade witnesses the rise of what Nicola Humble has called the “feminine middlebrow novel” by writers like Rosamond Lehmann, Daphne du Maurier, Elizabeth Taylor, and Rose Macaulay.⁹³ By the mid-1930s, new “proletarian writers” (notably James Hanley, Walter Greenwood, Harold Heslop, and Lewis Grassic Gibbon) had joined the ranks of well-known

⁸⁹ Melissa Sullivan, “The Middlebrows of the Hogarth Press: Rose Macaulay, E. M. Delafield and Cultural Hierarchies in Interwar Britain”, in *Leonard and Virginia Woolf, The Hogarth Press and the Networks of Modernism*, ed. by Helen Southworth (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 52-73 (pp. 52-53).

⁹⁰ Romance, according to Leavis, is even less acceptable than the detective story: “*The Sheik, The Blue Lagoon*, [make] a more detrimental diet than the detective story in so far as a habit of fantasizing will lead to maladjustment in actual life.” See Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1939), p. 54.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 55: “The cinema, one notices, provides the same satisfaction [as reading popular fiction].”

⁹² Cunningham, for instance, speaks of the “plurality of signs” and “multiplicity of texts” that defy a neat grouping of 1930s authors as performed by Samuel Hynes’ *The Auden Generation*. See Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 16-17.

⁹³ For a detailed discussion, see Nicola Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s: Class, Domesticity, and Bohemianism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

and frequently read novelists⁹⁴ while renowned modernists like Joyce, Woolf, and T. S. Eliot continued publishing work throughout the 1930s. Reading was still, despite an apparent pre-eminence of the cinema, a popular past-time activity, particularly with a view to newspapers and magazines. The steep rise in national newspaper supply was detailed at the beginning of this chapter, but one should add that the 1930s also saw an increase in the popular press and the launch of a number of new literary magazines and periodicals, such as F. R. Leavis' *Scrutiny*, *New Verse* (1933-39), John Lehmann's *New Writing* (1936-40), *The Left Review* (1934-38), or *Poetry and the People* (1938-40).⁹⁵

In a recent study of working class spending of discretionary income in 1937/38, Scott, Walker, and Miskell find "a high expenditure devoted to, and household participation in, reading. [...] Expenditure on reading matter (books, newspapers, magazines, and comics) amounts to 3.1 per cent of average disposable expenditure, significantly higher than for cinema".⁹⁶ Although there was higher spending on newspapers and periodicals than on books, "book sales witnessed a major interwar increase; annual volume sales rose from 7.2 million in 1928 to 26.8 million in 1939".⁹⁷ These figures indicate the diversity of the interwar publishing industry and suggest widespread consumer participation in the literary marketplace. Consequently, it would be false to assume that the implementation of sound film in Britain from 1929 onwards led to a decline in literary production, print publications, or reading as a leisure activity.

As political and economic events, such as the crash of 1929, the rise of fascist and

⁹⁴ See Cunningham, *British Writers*, pp. 26, 307.

⁹⁵ For a detailed discussion of these magazines and others, see *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines: Volume I: Britain and Ireland 1880-1955*, ed. by Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Part 8 of this volume (pp. 591-704) provides a comprehensive overview of some of the most important literary magazines of 1930s Britain.

⁹⁶ Peter Scott, James T. Walker, and Peter Miskell, "British working-class household composition, labour supply, and commercial leisure participation during the 1930s", *Economic History Review*, 68.2 (2015), 657-682 (p. 663).

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 664.

anti-fascist movements, and the Spanish Civil War led to writers' reassessment of the relationship between literature and politics,⁹⁸ developments in the media system, particularly vis-à-vis sound film, also provoked a reevaluation of literature's, and the writer's, role within a rapidly expanding media ecology. Writers' responses to sound film were varied and often ambiguous. On one occasion, Evelyn Waugh claimed that the "talking apparatus set [cinema] back to its infancy".⁹⁹ Eleven years later, he would write that the cinema had "taught a new habit of narrative" to the twentieth-century writer.¹⁰⁰ Like Waugh, Graham Greene was critical of the introduction of sound. In July 1929, he wrote that "film has reached a point where it must choose finally between developing as a cheap imitation of the stage or as a separate art. Silence is not its vice but its virtue".¹⁰¹ Yet, Greene also saw that sound film attracted many writers to film work, offering them an additional source of income. He felt that sound film could empower writers; they were "no longer merely a spectator or the critic of the screen. Suddenly the cinema needed him [the writer]; pictures

⁹⁸ A large body of work has attended to the intricate relationship between 1930s writing and political commitment. Apart from Hynes' and Cunningham's seminal accounts of the period, good starting points can be found in, for instance, Andy Croft, *Red Letter Days: British Fiction in the 1930s* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990); Benjamin Kohlmann, *Committed Styles: Modernism, Politics, and Left-wing Literature in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Elizabeth Maslen, *Political and Social Issues in British Women's Fiction, 1928-1968* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2001); Rod Mengham, "The Thirties: Politics, Authority, Perspective", in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Literature*, ed. by Laura Marcus and Peter Nicholls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 359-378; Stephen Spender, *The Thirties and After: Poetry, Politics, People* (London: Fontana, 1978). See also Part Three on "Commitment and Autonomy" in *A History of 1930s British Literature*, ed. by Benjamin Kohlmann and Matthew Taunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 209-314.

⁹⁹ Evelyn Waugh, "Why Hollywood is a Term of Disparagement", in *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. by Donat Gallagher (London: Methuen, 1983), pp. 325-331 (p. 326). The article was first published in the *Daily Telegraph* on 30 April 1947.

¹⁰⁰ Waugh, "Felix Culpa?", p. 362.

¹⁰¹ Graham Greene, "A Film Principle", in *Mornings in the Dark: The Graham Greene Film Reader*, ed. by David Parkinson (Manchester: Carcanet, 2007), pp. 392-394 (p. 393).

required words as well as images”.¹⁰² The implementation of sound film also meant that some novelists like Greene, Isherwood, and Hamilton spent the 1930s straddling two media forms, writing literary fiction alongside film reviews and scripts.¹⁰³

There was a degree of cross-fertilisation between film and literary fiction, leading Keith Williams to suggest that “film technique came into its own as a new principle of poesis in the thirties novel” and that “the cinematic novel in the thirties is as much a question of developing certain pioneering Modernist interests as resisting others”.¹⁰⁴ Although Williams concentrates on the translation of visual cinematic techniques (“cuts”, “montage”, “camerawork”), his discussion makes a strong case for understanding the 1930s novel and some of its narrative techniques as both a continuation of as well as a resistance to the modernists’ interest in film.¹⁰⁵ Looking back to the preceding two decades, Waugh reviewed Greene’s *The Heart of the Matter* in 1948, stating that

it is the cinema which has taught a new habit of narrative [...]. It is as though, out of the indefinite length of film, sequences have been cut which, assembled, comprise an experience which is the reader’s alone [...]. The writer has become director and producer.¹⁰⁶

Such a view arguably encapsulates some of the concerns faced by writers of the 1930s and 1940s and the necessity to define their role and status in relation to film: were they first and foremost writers? Or had they become directors, producers, entertainers? Greene’s own retrospective labelling of his works as either “novels” or “entertainments” is another

¹⁰² Graham Greene, “The Novelist and the Cinema – A Personal Experience”, in *Mornings in the Dark: The Graham Greene Film Reader*, ed. by David Parkinson (Manchester: Carcanet, 2007), pp. 441-445 (p. 444).

¹⁰³ Parkinson’s *The Graham Greene Film Reader* contains short film scripts and a section on Greene’s “Film Stories & Treatments”. Greene is well-known for his film scripts, for instance his work on *21 Days* and *The Third Man*. The 1930s and 1940s also saw direct interaction between the theatre and film: successful plays were often adapted for the cinema. Consider, for instance, Patrick Hamilton’s plays *Rope* and *Gas Light*. Other writers like Noël Coward and Christopher Isherwood were writing for film in addition to publishing plays and fiction.

¹⁰⁴ Keith Williams, *British Writers and the Media, 1930-1945* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 128-129.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 128-150.

¹⁰⁶ Waugh, “*Felix Culpa?*”, p. 362.

indication for the writer's questioning not just of the cultural status of his or her work, but also, by implication, an indication for the author's interrogation of his or her own status as a writer in an expanding media system.¹⁰⁷

In addition to positioning oneself in relation to film and the media system, there was also an increasing need to position oneself in relation to the literary works of the previous decades: Orwell's "Inside the Whale" (1940) maintains that the modernism of the 1920s and especially the writing of the 1930s Auden group had largely produced insufficient literary responses to the decade's social and political concerns. His diagnosis is that of an "impossibility of any major literature until the world has shaken itself into its new shape".¹⁰⁸ While the modernists still receive some praise from Orwell, his subsequent discussion of the political and literary climate of the 1930s concludes that,

it is almost inconceivable that good novels should be written in such an atmosphere. Good novels are not written by orthodoxy-sniffers, nor by people who are conscience-stricken about their own unorthodoxy. Good novels are written by people who are not *frightened*.¹⁰⁹

Orwell's stock-taking of the preceding decades exemplifies a broader dynamic at work throughout the 1930s. Writers in the late modernist period were reconsidering their role and status in a longer literary trajectory while also having to find an appropriate literary-aesthetic response to their contemporary present.

¹⁰⁷ On this point, see also Matthew Levay, "The Entertainments of Late Modernism: Graham Greene and the Career Criminal", *Modernist Cultures*, 5.2 (2010), 315-339 (p. 316). Levay writes that "always resistant to labels, Greene's coyness has led to a remarkably resilient view of his novels as existing solely within themselves, immune to literary history and without affiliation. If the critical record has provided us with a perception of Greene as an author adrift in the sea of twentieth-century fiction, it is a curious irony that one of the most obvious reasons for his mixed critical reception hinges on his enthusiasm for genre fiction, most apparent in those popular novels that Greene dubbed his 'entertainments', which fused the conventions of the thriller and the detective story into taut, cinematic narratives. Seemingly outside modernism and postmodernism, neither highbrow nor lowbrow, these novels reflect a commitment to generic manipulation that has left several critics unsure as to where they might fit into Greene's own *oeuvre*, let alone the history of British fiction during the period".

¹⁰⁸ George Orwell, "Inside the Whale", in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters, Volume 1: An Age Like This, 1920-1940*, ed. by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (Jaffrey, NH: Nonpareil, 2000), pp. 493-527 (p. 527).

¹⁰⁹ Orwell, "Inside the Whale", p. 519.

In the discussion of Hitchcock's *Blackmail* above, I have traced some of ways in which the film uses the availability of sound technology to foreground silence. Using this strategy, the film is simultaneously looking back to its immediate past, the era of silent movies, while being conscious of its present. Yet, *Blackmail* also creates a new aesthetic for the sound film, mapping out a future for the new medium that explores the creative possibilities of sound while building on audiences' familiarity with silence as a stylistic device in the cinema. *Blackmail* negotiates sound film's status within a longer cinematic trajectory while simultaneously asserting its newness as an appropriate response to its contemporary aesthetic, cultural, and economic conditions. In a parallel development, the late modernist novel, as Miller says, is marked by an "apparent admixture of decadent and forward-looking elements", its "late style" forming a distinctive response to the cultural, historical, and political pressures of its time.¹¹⁰ As stated in my introduction, this is not to argue that the late modernist novel is *like* a sound film, but to say that this offers a starting point for attending to some of the shared concerns of early sound film and the late modernist novel. Both media co-exist and develop during the interwar years and the Second World War. Both the novel and sound film reflect on their immediate past, are increasingly aware of their present, and try to determine their future role in the media ecology.

Edward Said suggests that "lateness is being at the end, fully conscious, full of memory, and also (even preternaturally) aware of the present".¹¹¹ While this description covers much of what has been said about the characteristics of the late modernist novel in my introduction, the example of *Blackmail* suggests that early sound film is, arguably, also "full of memory". It is in the process of becoming conscious of and building on its predecessor, the silent film, while also looking to the future in its awareness of audiences, technological possibilities, constraints, and markets. In this sense, the case of *Blackmail*

¹¹⁰ Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts between the World Wars* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), p. 7.

¹¹¹ Edward W. Said, *On Late Style: Music and Literature against the Grain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), p. 14.

indicates that the “lateness” of the late modernist novel is not diametrically opposed to the “beginnings” of sound film. The following four case studies examine this idea through a parallel reading for sound of film and fiction. Even when, as in my first case study of Evelyn Waugh’s *Vile Bodies* and the musical revue film, the issue of competition is foregrounded, this particular notion of competition still arises from a shared interest in the question of how to capitalise on different forms of entertainment, such as the stage revue, in a rapidly expanding media ecology.

Chapter Two

“Nothing to make a Song and Dance about”: Sonic Translations of Revue

This chapter considers one of the key entertainment forms in the British media system of the late 1920s and early 1930s, the musical revue, and its relationship with both early sound film and the novel. Stephen Guy estimates that the musical film was one of the biggest outputs of the 1930s.¹ In fact, the musical film partly came from a long-standing tradition of revue entertainment on the British stage. Musical films in the early 1930s, such as the successful production *Evergreen* (1934), notably mobilised revue sequences to construct a narrative of their heritage in the theatre. In this chapter, I explore how early synchronised sound film’s popularity with audiences stemmed from the way it successfully utilised the musical revue for its own commercial benefit. As film productions like *Elstree Calling* (1930) and *Evergreen* used the genre of the musical revue to their advantage, British writers were confronted with the question of how to continue writing fiction in the face of an expanding audio-visual entertainment industry that could so cleverly capitalise on other forms of entertainment. Amidst this wider literary debate, which included late modernist authors like Graham Greene and Elizabeth Bowen, I argue that Evelyn Waugh’s *Vile Bodies* (1930) crafts a defiant response to this question. *Vile Bodies* emulates and parodies features of the musical revue by translating its structures and soundscapes onto the page, while simultaneously attacking the new medium of sound film to assert its own capacity to capitalise on forms of stage entertainment. Waugh’s novel, a playful take on revue entertainment and an acerbic critique of early sound film’s shortcomings, presents a case study that outlines one possible response the late modernist novel formulates to its changing media context.

¹ Stephen Guy, “Calling All Stars: Musical Films in a Musical Decade”, in *The Unknown 1930s: An Alternative History of the British Cinema, 1929-1939*, ed. by Jeffrey Richards (London: Tauris, 2000), pp. 99-118 (p. 100).

The Revue in Britain

In order to discuss both the musical film's and Waugh's appropriation of the revue, we first require an overview of the genre and its development in Britain. The musical revue had its roots, as Moore suggests, in both variety theatre and musical comedy.² It contained different short "turns" which were loosely based on a common theme or topic.³ Revues had a basic storyline, narrated through intermittent scenes and usually featuring a narrator or announcer leading through the programme (the compère). Yet, in contrast to musical comedy, coherent narrative or the development of a sustained plot were of little importance. Gaining momentum in the Edwardian period, the revue slowly replaced musical comedy as the most popular form of stage entertainment in Britain.⁴ One of the revue's most important features was its eclectic style, which allowed for easy incorporation of other popular forms: revue could contain elements of music-hall, burlesque, variety, and slapstick comedy; it sometimes even featured short film performances as part of its programme.⁵ Platt suggests that the form of the revue was "a multi-media practice", with "parody and pastiche bec[oming] hallmarks" of the form.⁶

Originally devised as an end-of-year review show, the revue used a combination of popular songs, dialogue scenes, comedy sketches, dance numbers, and even acrobatics to present and mock "events and personalities which had preoccupied the public to a greater

² James Ross Moore, *André Charlot: The Genius of Intimate Musical Revue* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005), p. 32.

³ Allardyce Nicoll, *English Drama, 1900-1930: The Beginnings of the Modern Period*, Part 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 169.

⁴ David Linton, "English West End Revue: The First World War and After", in *The Oxford Handbook of the British Musical*, ed. by Robert Gordon and Olaf Jubin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 143-169 (p. 144).

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁶ Len Platt, *Musical Comedy on the West End Stage, 1890 - 1939* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2004), p. 134.

or lesser extent during the course of the year”.⁷ Raucous humour, employing slapstick comedy and parody, was a key element of revue entertainment.⁸ Speed was a further feature: revue pleased by being fast *and* fashionable. In the interwar years, revue arguably became more self-critical, reflecting on “the very dance craze and music culture that [it] had spawned” only a few years earlier.⁹ Not only did the revue parody events and people, but it could also mock its own form and its obsession with musical trends and fashions, showing the genre’s capacity for critical self-reflection.

The British West End revue was largely influenced by American and French productions and performance styles. On the one hand, it took inspiration from the Broadway producer Florenz Ziegfeld. His revues were lavish affairs, known as the “Ziegfeld Follies”, which featured a large chorus of beautiful girls, elaborate set designs, and extravagant costumes.¹⁰ On the other hand, West End revue also drew on the more intimate French revue style which was popularised in Britain by André Charlot, who worked as a producer in London from 1912 to 1937.¹¹ After the First World War, the producers C. B.

⁷ Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson, *Revue: A Story in Pictures* (London: Peter Davies, 1971), p. 1.

⁸ Both Jenkins and Solomon discuss the importance of raucous, anarchistic comedy (what Jenkins calls “the new humour”) in variety, vaudeville, and early sound film during the Depression era. While Jenkins focuses more directly on the interaction between early sound comedy film and vaudeville in the US, Solomon directs readers’ attention to the importance of slapstick and the image and use of the body in popular entertainment forms of the Depression era. See Henry Jenkins, *What Made Pistachio Nuts? Early Sound Comedy and the Vaudeville Aesthetic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992). See also William Solomon, *Literature, Amusement, and Technology in the Great Depression* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁹ Linton, “English West End Revue”, p. 159.

¹⁰ Ziegfeld is also credited with having “invented” the concept of the showgirl in the early twentieth century. See, for instance, Michael Lasser, “The Glorifier: Florenz Ziegfeld and the Creation of the American Showgirl”, *The American Scholar*, 63.3 (1994), 441-448. Ziegfeld’s power and influence as a Broadway producer also meant that he was “highly influential in establishing tenets of beauty”, selecting his female performers carefully “on the basis of exacting standards of appearance”. For a critical discussion on this point, see Angela J. Latham, “The Right to Bare: Containing and Encoding American Women in Popular Entertainments of the 1920s”, *Theatre Journal*, 49.4 (1997), 455-473 (p. 460).

¹¹ Linton, “English West End Revue”, pp. 147-149.

Cochran and Charlot established a British revue tradition: two of Cochran's revues were *On with the Dance* (1925) and *This Year of Grace* (1928), both written by Noël Coward. As the title indicates, *On with the Dance* was a review show of different dance styles and genres, containing four different ballet sequences and a sketch titled *Fête Galante* (a sketch about a vicarage garden party).¹² Waugh watched the revue with his friend Alistair Graham and noted in his diary that Ernest Thesiger's performance "was quite marvellous".¹³ In the same year as *On with the Dance*, one of Cochran's competitor's, Norman Lee, released the *London Revue* at the Lyceum Theatre. Here, as *The Times* explains, the revue's common theme was that of the Londoner not knowing his hometown.¹⁴ "Riotously funny", the production featured scenes set in Kew Gardens and Piccadilly Circus, and contained "impersonations of music-hall stars" and parodies of stereotypical members of the capital's population.

In 1925, the theatre critic Huntly Carter published *The New Spirit in European Theatre, 1914-1924*. Linton summarises Carter's view of revue as a "conduit for bourgeoning art movements" in which "experimentation in fashion, design, dance, and montage" was adapted.¹⁵ Revue was eclectic, diverting entertainment. Socially critical, it moved easily between satire and popular entertainment through the songs and dances of its historical moment. It reflected the fast-paced way of modern life as well as the modern(ist) preoccupation with spatio-temporal perception and the perceived collapse or compression of time and space experienced through new forms of communication, entertainment, and transportation.¹⁶

¹² "On with the Dance", *The Times*, 1 May 1925, p. 12.

¹³ Evelyn Waugh, *The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. by Michael Davie (London: Book Club Associates, 1976), p. 217.

¹⁴ "The London Revue", *The Times*, 3 September 1925, p. 8.

¹⁵ Huntly Carter, *The New Spirit in the European Theatre 1914-1924* (London: Benn, 1925). See also Linton's comments on Carter in Linton, "English West End Revue", p. 147.

¹⁶ See Peter Bailey, "Hullo Ragtime! West End Revue and the Americanisation of Popular Culture in pre-1914 London", in *Musical Theatre in London and Berlin: 1890 to 1939*, ed. by Len Platt, Tobias Becker, and David Linton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 135-152.

With the rise of synchronised sound film in the late 1920s, the revue began to move from stage to screen, a development which also coincided with the displacement of British music halls and theatres by cinemas. Murphy describes how London's West End rapidly gained new, purpose-built cinemas, leading to a decline in music-halls and theatres. This trend not only stemmed from the public demand for sound film, but also from the fact that newly built cinemas could "assimilate more of [music halls' and theatres'] functions".¹⁷ There was a sense that the "theatrical establishment as a whole was undermined" by the introduction of sound film.¹⁸ This was partly due to the pure novelty of sound film, but, economically speaking, film also proved more effective in creating long-lasting revenues in exchange for a one-off investment in production.¹⁹ Yet the revue did not disappear from the public sphere, but played a key part in marketing sound film to audiences as the coming of synchronised sound led to a surge in film productions of revues. For these new film revues, American and British studios filmed a series of comedy sketches and music-and-dance numbers with the stars and musicians already under contract in the respective studios. Jenkins has examined the process of confluence between early comedy film and the vaudeville aesthetic for an American context, observing how, for instance, "anarchistic comedy emerged from the classical Hollywood cinema's attempt to assimilate the vaudeville aesthetic".²⁰ Similarly, early sound film began to adopt features and frameworks of stage revue shows. Revue's versatility and its eclectic nature allowed film producers to exhibit the new sound technology and to flaunt their star performers to rapidly growing numbers of cinema-goers. Revue was repurposed for early sound film when it became clear

¹⁷ Robert Murphy, "Coming of Sound to the Cinema in Britain", *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 4.2 (1984), 143-160 (p. 145).

¹⁸ Dennis Kennedy, "British Theatre 1895-1946: Art, Entertainment, Audiences – an Introduction", in *The Cambridge History of British Theatre*, Vol. 3, ed. by Baz Kershaw (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 1-33 (p. 22).

¹⁹ For further information on this point, see Kennedy, "British Theatre 1895-1946", pp. 1-33 and Murphy, "The Coming of Sound", pp. 143-160.

²⁰ Jenkins, *What Made Pistachio Nuts?*, p. 24.

that it was a commercially effective genre to market synchronised sound to cinema audiences. *The Spectator's* film reviewer Celia Simpson summarised this development in 1929, stating that "it [revue] is the sort of entertainment which is most suitable and capable of success in the talking film medium".²¹

As I have indicated in the previous chapter, the transition to synchronised sound in Britain happened a little later than it did in the US, but by 1929 the British industry was producing and distributing sound film. Since British industry professionals had been convinced of the financial benefits of a move to sound by the musical film *The Singing Fool* (1928),²² there was a particular interest in making musical and revue films to capitalise on this genre's popularity with audiences. Stephen Guy estimates that musical films formed "a fairly constant proportion of total film output over the [1930s], averaging out at one in every six or seven films made".²³ Indeed, he suggests that "audiences, still predisposed towards musical and variety theatre, could relate to the musical film as an offshoot of it".²⁴ Accordingly, the 1929/30 season saw several revue films. Most notably, there was the British production *Elstree Calling* (1930) which was marketed to audiences as a "A Cine-Radio Revue".²⁵ The film's loose linking narrative concerns a couple trying to tune in to a revue broadcast with their TV set at home. The TV is broken and the couple spend their time trying to fix the equipment, and so miss out on the broadcast. *Elstree Calling* consciously frames itself as a televised item, making explicit how live acts are filmed for broadcast

²¹ Celia Simpson, "The Cinema: Star-Gazing", *The Spectator*, 2 November 1929, p. 623.

²² The importance of *The Singing Fool* (1928) for the British film industry's move to sound is emphasised by Brown and Porter. See Geoff Brown, "When Britannia ruled the Sound Waves: Britain's Transition to Sound in its European Context", *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image*, 12.2 (2018), 93-119 (p. 95) and Laraine Porter, "The Talkies Come to Britain: British Silent Cinema and the Transition to Sound, 1928-30", in *The Routledge Companion to British Cinema History*, ed. by Ian Hunter, Laraine Porter, and Justin Smith (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), pp. 87-98 (p. 88).

²³ Guy, "Calling All Stars", p. 100.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

²⁵ *Elstree Calling*, dir. by Adrian Brunel and Alfred Hitchcock, starring Will Fyffe, Cicely Courtneidge, and Tommy Handley (British International Pictures/Wardour Films, 1930).

through switching between three different settings: backstage in the film studio, the proscenium arch stage on which performances are filmed, and the audience at home with their TV sets. *Elstree Calling* is compered by British comedian Tommy Handley, who appears between performances, usually in a backstage setting. The film combines popular songs (e.g. “I’ve fallen in love” performed by Cicely Courtneidge), music-hall entertainment (by comedians Will Fyffe and Lily Morris), and dance performances by the “Adelphi Girls” and the “Charlot Girls”. Recurring scenes provide a sense of structure: there are, for instance, several scenes in which a Shakespeare actor is denied stage time, suggesting that audiences no longer want “serious” highbrow theatre but light-hearted entertainment. Co-directed by Adrian Brunel and Alfred Hitchcock,²⁶ *Elstree Calling* shows some of Britain’s most popular actors, musicians, dancers, and comedians of the late 1920s (e.g. Jack Hulbert, Cicely Courtneidge, and Anna May Wong). The film was the British response to a number of successful Hollywood revue productions: *The Hollywood Revue of 1929* (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1929), *The Show of Shows* (Warner Brothers, 1929), *Broadway Melody* (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1929), and *Paramount on Parade* (Paramount Pictures, 1930).²⁷ *The Times* reviewed *Elstree Calling* favourably, calling it a “monumental affair” and praised its

²⁶ Hitchcock was under contract with British International Pictures in 1929. After his work on *Blackmail*, he was asked to complete *Elstree Calling* and re-shoot some scenes after BIP’s management encountered difficulties with the revue’s original writer and director, Adrian Brunel. To this day, it is unclear to what extent Hitchcock’s direction actually shaped the final version of the film. In the opening credits, “sketches and other interpolated items” are attributed to him. Hitchcock went on to make another musical film, *Waltzes from Vienna* (1934), for Gaumont-British. See *Waltzes from Vienna*, dir. Alfred Hitchcock, starring Jessie Matthews and Esmond Knight (Gaumont-British, 1934). For a detailed discussion of Hitchcock’s contribution to *Elstree Calling*, see Alain Kerzoncuf and Charles Barr, *Hitchcock Lost and Found: The Forgotten Films* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2015), pp. 88-97.

²⁷ Celia Simpson reviewed *Broadway Melody* as a “revue from behind the scenes”, describing the film’s combination of a backstage plot with revue performances. See *Broadway Melody*, dir. Harry Beaumont, starring Charles King and Anita Page (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1929) and Celia Simpson, “The Cinema: The Talkies”, *The Spectator*, 1 June 1929, pp. 854-855. For further information on the revue in Britain, see *The Oxford Handbook of the British Musical*, ed. by Gordon and Jubin; *Musical Theatre in London and Berlin: 1890 to 1939*, ed. by Platt, Becker, and Linton; Jenkins, *What Made Pistachio Nuts?*; *British Theatre between the Wars, 1918-1939*, ed. by Clive Barker and Maggie B. Gale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) and Platt, *Musical Comedy on the West End Stage, 1890-1939*.

“smoothness and continuity”.²⁸ Notably, *The Times* closes its review by asserting that “it is gratifying that the first cinema-radio *revue* realizes that ideas, as well as singing and dancing, have their place in *revues*”.²⁹ The success of *Elstree Calling* thus came from a combination of factors: it featured many of Britain’s most successful performers and combined singing, dancing, light comedy, and a loose linking narrative.

In the years after *Elstree Calling*, musical and revue entertainment remained a staple element of the British film industry and revue’s integration into the sound film became increasingly sophisticated.³⁰ Despite advances in sound technology and a more sophisticated storyline, *Evergreen* (1934), like its cinematic predecessor *Elstree Calling*, also substantially draws on forms of stage entertainment for its own commercial benefit. The film creates a revue fantasy that combines and intertwines both Edwardian and 1930s contemporary forms of entertainment, thus negotiating the sound film’s position in a larger trajectory of cinematic and theatrical history. The film is preoccupied with asserting its status in the modern mediascape while also looking back to the entertainments of the Edwardian era. Addressing and negotiating the question of its status, role, and history within an expanding media system is a central question that will resurface in my discussion of Waugh’s *Vile Bodies* and the novel’s response to the changing media ecology of the late 1920s and early 1930s.

²⁸ “Elstree Calling”, *The Times*, 10 February 1930, p. 10.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Stephen Guy notes that the 1930s experienced a surge in musical films which drew on different traditions in the theatre: music-hall, operetta, and revue. Guy states that “while these theatrical strands are reasonably distinct, it should be noted that there was considerable overlap and cross-flow of influences and artists”. See Guy, “Calling All Stars”, p. 101. Some of the most successful musical films released throughout the 1930s were *Sally in our Alley*, dir. Maurice Elvey (RKO Pictures, 1931) and *Sing As We Go!*, dir. by Basil Dean (Associated British Film Distributors, 1934). These films secured Gracie Fields’ status as a film star in Britain. There were also sound films building on the operetta tradition, notably *Goodnight, Vienna*, dir. by Herbert Wilcox (United Artists, 1932) and *Bitter Sweet*, dir. by Herbert Wilcox (United Artists, 1933). John Sedgwick’s analysis of the Top 50 British films of each year from 1932 to 1937 shows that musicals as well as films featuring song and dance routines were regularly among the highest-grossing box office successes in Britain. See the appendix to John Sedgwick, “Cinema-going Preferences in Britain in the 1930s”, pp. 1-35 (pp. 23-35).

Evergreen

In 1934, *Evergreen* was released to great acclaim in Britain.³¹ Directed by Victor Saville and produced by Michael Balcon for Gaumont-British, the film stars Jessie Matthews in one of her most iconic roles. Reviewers praised her “brilliant performance” and pronounced her acting “the chief attraction” of the film.³² Contemporary reviews notably refer to the film’s treatment and integration of dramatic forms and popular entertainment: “the ripe old-time music-hall flavour has been admirably captured in this film”.³³ Seton Margrave, the *Daily Mail*’s film reviewer, commended *Evergreen* for its “triple spectacle of Jazz, Munitions, and the Polka” in a sequence “representing the years 1924, 1914, and 1904”.³⁴ Margrave, who calls *Evergreen* a “musical film [...] of exceptional merit” here summarises a revue sequence in the film which showcases the preceding decades through different musical styles and dances. What emerges from these contemporary comments is an awareness of *Evergreen*’s integration of Edwardian forms of musical entertainment. The film utilises music-hall and revue performances as a central element of the story. Yet, the incorporation of these dramatic forms as two defining elements also allows the musical film to reflect on its own status within an expanding media system and to construct a narrative of its theatrical heritage.³⁵ Containing music-hall acts, revue performances, a dance show, and elements of

³¹ *Evergreen*, dir. by Victor Saville, starring Jessie Matthews and Sonnie Hale (Gaumont-British, 1934).

³² “Jessie Matthews Brilliant in Old Style Music Hall”, *Daily Mail*, 10 September 1934, p. 8. The film has received critical attention in its function as a star vehicle for Matthews. See, for instance, Jeffrey Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain, 1930-1939* (London: Routledge, 1984), pp. 207-224 and Andrew Higson, *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 126-142. Richards discusses Matthews’ general audience appeal and the production of a number of films tailored to her star personality. Higson explores different elements of *Evergreen* and emphasises Matthews’ “star-image” as a central selling point for the film.

³³ “Jessie Matthews Brilliant in Old Style Music Hall”, p. 8.

³⁴ Seton Margrave, “New Musical Films that have Stories, too”, *Daily Mail*, 11 June 1934, p. 4.

³⁵ For an extensive discussion of the history of musical film and its origins in the theatre, see, for instance, Richard Barrios, *A Song in the Dark: The Birth of the Musical Film*, 2nd edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) and Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987).

romantic comedy, the sound film here demonstrates its definitive ability to mobilise other forms and genres of popular entertainment for its own commercial benefit. Throughout this discussion, I argue that the film mobilises sound recording technology and capitalises on revue's eclecticism to create a cinematic fantasy that reproduces stage revue and musical theatre for cinema audiences. Steady improvements in sound recording allowed for an increasingly sophisticated and more complex narrative integration of theatrical forms into the sound film. While *Elstree Calling*, as I have outlined above, is a fairly straightforward revue on film, *Evergreen* integrates features of revue into a more elaborate storyline that seeks to establish an origins narrative for its protagonist, but also for the sound film itself.

Evergreen presents audiences with a typical rise-to-fame narrative. The film tells the story of Harriet, the daughter of a famous Edwardian music hall star (both mother and daughter are played by Matthews). The film begins with the Edwardian star Harriet Green taking her leave from the stage. Blackmailed by the father of her illegitimate daughter, she disappears and leaves her daughter, young Harriet, in the care of a friend. The film then skips to 1930s London, twenty years after the disappearance of the Edwardian star, and follows young Harriet's attempts to become a famous singer. Thompson, a publicity agent, recognises Harriet and proposes a PR stunt: the daughter is to impersonate her mother, pretending to be the timelessly beautiful Edwardian icon who has returned to the stage. The stunt is successful and the daughter, posing as her famous mother, is cheered by audiences in a new revue show. Keeping up the pretence becomes increasingly difficult when Harriet falls in love with Thompson. When she confesses the deception, she is taken to court where she must convince the judge that she is the daughter of the Edwardian star. Proving her kinship with the Edwardian icon, Harriet brings the film to its happy conclusion.

The film's eclectic combination of other entertainment forms emerges most prominently from its musical numbers. Loosely based on a West End stage revue called *Ever Green*, which was composed exclusively by the American composer duo Rodgers and Hart and scripted by Benn Levy, the film version of *Evergreen* mixes the original Rodgers and

Hart songs with other music by the London-based American composer Harry M. Woods, thus evoking the impression of a revue show.³⁶ The film relies on a larger repertoire of music, notably including a number of traditional folk songs and several iconic Edwardian music-hall hits. Spanning the musical trends of three decades, the film evokes a sense of being caught between Edwardian past and 1930s present.

The musical leitmotif of the film is the song “When You’ve got a Little Springtime in Your Heart”, which was composed especially for the film by Woods.³⁷ Strings and high register piano lend the music a symphonic sound whereas the horns, particularly in several off-beat horn lines after the vocals, sound more typical of jazz and swing compositions. Lawrence Napper notes that “Springtime”, whilst being a contemporary 1930s composition, “gently pastiches the Edwardian musical style”.³⁸ The first time Harriet performs “Springtime” in front of a large audience, the song functions as the introductory piece leading into a musical revue sequence in which Harriet repeatedly turns an oversized hourglass on stage (Fig. 4). By turning the hourglass, she symbolically transports herself and the chorus dancing and singing with her from 1934 into the years 1924, 1914, and 1904.

³⁶ The stage version of this revue, also starring Jessie Matthews, premiered in December 1930 at the Adelphi Theatre in London and became an instant success with audiences. Ahead of the stage premiere, *The Times* announced: “Although *Ever Green* is described as ‘a musical play’, the book [script] has been written with the express purpose of giving Mr Cochran the same scope for spectacular scenes as would be afforded by a *revue*.” See “The Theatres: Mr Cochran’s New Production”, *The Times*, 27 November 1930, p. 12.

³⁷ The song alludes to light Edwardian music as composed by, for instance, Eric Coates, Cecil Armstrong Gibbs (“Dusk”) or Albert William Ketèlby (“Bells Across the Meadow”; “Persian Market”) by combining a typically Edwardian, diatonic melody with a more contemporary compositional framework that consists of a slow musical introduction to the song, followed by the song itself. I would like to thank Professor Jeremy Dibble from the Music Department at Durham for sharing his expertise and insights into the song and for suggesting these connections to Edwardian compositional styles.

³⁸ Lawrence Napper, “British Gaiety: Musical Cinema and the Theatrical Tradition in British Films”, in *The Sound of Musicals*, ed. by Steven Cohan (London: BFI, 2010), pp. 30-40 (p. 37).

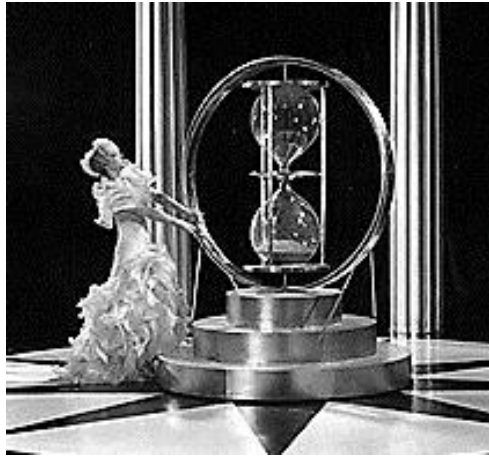


Figure 4: Harriet in the revue sequence of *Evergreen*. Screenshot by the author.

The hourglass functions as the linking element between “turns” in the revue, but the idea of time travel also reflects more broadly on the film’s combination of Edwardian and 1930s contemporary musical entertainment as exemplified by “Springtime” as the musical leitmotif. The revue in the film first moves to the year 1924, showing a Charleston dance sequence and the dancers in flapper costumes. The dance is cross-cut with footage of other people dancing Charleston on the streets. Moving to 1914, the revue shows an expressionist, *Metropolis*-style ballet sequence in which dancers in futurist costume line up in a Fordist, mass-reproduction style choreography. 1904 then shows Harriet and the chorus dancing the polka, a very fashionable and popular dance in the Edwardian period that evokes the Bohemian and Viennese styles of musical entertainment popular in Britain in the pre-war era. Finally, Harriet and the chorus reprise “Springtime in your Heart” for the climactic finale of the time travel revue. The revue show is thus framed by “Springtime”, a song which “exploit[s] the theme that youth remains even if the years slip by”.³⁹

Evergreen consciously integrates the form of the revue to mark Harriet’s stage debut while she is impersonating her famous Edwardian mother. As a form of theatrical entertainment that rose to popularity in the Edwardian period, the choice of this genre for Harriet’s stage debut seems apt for underscoring the film’s nostalgic construction of the past

³⁹ Victor Saville, *Evergreen: Victor Saville in His Own Words*, ed. by Roy Moseley (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), p. 75 .

and its look back to older forms of British entertainment. The integration of the revue sequence into *Evergreen* allows the film to “review” the musical idioms and dance styles of the recent past, but it also demonstrates sound film’s capacity to adapt other forms of entertainment. Originally based on a stage revue, *Evergreen* returns to its theatrical heritage by incorporating revue elements and by making the revue performance Harriet’s breakthrough moment in the film. “Springtime”, as the central piece of music, frames the revue and underscores the film’s return to its Edwardian predecessor by mixing contemporary and Edwardian musical idioms.

“Springtime in your Heart” is reprised in the final moments of *Evergreen*, when the PR stunt is discovered and Harriet is taken to court for fraud. Her defence lawyer argues that she must not be tried for fraud if she can “deliver the goods”, meaning if she can prove her talent as a singer. The lawyer calls Harriet to the witness stand and sets up a phonograph in front of the judge and jury. He then plays a phonograph recording of Harriet’s mother, the Edwardian star Harriet Green. The recording is “Springtime in Your Heart” and Harriet begins to sing along perfectly to the recording in the courtroom, convincing the judge that she is the daughter of the Edwardian star. In this climactic scene, the film interweaves the use of sound reproduction technology, here in the shape of the phonograph, with attaining proof of Harriet’s identity. The use of the phonograph and the wax cylinder recording in this sequence of the film raises crucial questions about the role of sound technology in *Evergreen*. In the courtroom scene, the phonograph is placed in the foreground of a medium long shot, presenting the phonograph in rack focus, and drawing the viewer’s attention to the sound reproduction device in the centre of the screen (Fig. 5).



Figure 5: The courtroom scene in *Evergreen*, showing the phonograph in rack focus. Screenshot by the author.

As soon as the recording begins to play, the camera presents close-ups of the cylinder turning within the phonograph (Fig. 6), releasing the voice of the Edwardian star into the space of the court room. The camera explores the material source of the voice by intercutting medium long shots of the courtroom, upper body shots of Harriet and the judge, and close-ups of the phonograph. The scene takes on a meta-referential function, alluding to the processes of sound recording and reproduction that enable the musical film to offer synchronised sound to its audiences. *Evergreen* does not conceal its representational strategies, but overtly features sound reproduction technology as an element that is necessary for bringing the story to its conclusion.

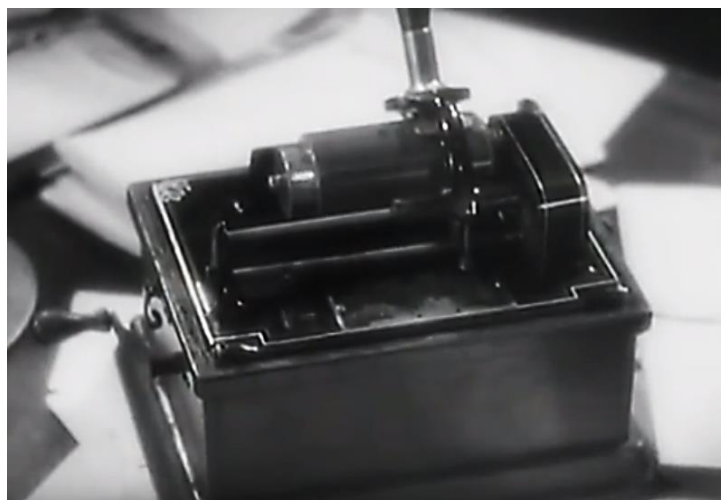


Figure 6: Close-up of the phonograph in *Evergreen*. Screenshot by the author.

The use of the phonograph in the courtroom scene underscores the film's pastiche fantasy of the past. Thomas Edison invented the phonograph in 1877 and Emil Berliner developed the rivalling gramophone with its flat disk record in 1887. By the early 1930s, the phonograph with its cylinder recordings had been largely displaced by the gramophone since Berliner's flat disk records could be reproduced more easily. In 1929, Edison ceased production for cylinder records and the phonograph subsequently became associated with outmoded strategies of sound reproduction technology.⁴⁰ Featuring the phonograph in the courtroom scenes in *Evergreen* emphasises the fictional historicity of the Edwardian recording that is presented as a piece of evidence. The phonograph and the wax cylinder recording evoke nostalgia for an outdated form of music reproduction technology and create a cinematic fantasy of the recent past for contemporary 1930s audiences. The past is not simply replayed through the sound recording, but also materialises in the shape of the phonograph as an outdated means of sound reproduction. As such, the phonograph provides a visual cue for 1930s audiences to underscore the alleged historicity of the pseudo-Edwardian song "Springtime in Your Heart".

In her work on the musical moment in film, Amy Herzog argues that the musical film's

fantastic, falsifying memory [...] does not obscure history but rather demonstrates the very constructed nature of history and memory as processes. [...] Music is the force in these films that propels us through this process of remembering, making the transformations that the past has undergone painfully felt.⁴¹

⁴⁰ See Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 203-204: "Berliner's machine was considerably louder than its immediate predecessors, but one of its most important differences was that its disks were reproduced through a 'stamping process' and, therefore, easily mass produced." However, Sterne maintains that this is not the sole reason for why Berliner's gramophone gradually replaced the phonograph. The decline in popularity was possibly also due to the increasing availability of radio. See, for instance, David L. Morton Jr., *Sound Recording: The Life Story of a Technology* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2004), p. 91. On the cultural (and particularly literary) connotations of the phonograph with the Victorian and Edwardian periods, see John M. Picker, "The Victorian Aura of the Recorded Voice", *New Literary History*, 32.3 (2001), 769-786.

⁴¹ Amy Herzog, *Dreams of Difference, Songs of the Same: The Musical Moment in Film* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 10.

Herzog argues that through the musical moment, film can form an acoustic “commentary on the way history is constructed”.⁴² In the case of *Evergreen*, the performance of “Springtime in your Heart” repeatedly calls into question the film’s construction of the Edwardian past and the extent to which the film outlines a trajectory of theatrical entertainment. While *Evergreen* appears to be a nostalgic and conservative musical comedy that sonically evokes romantic notions of pre-war light music, revue, and music-hall traditions, the musical leitmotif must also be read as Harriet’s fraudulent impersonation of her mother. “Springtime” is repeatedly performed within the framework of both the revue show and the PR stunt. The film’s presentation of the past is musically as well as performatively exposed as nostalgic fantasy that allows audiences to reflect on the cinematic representation of the Edwardian era and British entertainment culture. *The Times* rather poignantly commented that “[i]n addition to the usual entertainments the film makes a direct appeal to that morbid sense of the past from which the present age appears to be suffering”.⁴³ *Evergreen*’s complex treatment of time and its artificially constructed nostalgia for Edwardian forms of entertainment emerge more clearly as a defining element of the film. *Evergreen*’s musical leitmotif, the integration of revue, and the film’s overt references to outdated forms of sound reproduction technology underline the artificially constructed sense of nostalgia that pervades the film.

Richards describes Matthews’ films as “fantasies”, influenced by modernism, which were “[...] taking place in a highly stylized, high contrast, hermetically sealed black and white world of ritzy nightclubs, luxury hotels, ocean liners, newspaper offices, radio studios, theatres and mansions”.⁴⁴ *Evergreen* experiments with format, delivery, and technology and capitalises on revue’s eclecticism. It is a cinematic fantasy that reproduces stage revue and musical theatre for cinema audiences. As we will see in the remainder of the chapter, Evelyn

⁴² Herzog, *The Musical Moment in Film*, p. 10.

⁴³ “New Gallery Cinema”, *The Times*, 8 June 1934, p. 12.

⁴⁴ Richards, *Age of the Dream Palace*, p. 209.

Waugh's *Vile Bodies* reacts to the sound film's appropriation of theatrical forms. Waugh's novel plays with elements of revue structurally and thematically to assert the novel's own capacity to capitalise on the theatre. The novel takes up elements of revue to assert literature's capacity to adapt forms of theatrical entertainment as productively as early sound film. In a parallel move to *Evergreen's* self-conscious, nostalgic fantasy of revue and musical theatre, Waugh's novel capitalises on revue's eclecticism, experimenting with different styles and formats, and merging past and present forms of entertainment in the novel.

"A revue, between covers"

Published in 1930, at the time when the musical revue began to be transferred from stage to screen, Evelyn Waugh's *Vile Bodies* marks a crucial rite of passage for the late modernist novel. Considered as both Waugh's "most experimental book"⁴⁵ and one of his major commercial successes, *Vile Bodies* now holds a prominent place in Waugh scholarship as well as wider studies on the development of late modernist fiction.⁴⁶ Sparking a public sensation at the beginning of 1930 and "rescu[ing] Waugh from the humiliatingly hand-to-mouth penury which characterized his life after university",⁴⁷ the novel's singular appeal lies in its immanent tension between formal experiment and commercial interest.⁴⁸ It is this

⁴⁵ Damon Marcel DeCoste, "(AND YOU GET FAR TOO MUCH PUBLICITY ALREADY WHOEVER YOU ARE)': Gossip, Celebrity, and Modernist Authorship in Evelyn Waugh's *Vile Bodies*", *Papers on Language and Literature*, 49.1 (Winter 2013), 3-36 (p. 3).

⁴⁶ For instance in Jonathan Greenberg's *Modernism, Satire, and the Novel*: Greenberg argues that *Vile Bodies* is a key text in the development of late modernist satire. See Greenberg, *Modernism, Satire, and the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 47-69.

⁴⁷ Richard Jacobs, "Introduction", in Evelyn Waugh, *Vile Bodies* (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. ix-xxxiv (p. x).

⁴⁸ The novel finally made Waugh's career as a novelist financially viable. Stannard estimates that the novel sold about "22,000 hardback copies in Britain during the 'thirties and as many again in America, Europe and Australasia". See Martin Stannard, *Evelyn Waugh: The Early Years 1903-1939* (London: Dent & Sons, 1986), p. 196. Waugh himself wrote in his diary entry for 20 May 1930 that his income

tension, or aspects of this tension, which have shaped at least three strands in criticism on the novel. First, there are those interested in viewing the novel through the lens of modernist experimentation and avant-garde movements: George McCartney and Alan Dale emphasise the novel's formal and stylistic experiments, dubbing Waugh "a modernist despite himself"⁴⁹ who created a form of "alternate modernism"⁵⁰ that is simultaneously indebted to as well as critical of the intellectual premises of modernist writers. Brooke Allen and Archie Loss have interpreted the novel as responding to avant-garde movements such as Futurism and Vorticism.⁵¹ Second, there is a strand in criticism which foregrounds satire and parody, making Waugh's acerbic humour the centre of investigation: Jonathan Greenberg argues that *Vile Bodies* ought to play a central role in our understanding of late modernist satire while Denise O'Dea is less interested in *Vile Bodies* as a second-generation modernist text and argues that the novel is a parody of "conventional romance".⁵² Third, there is a line of thought which views the novel through the lens of twentieth-century popular culture and celebrity gossip, arguing that the novel is a "scrapbook of popular

after the publication of *Vile Bodies* was, at least temporarily, "about £2,500 a year". See Waugh, *Diaries*, p. 309.

⁴⁹ Alan Dale, "To Crie Alarme Spiritual: Evelyn Waugh and the Ironic Community", *Modernist Cultures*, 2.2 (2006), 102-114 (p. 112).

⁵⁰ George McCartney, *Evelyn Waugh and the Modernist Tradition. With a New Introduction by the Author* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2004), p. 50.

⁵¹ See Brooke Allen, "Vile Bodies: A Futurist Fantasy", *Twentieth Century Literature*, 40.3 (Autumn 1994), 318-328 and Archie Loss, "Vile Bodies, Vorticism, and Italian Futurism", *Journal of Modern Literature*, 18.1 (1992), 155-164.

⁵² Greenberg, *Modernism, Satire, and the Novel*, pp. 47-69. See also Denise O'Dea, "What's in a Name? Or, *Vile Bodies* Revisited: Evelyn Waugh, *Bright Young Things*, and a Hero in Search of a Plot", *Philament: an online journal of Literature, Arts, and Culture*, 4 (August 2004) <<http://www.philamentjournal.com/issue4/odea-name/>> [accessed 27 April 2019].

culture”⁵³ or a *roman à clef* featuring recognisable personalities of the 1920s.⁵⁴ Belonging to this strand of criticism, but making a concerted effort to build on the tension of formal experiment and popular appeal, Damon Marcel DeCoste reads Waugh’s novel as straddling both modernist forms of narration and Society reportage.⁵⁵

While the above critics come from very different critical and methodological perspectives, a common thread in their assessments is a recognition of the novel’s reliance on sound. DeCoste, for instance, interprets Waugh’s “externalist approach” as “typically aural”, foregrounding dialogue to “achieve detachment”.⁵⁶ Drawing on McCartney’s more general observation of the “inherent tension between ear and eye” in Waugh’s fiction, Allen remarks that in “*Vile Bodies* [...] noise is almost exclusively talk – most of it vacuous enough to qualify as noise, pure and simple”.⁵⁷ Lane describes parts of the text as “scored for voices only”, while Richard Jacobs refers to the “*tonal* use of brackets” and argues that the novel “sounds history”.⁵⁸ In his biography of Waugh, Stannard refers to evidence in the typescript of *Vile Bodies* that shows Waugh’s preoccupation with

this struggle to attain precisely the right ‘pitch’. [Waugh’s] ear for idiom was perhaps his greatest asset as humorous writer. The experienced reader can not only distinguish between

⁵³ Robert R. Garnett, *From Grimes to Brideshead: The Early Novels of Evelyn Waugh* (London: Associated University Presses, 1990), p. 63.

⁵⁴ For references to *Vile Bodies* as *roman à clef*, see Douglas Lane Patey, *The Life of Evelyn Waugh* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 73; Robert Murray Davis, *Evelyn Waugh and the Forms of his Time* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1989), pp. 136-137; and Stannard, *Early Years*, p. 204. These critics provide the names of some of the real personalities that Waugh included in his novel: Aimée Semple MacPherson appears as Mrs Ape and Rosa Lewis was most likely the model for Lottie Crump. Further discussion of *Vile Bodies* as *roman à clef* can also be found in Aaron Jaffe, *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 47-50.

⁵⁵ DeCoste, “Gossip, Celebrity, and Modernist Authorship”, pp. 33-34.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁵⁷ McCartney, *Evelyn Waugh and the Modernist Tradition*, p. 155; Allen, “Futurist Fantasy”, p. 321.

⁵⁸ Anthony Lane, “Evelyn Waugh”, in *The Cambridge Companion to English Novelists*, ed. by Adrian Poole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 407-422 (p. 412); Jacobs, “Introduction”, pp. xxx, xi.

unattributed speakers, but he can tell immediately what Waugh wants us to think of the characters by the way he makes them speak.⁵⁹

This surprising number of remarks on tone, pitch, and speech should lead us to inquire more sensitively into the novel's treatment of sound and its relationship with the socio-cultural and media history of Britain in the late 1920s and early 1930s. As readers of *Vile Bodies* and as readers of the criticism produced on the novel over the past three decades, we find ourselves confronted with a crucial set of questions: where does this fascination with tone, pitch, sound, and voice stem from? Why do critics use this kind of language to describe how *Vile Bodies sounds* even though it is a prose text? What does this apparent preoccupation with sound tell us about the novel and the cultural conditions under which it came into being? I want to suggest here that the novel's tension between experimentation and commercial appeal derives from a particular moment in the history of British entertainment culture which I have outlined in the first two sections of this chapter. Works such as Suárez' *Pop Modernism* have shown how heightened critical awareness for modernity's new "sound environment" can help us to recontextualise modern fiction, opening new avenues for interpretation.⁶⁰ In what follows, I argue that *Vile Bodies* both emulates and parodies elements of the musical revue to demonstrate how the novel is much better suited to adapt forms of popular entertainment than one of the novel's main competitors in the late 1920s: early sound film.

The implications of my reading are twofold. On the one hand, this case study of Waugh demonstrates his negotiation with a rapidly expanding entertainment industry. The

⁵⁹ Stannard, *Early Years*, p. 203.

⁶⁰ Juan A. Suárez, *Pop Modernism: Noise and the Reinvention of the Everyday* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2007), p. 120. Suárez' project resituates modernism in a broader network of media and entertainment genres. His work suggests that "[t]he stylistic heterogeneity, fragmentation, and multi-perspectivism of modernism had a popular counterpart, if not a predecessor, in the quick succession of performances, genres, and media packed into vaudeville and variety shows" (p. 3). Reading modernist writers vis-à-vis their contemporary media and entertainment context with special emphasis on sound leads Suárez to some fascinating interpretations. He reads *The Waste Land* as "treat[ing] the literary tradition as a sound archive to be manipulated by means of gramophone technology" (p. 7).

novel's treatment of revue and early sound film thus becomes understandable as Waugh's response to the question of how to write commercially successful fiction in the age of an incessantly expanding audio-visual entertainment industry. On the other hand, this discussion raises wider questions about a group of late modernist writers who were staking out the place of the novel at a time of transition and increasing media competition. In order to discuss how *Vile Bodies*' style, structure, and themes adapt the stage revue to critique early sound film, I first discuss some initial reviewers' responses to the novel to trace a strand in its contemporary reception that compared the text directly with musical revue shows. Then I analyse the novel vis-à-vis revue and sound film. Witnessing how adapting stage revue for the screen led to sound film's early commercial success with audiences (despite synchronised sound's initial teething problems), Waugh followed suit and used revue as a model for his novel. First, this strategy allowed him to write a commercially successful book while being able to experiment in order to find his own writing style. Second, translating the soundscapes and structures of revue onto the page also gave Waugh an ideal opportunity for asserting the novel's superiority over sound film.

A number of early reviews directly compared *Vile Bodies* to a revue show. This comparison draws attention specifically to the novel's amalgamation of entertaining scenes which follow in quick succession and which seem only superficially linked. Edward Shanks, writing for the *New Statesman* in 1930, discussed the novel as follows:

Mr Waugh [has written] what must be called rather a revue, between covers. He does not lack even a female chorus, which we meet on the second page. [...] [the scenes] succeed one another with a snap and variety that many a revue-producer might envy.⁶¹

A few years later, Rose Macaulay followed suit in likening *Vile Bodies* to a revue:

Vile Bodies, a novel more crowded, less classic and clear-cut in plot, more dispersed in interest, more of a revue show. [...] [T]he giddy whirl of *Vile Bodies* snatches up in its dance

⁶¹ Edward Shanks, Review of *Vile Bodies*, in *Evelyn Waugh: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Martin Stannard (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), pp. 100-101. The review was first published in the *New Statesman* on 8 February 1930.

at least a dozen separate groups of people, each with their own story, as in a ballet where groups perform in different corners of the stage.⁶²

Ronald Knox, commenting more broadly on Waugh's fiction, claimed that Waugh's early novels "were of a kind which never allowed you to forget that this was a show being put on for your benefit; it was revue, not drama".⁶³ Such reviews leave little doubt that at least some of the novel's contemporary readers saw a connection between the style, structure, and themes of Waugh's novel and revue shows, which presented an array of amusing but unrelated scenes. Echoing such sentiments, Ralph Straus, writing for the *Bystander*, commented that "*Vile Bodies* is one of the drollest and most entertaining affairs that ever strayed into print".⁶⁴ Straus' phrasing suggests that *Vile Bodies* was felt to be quite a different form of entertainment that had only perchance found its way between the covers of a book. In other words, the sensation of novelty stirred by the text could only be explained by its otherness from the novel and its kinship with the revue.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, *Vile Bodies'* show qualities led to two hasty efforts to produce stage adaptations of the novel. The first, written by Arthur Boscastle, was presented privately at the Arts Theatre on 8 October 1931. Reviews were mixed; the *Daily Telegraph* described the play as suffering from "ineffectiveness" because it was unable to match the "delicately fashioned caricature" crafted by the novel.⁶⁵ The play did not receive a licence for public performance. Just a few months later, in April 1932, a second version written by Dennis Bradley premiered at the Vaudeville Theatre. This adaptation was a rewrite of Boscastle's earlier attempt and consisted of twelve episodes. Bradley had added

⁶² Rose Macaulay, "Evelyn Waugh", in *Evelyn Waugh: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Martin Stannard (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), pp. 109-112. The review was first published in *Horizon* in December 1946.

⁶³ Ronald Knox, "The Reader Suspended", *Month*, 8.4 (Oct. 1952), 236-8 (p. 237).

⁶⁴ Ralph Straus, "Vile Bodies", in *Evelyn Waugh: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Martin Stannard (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), pp. 95-96. The review was first published in *Bystander* on 15 January 1930.

⁶⁵ "*Vile Bodies: Difficulties of Stage Presentation*", *Daily Telegraph*, 9 October 1931, p. 8.

a compère who appeared between scenes. The play fared better: the new stage adaptation was praised as “something rather in the nature of a revue”.⁶⁶

Waugh’s early years were shaped by frequent visits to cinemas, theatres, and revue shows. He was also involved in the making of an amateur film during his undergraduate years at Oxford.⁶⁷ Yet, more important, and perhaps less widely known, is his friendship with actors Elsa Lanchester and Tony Bushell, and his frequent visits to the “Cave of Harmony”, a nightclub in Soho which was co-owned by Lanchester and a venue renowned for its cabaret and revue shows.⁶⁸ In his diary, Waugh reported one of the convivial nights spent with Lanchester and his brother Alec on 12 July 1924:

In the evening Keith Chesterton was giving a party [...]. There were a comic collection of all the early Cave of Harmony set [...]. Elsa sang some few Cockney songs including *Yiddisher Boy* which I love. The man who wrote that delightful parody of *Our Betters* in the Little Revue was there [...]. I got home in broad daylight at 5 and this morning feel more than a little weary.⁶⁹

In addition to his outings with Lanchester and the Cave of Harmony crowd, Waugh visited different revue shows. In August 1925, he went to *On with the Dance*, written by Noël Coward, which Waugh “had long wanted to see”.⁷⁰ In August 1927, he saw *One Damn Thing After Another*, produced by C. B. Cochran. Waugh commented that this revue was not “particularly good but the whole quite brisk and jolly and well organized”.⁷¹ Waugh’s visits

⁶⁶ “The Censor Relents”, *Daily Telegraph*, 26 March 1932, p. 6.

⁶⁷ Stannard, *Early Years*, p. 93.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 101-102. On the Cave of Harmony and Elsa Lanchester, see Rohan McWilliam, “Elsa Lanchester and Bohemian London in the Early Twentieth Century”, *Women’s History Review*, 23.2 (2014), 171-187. McWilliam writes that “an evening at the Cave usually began at nine with dancing followed by a cabaret or revue commencing at twelve and then dancing till two. [...] The evenings embodied a spirit of experimentation; the succession of dancing and performance could be likened to the use of montage by figures in the avant-garde” (p. 179).

⁶⁹ Waugh, *Diaries*, p. 169. The “Little Revue” Waugh mentions here was most likely a revue show put on by the Little Theatre, John Street, London.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 217.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 288.

to revue shows in the mid to late 1920s provide an additional clue to his thoughts on writing fiction vis-à-vis other forms of entertainment. The decade marked a time at which Waugh was grappling with developing his own theory of fiction and literary representation. In a well-known review essay on the fiction of Ronald Firbank, Waugh summarised the elements of Firbank's style which he admired most: a dialogic, conversational, 'unobtrusive' style of narration and narrative that was "directed for entertainment".⁷² Such features seemed somehow related to film. According to Waugh,

[Firbank's] later novels are almost wholly devoid of any attributions of cause to effect; there is the barest minimum of direct description; his compositions are built up intricately and with a balanced alternation of the wildest extravagance and the most austere economy, with conversational nuances. They may be compared to cinema films in which the relation of caption and photograph is directly reversed; occasionally a brief, visual image flashes out to illumine and explain the flickering succession of spoken words.⁷³

Not only does this appraisal of Firbank suggest that Waugh was keen to develop his own writing style based on authors he admired, but it also demonstrates that he was considering the 1920s mediascape and cinema's role for finding new ways to think about writing.⁷⁴ Waugh's careful phrasing "they may be compared to cinema films" suggests that he tried to avoid a direct comparison between Firbank's fiction and film. Rather, Waugh expresses how his understanding of "good" textual narrative was influenced by his understanding of cinema. In other words, Waugh uses the comparison to film to describe *his experience of* Firbank's writing. Film offers a way of thinking figuratively about specific features of fiction writing that Waugh sought to emulate.

McCartney suggests that we might understand Waugh as approaching his fiction as

⁷² Evelyn Waugh, "Ronald Firbank", in *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. by Donat Gallagher (London: Methuen, 1983), pp. 56-59. The review essay was first published in *Life and Letters* in March 1929.

⁷³ Waugh, "Ronald Firbank", pp. 57-58.

⁷⁴ A more extensive discussion of the young Waugh's thoughts on fiction-writing can be found in Davis, *Evelyn Waugh*, pp. 68-89. Davis rightly states that the young Waugh had "a surprising tolerance for commodity fiction" (p. 74).

a “director”.⁷⁵ This does not limit itself to film, but also extends to the theatre. Frick, for instance, has noted the presence of repetitive “speaker identifiers”, such as “he said” and “she said”, in *Vile Bodies* and their similarity to “theatrical prompts”.⁷⁶ Waugh’s short story *The Balance* (1925) is an early testament to his preoccupation with stage and screen and demonstrates his quest for ways to productively mobilise the entertainment forms of his time for writing prose fiction.⁷⁷ *The Balance* “is a strange mixture of narrative and dramatic modes”⁷⁸ and we might consider its composition as an early rehearsal for *Vile Bodies*. Stage and screen thus seemed to offer Waugh two models for how to attain commercial success within a rapidly expanding entertainment sphere and his study of Firbank showed Waugh that it was possible to produce fiction that translated effects of theatre and film into prose.

While features derived from cinema and theatre helped Waugh to find his own voice as a writer, they also provided the financial gain Waugh was hoping for. In a letter to his close friend Harold Acton in July 1929, he admitted

I feel chained to this novel [*Vile Bodies*]. I am sure you will disapprove of it. It is a welter of sex and snobbery *written simply in the hope of selling some copies*. Then if it is [at] all a success, I want to try and write something more serious [my emphasis].⁷⁹

Waugh’s letter indicates that he was writing the novel not for critical acclaim but predominantly for financial reasons. His anxiety over Acton’s potential disapproval stemmed from his conception of *Vile Bodies* as entertainment, rather than as a “serious” literary venture. In need of commercial success and aspiring to develop his own definitive

⁷⁵ McCartney, *Evelyn Waugh*, p. 121.

⁷⁶ Robert Frick, “Style and Structure in the Early Novels of Evelyn Waugh”, *Papers on Language and Literature*, 28.4 (1992), 417-441 (p. 436).

⁷⁷ Evelyn Waugh, “The Balance”, in *The Complete Short Stories and Selected Drawings*, ed. by Ann Pasternak Slater (London: Everyman’s Library, 1998), pp. 3-38.

⁷⁸ Frederick L. Beaty, *The Ironic World of Evelyn Waugh: A Study in Eight Novels* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1992), p. 12.

⁷⁹ Evelyn Waugh, “Letter to Harold Acton”, Tuesday [undated] July 1929, in *The Letters of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. by Mark Amory (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1980), p. 37.

style as a novelist, Waugh turned to the revue and attuned himself to the vibes of stage and screen.

“There’s a song there, really”

Reading *Vile Bodies* alongside the musical revue and revue film, key passages of the work attain new meaning. The novel commences with a ship crossing the channel from Calais to Dover with most passengers being seasick. The events on the ship, and the crossing of the channel itself, have been interpreted as a “satire of purgation”, as an allegory of “man’s progress towards death”, or as an illustration of the book’s critical view of modernity.⁸⁰ However, readers might equally consider this part of the text a parody of revue’s and revue film’s song-and-dance numbers. The evangelist Mrs Ape tries to keep up morale aboard by suggesting to her choir girls, her “Angels”, as well as to other passengers to sing:

The ship creaked in every plate, doors slammed, trunks fell about, the wind howled; the screw, now out of the water, now in, raced and churned, shaking down hatboxes like ripe apples; but above all the roar and clatter there rose from the second-class ladies’ saloon the despairing voices of Mrs Ape’s angels, in frequently broken unison, singing, singing, wildly, desperately, as though their hearts would break in the effort and their minds lose their reason, Mrs Ape’s famous hymn, *There ain’t no flies on the Lamb of God*.⁸¹

The ship, tossed about by the rough waters, “creaks”, the wind “howls”, luggage topples over and doors “slam”. Yet, amidst all the “roar and clatter”, Mrs Ape’s choir sings “wildly” with “despairing voices”. It is here, in the very first chapter of the novel, that the text already declares its reliance on sound by devoting its descriptive passages to the soundscape of the ship. The title of Mrs Ape’s “famous hymn”, “There ain’t no flies on the Lamb of God”, acerbically juxtaposes the serious connotations of a religious hymn with its inappropriate title. The American colloquial contraction “ain’t” produces an impression of covert critique of the late 1920s music and film culture which, as I have outlined in the previous chapter,

⁸⁰ See Greenberg, *Modernism, Satire, and the Novel*, p. 49; Beaty, *Ironic World*, p. 55; and Allen, “Futurist Fantasy”, p. 322.

⁸¹ Evelyn Waugh, *Vile Bodies* (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. 12-13.

was feared to become increasingly Americanised.⁸²

Mrs Ape and her girl choir appear several times in the novel. The girls do not seem to have proper names (and if they do, they are not used by anyone). Rather, Mrs Ape calls them by their stage names: "Faith", "Charity", "Fortitude" and so on. The girls are all young and attractive, wearing angel's wings for a costume. Despite Mrs Ape's efforts to sell her choir as a charitable Christian endeavour to audiences, the girls are sexualised at every turn: "Creative Endeavour lost her wings [...]. She got talking to a gentleman in the train."⁸³ Another girl, "Chastity", has become a prostitute in all but name by the end of the novel. Mrs Ape herself calls the girls "sluts", indicating that sex, not religion, is the driving force behind her business.⁸⁴

Mrs Ape's angels mimic the fashionable type of the chorus girl or revue girl that was popularised in the interwar era by Florenz Ziegfeld's spectacular revue productions on Broadway. The "Ziegfeld Girls" were known to look similar, being of similar height and stature, and they danced in perfect synchronisation, lending each of Ziegfeld's Broadway shows spectacle, glamour, and sex appeal through a deliberate objectification of the female performer. An equivalent dance troupe had been formed in Britain as early as 1889, the Tiller Girls. They performed in Manchester, London, Berlin, and Paris, and were particularly renowned for their perfectly coordinated movements, attractiveness, and athletic bodies.⁸⁵

⁸² On the perceived Americanisation of British culture in the twentieth century and the role played by the media in this process, see, for instance, Genevieve Abravanel, *Americanizing Britain: The Rise of Modernism in the Age of the Entertainment Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016) and Mark Glancy, *Hollywood and the Americanization of Britain: From the 1920s to the Present* (London: Tauris, 2013). *Vile Bodies* contains a few references to Jazz and African-American musical styles: Miles brings a gramophone record to Agatha Runcible before she dies in the nursing home. The record makes Agatha move to the "negro rhythm" while "the gramophone was playing the song the black man sang at the Café de la Paix". See Waugh, *Vile Bodies*, p. 159.

⁸³ Waugh, *Vile Bodies*, p. 8.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁸⁵ Initial recruitment of the girls did not actually involve any dancing, but "a thorough inspection of each candidate's teeth and legs". See Kara Reilly, "The Tiller Girls: Mass Ornament and Modern Girl", in *Theatre, Performance and Analogue Technology: Historical Interfaces and Intermedialities*, ed. by Kara Reilly (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2013), pp. 117-132 (p. 119).

They were also one of the first dance troupes to use the “precision kick line” in 1910.⁸⁶ Having seen the Tiller Girls perform in 1927, Siegfried Kracauer subsequently wrote in “The Mass Ornament” that the dancers were

no longer individual girls, but indissoluble girl clusters whose movements are demonstrations of mathematics. As they condense into figures in the revues, performances of the same geometric precision are taking place in what is always the same packed stadium, be it in Australia or India, not to mention America.⁸⁷

Likening the precision dancing and perfectly synchronised choreography to Fordist ideals of capitalist production, Kracauer observes how women’s bodies, as part of the dance troupe, become objects of desire and an expression of modern consumer culture. The Tiller Girls, like the Charlot Girls and the Ziegfeld Girls, embodied the new twentieth-century type of the “girl”: a sexually liberated (and yet also highly sexualised) woman who appears independent, perpetually unattainable, and beautiful (Fig. 7).⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Reilly, “Tiller Girls”, p. 117.

⁸⁷ Kracauer, “The Mass Ornament”, pp. 75-76.

⁸⁸ This new type of “girl” was popularised in literature and film of the 1920s and 1930s by works like Anita Loos’ *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1925) or Irmgard Keun’s *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (1932). See Katharina von Ankum, “Material Girls: Consumer Culture and the ‘New Woman’ in Anita Loos’ *Gentlemen prefer Blondes* and Irmgard Keun’s *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*”, *Colloquia Germanica*, 27.2 (1994), 159-172.



Figure 7: The Tiller Girls. Photograph undated, possibly taken in or around 1900. Negative on glass, 5x7 in. Bain News Service. George Grantham Bain Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Image Credit: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division [reproduction number LC-DIG-ggbain-39166].

The presence of the choir girls in the novel suggests that Waugh adapted the new type of the revue girl for his own literary project. Scenes of Mrs Ape and her choir performing in the novel are interspersed with scenes featuring the main characters Adam, Nina, and Miss Runcible.⁸⁹ There are also multiple references to song and dance, such as Chastity's comment that Lady Metroland's party offers "nothing to make a song and dance about".⁹⁰ Interlinking the (singing) "female chorus" with the rest of the novel adapts revue's characteristic interpolation of sketches and song-and-dance routines. This occurs, for instance, during the ship's crossing, when Mrs Ape forces her fellow passengers to join in the singing:

"We're going to sing a song together, you and me." ("Oh, God," said Adam). "You may not know it, but you are. You'll feel better for it body *and* soul. [...] There's the song on the back. Now all together . . . sing. Five bob for you, steward, if you can shout me down. Splendid, all together, boys." In a rich, very audible voice Mrs Ape led the singing. Her arms rose, fell and fluttered with the rhythm of the song. The bar steward was hers already – inaccurate sometimes in his reading of the words, but with a sustained power in the low notes that

⁸⁹ Waugh, *Vile Bodies*, pp. 16-17, 84-85.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

defied competition. The journalist joined in next and Arthur set up a little hum. Soon they were all at it, singing like blazes, and it is undoubtedly true that they felt the better for it.⁹¹

The novel here parodically emulates revue's and early sound film's musical sequences, in which a song takes centre stage and disrupts the continuity of the action. Herzog defines the musical moment in film as "invert[ing] the image-sound hierarchy to occupy a dominant position in the filmic work. The movements of the image, and hence the structuring of space and time, are dictated by song".⁹² For the case of film, this becomes particularly evident in *Evergreen's* use of "Springtime" as a musical leitmotif which frames the revue sequence and pauses the continuity of the story in favour of indulging in a musical fantasy. In Waugh's novel, Mrs Ape's command to sing does not advance the plot, but simply takes hold of the passengers ("the bar steward was hers already"). The song becomes the narrative's anchoring point for the subsequent paragraphs of text, each starting with somebody "hearing it":

Father Rothschild heard it and turned his face to the wall.

Kitty Blackwater heard it. [...]

The Captain heard it. [...]

The Bright Young People heard it. "So like one's first parties," said Miss Runcible, "being sick with other people singing."⁹³

The white lines between paragraphs move the focus from scene to scene, and, rather than establishing continuity of action chronologically, the song disrupts such ordering and conveys the impression of simultaneity by focussing on various passengers at the precise moment of hearing the song.

The episodic plot of the novel, which oscillates between different characters and strings together loosely related incidents, arguably adapts revue's cavalier treatment of narrative continuity and coherence as outlined by Len Platt:

⁹¹ Waugh, *Vile Bodies*, p. 16.

⁹² Herzog, *Musical Moment*, p. 7.

⁹³ Waugh, *Vile Bodies*, p. 17.

The whole show, although written as a unified text with designed songs, dance routines and sketches, had far less interest in narrative coherency than musical comedy. It was not that revue was too unsophisticated to sustain traditional story, as is sometimes thought, but rather that it eschewed what it saw as the narrative simplicity and romanticism of the earlier form.⁹⁴

Waugh was, of course, a sophisticated writer and could have given his novel a sustained traditional plot, but, as we know from his reflections on Firbank, he simply did not want the “simplicity” of cause-and-effect narrative. Instead, *Vile Bodies* contains recurring variations on a number of themes: Adam’s and Nina’s on/off relationship, Adam’s quest for money, and the implicit conflict between two generations. Grouped around these themes is a cluster of scenes (the motor-car races, the ship, the nursing home, the film at Doubting Hall), which all contribute to an evocative, yet acerbic picture of the society in which Adam and Nina move.

The artistry of Waugh’s text lies in giving the superficial impression of a chaotic and disorderly novel while actually being a carefully structured text in fourteen chapters (thirteen plus the “Happy Ending”) which essentially form two blocks à six chapters with a concluding chapter each.⁹⁵ In theatrical terms, we might understand the novel as having two acts or blocks à six scenes each, with an intermission (chapter 7) and a grand finale (“Happy Ending”). Moreover, the novel follows a logical, internal chronology.⁹⁶ The action in the mid-section of the novel moves back and forth between different party settings and pseudo-domestic settings, indicating that Waugh structured the novel chronologically as well as spatially.⁹⁷ McCartney also remarks on the novel’s careful structuring, but attributes this to Waugh’s use of cinematic techniques:

⁹⁴ Platt, *Musical Comedy*, p. 134.

⁹⁵ Further comments on the structure of *Vile Bodies* can be found in Davis, *Evelyn Waugh*, pp. 128-145 and in Jacobs, “Introduction”, pp. ix-xxxiv.

⁹⁶ Davis, *Evelyn Waugh*, p. 141.

⁹⁷ Following from chapter two (the customs scene), chapters three, five, and nine take place in pseudo-domestic settings such as Shephard’s hotel and Doubting Hall. Chapter seven forms a kind of break or intermission in the flow of events as the chapter foregrounds Adam’s quest for domestic

Even at his most knockabout, his fiction always exhibits the craftsman's attention to design. He learned a good deal of his craftsmanship from cinema, which supplied him with the mechanics to build underlying patterns into his narratives, no matter how helter-skelter their surfaces might seem to the casual reader.⁹⁸

While McCartney's assessment is certainly plausible, we ought to note that revue, more than narrative cinema, used apparent disorder to mask careful structuring:

'running order' was crucial in revue; not only did the sequence of song and sketch [...] need careful attention, costume-changing had to be figured in and a fully staged segment had to be followed by a front-cloth act.⁹⁹

Revue's use of different scenes, its reliance on common themes rather than sustained plot, and the surface impression of disorderliness which masks an underlying structure, preceded the cinematic features described by McCartney. All of these features are found in Waugh's novel, too, which should lead us to question whether cinema was Waugh's sole inspiration.

The novel's thinly veiled, parodic treatment of political and socialite figures of the late 1920s certainly calls to mind the revue's capacity to mock public personalities. Although much has been said for the gossip columns of the daily papers as a major inspiration for Waugh, it is important to note that revue could be considered "a living version of the newspaper and its miscellany effect",¹⁰⁰ an enactment of the gossip printed in the dailies. Inventing different roles and imitating famous personalities were two key features of revue. Similarly, the novel is notably concerned with characters taking on different roles and inventing new personalities: Nina pretends to be a maid answering the

bliss by becoming Mr Chatterbox to raise the money to marry Nina. In contrast, chapters four, six, eight, and ten focus on a variety of parties: Archie Schwert's party, Lady Metroland's party, the party in the airship, and the final raucous gathering of the Bright Young People at the motor car races which leads to Agatha Runcible's fatal crash.

⁹⁸ McCartney, *Evelyn Waugh*, p. 100.

⁹⁹ James Ross Moore, "Girl Crazy: Musicals and Revue between the Wars", in *British Theatre between the Wars, 1918-1939*, ed. by Clive Barker and Maggie B. Gale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 88-112 (p. 94).

¹⁰⁰ Bailey, "Hullo Ragtime!", p. 136.

phone for herself; Adam becomes Mr Chatterbox and invents famous socialites such as Imogen Quest; and Colonel Blount signs the cheque for Adam as “Charlie Chaplin”.

The revue as a mode and model for *Vile Bodies* also emerges from the split narratorial voices. Both Milthorpe and DeCoste have noted, albeit with different emphasis, that *Vile Bodies* contains at least two different voices: “the intrusive, knowing voice of the Society pages” on the one hand, and the “detached, impersonal orchestrator of modernist aesthetics” on the other.¹⁰¹ Milthorpe argues that one voice can be attributed to the main body of the text, and that the other voice is linked to the novel’s “paratextual devices”, such as footnotes, parentheses, and white lines.¹⁰² However, DeCoste insists that the boundaries are blurred, writing that “the division between modernist detachment and gossip-columnist obtrusiveness does not always observe those paratextual boundaries”.¹⁰³ I want to suggest here that the narrator in *Vile Bodies* only seems to be split between two voices, because he or she essentially performs a role modelled on the compère in revue. A compère, as outlined above, would normally lead through the programme of a revue performance, making announcements, commenting on acts, and interacting with the audience. The compère would also be responsible for maintaining order and for providing improvised entertainment between acts. We can observe these different functions in the performance of Tommy Handley in *Elstree Calling* as noted earlier in this chapter. The narrator in *Vile Bodies* performs multiple functions that seem closely related to those of the compère. The narrator addresses the audience directly, establishing a sense of community, and drawing them into the circle of shared secrecy and gossip: “You see, that was the kind of party Archie Schwert’s party was.”¹⁰⁴ The narrator also guides readers through the novel and announces

¹⁰¹ DeCoste, “Gossip, Celebrity, and Modernist Authorship”, pp. 6, 17-18.

¹⁰² Naomi Milthorpe, *Evelyn Waugh’s Satire: Texts and Contexts* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2016), p. 48.

¹⁰³ DeCoste, “Gossip, Celebrity, and Modernist Authorship”, p. 18.

¹⁰⁴ Waugh, *Vile Bodies*, p. 43.

some of the “acts” before they happen: “He did this with a man called Ginger.”¹⁰⁵ The narrator also comments on, even judges, the events as they unfold: “(all that succession and repetition of massed humanity . . . Those vile bodies . . .).”¹⁰⁶ Performing these different functions, the narrator of *Vile Bodies* appears both as a detached commentator and as an insider-actor, acting simultaneously in the midst and on the fringes of the novel. This double-function arguably leads to the impression of split narratorial voices, but this impression is created by the novel’s adaptation of the role of the compère in revue.

Vile Bodies and Early Sound Film

As revue and musical feature films like *Elstree Calling* and *Evergreen* began to populate the late 1920s and early 1930s mediascape, Waugh’s *Vile Bodies* responded with an intricate critique of early sound film. The novel adapts features of the revue not just for its own commercial success, but to demonstrate how the novel could successfully supersede early sound film in its ability to adapt features of stage entertainment. There is evidence in the novel that Waugh was concerned with a critique of both cinematic sound reproduction more broadly as well as musical or revue film specifically. Waugh builds up to his direct attack on sound film by first planting various clues to attune his readers to the challenges of modern sound. Notably, sound provides the descriptive element which is otherwise largely missing from *Vile Bodies*. Yet, Waugh’s soundscapes are often constructed to demonstrate a total lack of intelligibility:

The engine was running and the whole machine shook with fruitless exertion. Clouds of dark smoke came from it, and a shattering roar which reverberated from concrete floor and corrugated iron roof into every corner of the building so that speech and thought became insupportable and all the senses were numbed.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Waugh, *Vile Bodies*, p. 98.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

The narrator insists that “speech and thought became insupportable and all the senses were numbed”, drawing attention to how modern noise prevents intelligible human interaction as well as conscious sensory experience. Attending the motor car races, Adam, Nina, and Agatha Runcible witness “scraps of highly technical conversation”. The novel here uses ellipses and fragments of speech to show disrupted communication, eschewing intelligible dialogue and using the evocation of noise to undermine and impede characters’ interaction:

“... Only offers a twenty pound bonus this year ...”
“... lapped at seventy-five ...”
“... Burst his gasket and blew out his cylinder heads ...”
“... Broke both arms and cracked his skull in two places ...”
“... Tailwag ...”
“... Speed-wobble ...”
“... Merc...”
“... Mag...”
“... crash...”¹⁰⁸

Recording disintegrated speech as fragments of noise, the narrator does not care whether these sound bites may or may not be meaningful to the reader. In its recording of sound fragments, Waugh’s text arguably translates the shortfalls of early cinematic sound recording and sound reproduction onto the page. Early microphones for cinematic sound recording, for instance, were omnidirectional and not selective enough (hence the need for comprehensive sound-proofing on an early sound film set, as I have indicated in the earlier discussion of *Blackmail*). The slightest sound was picked up by the recording device which could lead to a cacophony of noise that made it extremely difficult for the listener to distinguish between meaningful sound and noise.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Waugh, *Vile Bodies*, p. 134.

¹⁰⁹ For an overview of some of the issues caused by the introduction of synchronised sound technology, see chapter one on “The Coming of Sound to Britain”. More detailed discussions of challenges faced by film industries in the US, France, and Britain, can be found in Charles O’Brien, *Cinema’s Conversion to Sound: Technology and Film Style in France and the U.S.* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005); James Lastra, *Sound Technology and the American Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Barry Salt, *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis* (London: Starword, 2009); Donald Crafton, *The Talkies: American Cinema’s Transition to Sound, 1926-1931* (New York: Scribner, 1997); and Lea Jacobs, *Film Rhythm after Sound: Technology, Music, and Performance* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015).

At the time of *Vile Bodies*' composition, debates on the poor intelligibility of dialogue on screen and on the poor quality of cinematic sound reproduction were carried by daily newspapers, film magazines, and the trade press.¹¹⁰ The fragmentation of speech and the novel's references to noise cleverly allude to the shortfalls of early synchronised sound in the cinema: non-selectivity and unintelligibility of spoken interaction convey a cacophony that lacks depth and purpose. Although everything is recorded, it lacks cohesive narrative integration and meaning. These more covert hints at the failure of early cinematic sound culminate in Waugh's direct attack on the sound film. *Vile Bodies* features the making of a sound film that, ironically, cannot be played with its soundtrack due to a lack of appropriate equipment. The film is co-financed by Nina's father, Colonel Blount, and shot on his estate Doubting Hall in Buckinghamshire. It tells a sensational and wholly nonsensical account of the life of John Wesley, produced by "The Wonderfilm Company of Great Britain" and overseen by Mr Isaacs, who explains to Adam that the film

marks a stepping stone in the development of the British Film Industry. It is the most important All-Talkie super-religious film to be produced solely in this country by British artists and management and by British capital.¹¹¹

Suggesting the making of a musical film à la *Evergreen*, Isaacs boasts to Adam that the film team are "recording extracts from Wesley's sermons and we're singing all his own hymns".¹¹² Singing and music are prominent elements of the film as Adam, upon his arrival

¹¹⁰ See in particular my earlier discussion of *Kine Weekly*'s critique of "atrocious reproduction and bad entertainment [which] made thousands of enemies for the talkies". *Kinematograph Weekly*, 2 January 1930, p. 113.

¹¹¹ Waugh, *Vile Bodies*, p. 122.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 123. This is the second time that religion is portrayed as a marketable commodity through modern media and entertainment (the first is Mrs Ape's pseudo-evangelist activity). It seems that the novel makes a point on how modern entertainment and media turn religion into a marketable commodity for the masses. Or, perhaps, that modern media are the new religion. While "aberrant religion" (Jeffrey Heath, *The Picturesque Prison: Evelyn Waugh and his Writing* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1982), p. 81) or "bogus religion" (James F. Carens, *The Satiric Art of Evelyn Waugh* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966), p. 17) have been identified by some Waugh scholars and biographers as major targets of Waugh's social critique in *Vile Bodies*, the precise relationship between the media, the entertainment industry, and religion in Waugh's early works requires further critical attention.

at Doubting Hall, first hears “distant shouting and what seemed to be a string band”.¹¹³ As he wanders onto the film set, he encounters “a dozen or so men and women in eighteenth-century costume [...] singing strongly”.¹¹⁴ They are guided by a conductor and, yet again, accompanied by “a string band”.¹¹⁵ Even the Colonel is part of the ensemble, financially and vocally supporting the film venture.

However, when Colonel Blount shows the finished film to Nina and Adam, the screening does not go as planned:

There came in breathless succession four bewigged men in fancy costume, sitting round a card table. There were glasses, heaps of money and candles on the table. They were clearly gambling feverishly and drinking a lot. (“There’s a song there, really,” said the Colonel, “only I’m afraid I haven’t got a talkie apparatus yet.”)¹¹⁶

While the live performance of Mrs Ape and her choir girls has the capacity to take hold of the novel’s characters, the sound film in the novel lets down its audiences. The “most important All-Talkie super-religious film” is not a talking film at all. The ambitious project fails utterly and the screening of the sound film without appropriate equipment makes the Colonel revert back to an explanatory live commentary: “there’s a song there really”. The film, which is meant to mark a “stepping stone in the development of the British Film Industry”, does not mark anything significant at all but points to the failure of the new medium and invalidates the grand claims made by Mr Isaacs and Colonel Blount. Indeed, the failure of sound film in the novel calls to mind the real warnings issued by *Kinematograph Weekly* that “atrocious reproduction” would lead to “thousands of enemies for the talkies”.¹¹⁷ Sound, its recording initially intended for “preserving traces of the absent”,¹¹⁸ is

¹¹³ Waugh, *Vile Bodies*, p. 119.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

¹¹⁷ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 2 January 1930, p. 113.

¹¹⁸ Suárez, *Pop Modernism*, p. 127.

now absent itself from the film venture. While film is thus framed as unreliable in its reproduction of sound, Mrs Ape's choir, the numerous telephone conversations, or the scenes at the motor car races demonstrate that the novel does not fail its readers when it comes to renditions of sound.

The failure of sound film in the novel reflects Waugh's ambivalent attitude towards cinematic innovation. Critical of new technologies such as sound and colour, Waugh felt that sound degraded film as an art form. Communicating to his readers that he held early sound film in rather low esteem, he also laments the process of displacement of music-halls:

I feel that nowadays, since the introduction of what are charitably known as "Talking Pictures", writing about the cinema is like writing about the music-hall; it tends to become a mere lament of a disappearing art. [...] [O]ur appreciation is dimmed by the intrusion of uncouth voices, which we strive to dissociate from the actors and actresses who have so often delighted us [...]. I know that I am in the minority in this feeling, and I hope fervently that this disturbing new invention will soon be tamed so that we can once more look upon the cinema – silent or "talky" [sic] – not as an imitation stage play but as genuine and self-sufficient art.¹¹⁹

Critiquing the creation of "imitation stage play[s]" whose mere function it is to capitalise on synchronised sound technology, Waugh is targeting musical and revue films like *Elstree Calling* and *Evergreen* and the manner in which these films appropriate stage entertainment. He criticises the sound film's lack of originality, intelligibility, and sophistication. Such a critique becomes clear in *Vile Bodies'* depiction of the sound film as a pointless, plotless, and speculative endeavour that culminates in a considerable loss of financial assets for all parties involved.

Despite Waugh's critical comments on the sound film, he did not seem to mind that *Vile Bodies* was eventually turned into a television revue in 1939 as announced by the *BBC Radio Times* of 23 June 1939. Indeed, Waugh is credited with having contributed to parts of the script. The revue called *Table d'Hote* was at least in part based on Waugh's novel and featured a sketch entitled "Doubting Hall" which starred the characters of Adam and Nina.

¹¹⁹ Waugh, "My Favourite Film Star", in *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh*. ed. by Donat Gallagher (London: Methuen, 1983), pp. 68-70 (p. 68). The essay was first published in the *Daily Mail* on 24 May 1930.

The programme was first broadcast on 26 June 1939 at 9.20pm.¹²⁰ No recording of the TV broadcast survives, leaving readers to wonder whether this was a worthy outlet for Waugh's "revue, between covers".

Sonic Translations

This parallel discussion of *Vile Bodies* and early sound film demonstrates how both media were negotiating their place in a rapidly expanding mediascape in and around 1930. The introduction of synchronised sound to the British film industry produced both exchange and competition between stage and screen which notably centred on the way the introduction of sound facilitated a translation of stage entertainment onto the cinema screen. As the discussion of *Elstree Calling* and *Evergreen* suggests, steady improvements in sound recording technology allowed for a gradually more sophisticated narrative integration of theatrical forms into the sound film. While *Elstree Calling* is a fairly straightforward revue on film which simply copies the stage revue for the cinema screen, the later production of *Evergreen* incorporates features of revue into a more complex storyline that is concerned with establishing an origins narrative for its 1930s starlet Harriet, but also for the sound film itself. *Evergreen*, like its cinematic predecessor *Elstree Calling*, mobilises the revue for its own commercial benefit, but it also creates a nostalgic fantasy that combines and intertwines Edwardian and contemporary 1930s forms of entertainment, thus negotiating the sound film's position in a larger trajectory of cinematic and theatrical history. Self-consciously looking back to the stage of the Edwardian era, *Evergreen* is preoccupied with negotiating its place in a new media ecology.

¹²⁰ "Table D'Hote", *BBC Radio Times*, 23 June 1939, p. 16. The issue is available online on the BBC Genome Website. <<https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/b51bf00a15d04196a7ed9537f0ccc578>> [accessed 27 April 2019]. Enquiries with the British Film Institute and the BBC Research Viewings Service have confirmed that there is no recording of the TV revue. It was most likely performed and broadcast live in 1939. Further enquiries with the BBC Written Archives Centre have established that the BBC does not hold a script of the revue. Waugh and Dennis H. Bradley, who adapted *Vile Bodies* for the stage, are listed as contributors to the TV revue. The information is taken from the author's correspondence with the British Film Institute and the BBC Written Archives Centre.

These questions of status, history, and of how to translate dramatic forms into other media outlets also pertain to Waugh's *Vile Bodies*: the novel addresses the changing media ecology of the late 1920s and early 1930s by taking inspiration from the revue and by critiquing the shortfalls of early sound film. In a parallel move to that of *Elstree Calling* and *Evergreen*, *Vile Bodies* responds to the expanding audio-visual entertainment industry by adapting revue for the literary text and by tackling the perceived shortfalls of early cinematic sound. Here, the novel asserts its capacity to capitalise on theatrical entertainment, offering its own translation of the soundscapes and structures of revue and film onto the pages of a novel. Waugh is mapping out his literary style, which equally draws on Firbank's early twentieth-century works, revue theatre, and cinema, with the novel negotiating its own place in an increasingly audio-visual media ecology. While this analysis implicates Waugh strongly in his contemporary mediascape and popular culture, the chapter has also used *Vile Bodies* as a test case to show how different media and modes were not just background to the novel, but figured more prominently as both a matter of competition and inspiration. The discussion raises broader questions about a group of late modernist writers who were by and large beginning their careers in the late 1920s or early 1930s. What were their relationships with popular entertainment and the media and how did the introduction of synchronised sound change or modify these relationships? While Waugh's novel is an innovative and commercially successful textual response to the historically specific, audio-visual entertainment experience of revue and early revue film, *Vile Bodies* is by no means an isolated case. As I have indicated in the previous chapter, the introduction of synchronised sound not only affected commercial entertainment, but also government-sponsored public relations initiatives such as the GPO film unit and the British Documentary Movement. The ways in which sound participates in the 1930s drive to observe, report, and record everyday life becomes more evident in the next chapter. In what follows, George Orwell, Lewis Grassic Gibbon, and Walter Greenwood join Waugh's efforts to map the 1930s soundscape by translating the sounds of everyday life onto the page.

Chapter Three

Hybrid Idioms: Documentary Sound and Auto-Ethnographic Fiction

The previous chapter has shown how a reading for sound of *Vile Bodies* reintegrates the text into its contemporary entertainment context, demonstrating how the novel responds to an expanding film industry and critically tackles sound film's concomitant appropriation of the musical revue. This chapter applies the method of reading for sound to a different form of film-making and writing. Here, I examine sound vis-à-vis the 1930s fascination with auto-ethnography and reporting by analysing a selection of British documentary films and late modernist texts by George Orwell, Walter Greenwood, and Lewis Grassic Gibbon. I argue that sound becomes a core element in the pursuit of the 1930s documentary idea and that the sound strategies of documentary film and fiction in the late modernist period generate what I call a "hybrid idiom", a style at the intersection of social realism and modernism. Although the social realist tradition of the 1930s has been portrayed as antagonistic to modernism, this chapter demonstrates how a reading for sound discloses documentary's kinship with avant-garde filmmaking as well as the social realist novel's kinship with modernist forms. While the previous chapter explored sound as a matter of competition between film and the novel in the context of commercial musical and revue entertainment, this chapter focusses on the period's "documentary impulse", presenting sound as a matter of shared concern that gives rise to a new hybrid idiom.

Two Narratives of Divide

Much has been written on the 1930s and its preoccupation with “auto-ethnographic”¹ developments such as the British Documentary Movement,² Mass-Observation (M-O),³ Photo-Journalism,⁴ and Condition of England writing such as J. B. Priestley’s *English Journey*

¹ I take the terms “auto-ethnographic” and “auto-ethnography” from James Buzard, “Mass-Observation, Modernism, and Auto-Ethnography”, *Modernism/modernity*, 4.3 (1997), 93-122. Buzard uses the term to denote a form of self-observation, a way of doing ethnography from within. Like Mary Louise Pratt, from whom Buzard borrows the term in the first instance, Buzard draws attention to auto-ethnography as “‘construct[ed] in response to or in dialogue with’ authoritative ethnographic representations”. See Buzard’s footnote 4 in “Mass-Observation, Modernism, and Auto-Ethnography”. See also Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 7.

² See Ian Aitken, *The Documentary Film Movement: an Anthology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998); Ian Aitken, *Film and Reform: John Grierson and the Documentary Film Movement* (London: Routledge, 1990); Paul Swann, *The British Documentary Film Movement, 1926-1946* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Erik Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974); *The Rise and Fall of British Documentary: the Story of the Film Movement Founded by John Grierson*, ed. by Elizabeth Sussex (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1975); Paul Rotha, *Documentary Diary: An Informal History of the British Documentary Film, 1928-1939* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1973); Laura Marcus, “‘The creative treatment of actuality’: John Grierson, Documentary Cinema and ‘Fact’ in the 1930s”, in *Intermodernism*, ed. by Kristin Bluemel (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), pp. 189-207; *The Projection of Britain: A History of the GPO Film Unit*, ed. by Scott Anthony and James G. Mansell (London: BFI, 2011).

³ See, for instance, *Speak for Yourself: A Mass-Observation Anthology, 1937-1949*, ed. by Angus Calder and Dorothy Sheridan (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984); James Hinton, *The Mass Observers: a History, 1937-1949* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Penny Summerfield, “Mass-Observation: Social Research or Social Movement?”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 20.3 (1985), 439-452; Dorothy Sheridan, “Writing to the Archive: Mass-Observation as Autobiography”, *Sociology*, 27.1 (1993), 27-40; Nick Hubble, *Mass-Observation and Everyday Life: Culture, History, Theory* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2006); Nick Hubble, “The Intermodern Assumption of the Future: William Empson, Charles Madge and Mass-Observation”, *Intermodernism*, ed. by Kristin Bluemel (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), pp. 171-188; and Buzard, “Mass-Observation, Modernism, and Auto-Ethnography”, 93-122.

⁴ See, for instance, Tim N. Gidal, *Modern Photojournalism: Origin and Evolution, 1910-1933* (New York: Macmillan, 1973); Ryan Linkof, *Public Images: Celebrity, Photojournalism and the Making of the Tabloid Press* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018). Bryant examines in detail the relationship between documentary, writing, and W. H. Auden’s photography (especially his photographs published in *Letters from Iceland*). See Marsha Bryant, “Auden and the ‘Arctic Stare’: Documentary as Public Collage in *Letters from Iceland*”, in *Photo-textualities: Reading Photographs and Literature*, ed. by Marsha Bryant (London: Associated University Presses, 1996), pp. 108-127.

(1934) and Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937).⁵ Cunningham as well as Baxendale and Pawling note in their influential studies of 1930s literature and culture the diverse attempts at mapping and portraying British everyday life through non-fiction, photography, reportage, film, and the Mass-Observation movement. Baxendale and Pawling suggest that the 1930s appear as "a moment when ordinary people and the real world suddenly come into their own and 'speak' for themselves".⁶ Documentary film, as well as the social realist novel of the period, are sometimes taken to bear an indexical, direct relationship to the social, political, economic, and regional conditions and subjects they address. The fallacy of such an assumption has been noted repeatedly: documentary forms "are not just transparent windows on the 'real world' of the people, but *encodings* of meaning which actively construct the object of their gaze, as well as recording it".⁷ Although the 1930s documentary impulse has received critical reevaluation in recent years, standard narratives of documentary and social realism in the 1930s persist and have produced a lasting dichotomy between documentary and avant-garde film as well as between social realist and modernist literature.⁸ In the following section, I will outline these two narratives of divide which present documentary film as antagonistic to avant-garde filmmaking and, in parallel, devise a narrative of the social realist novel of the 1930s as fundamentally opposed to modernist formal experiment. I will then devote the remainder of the chapter to an exploration of how a reading for sound undermines such narratives of divide. I argue that sound emerges as a shared concern for both the novel and documentary film in the late

⁵ See J. B. Priestley, *English Journey* (London: Mandarin, 1994); George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (London: Penguin, 2001). See also John Baxendale and Christopher Pawling, "In Search of the People: The Journeys of J. B. Priestley", in *Narrating the Thirties. A Decade in the Making: 1930 to the Present* (London: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 46-78; Patricia Rae, "Orwell's Heart of Darkness: *The Road to Wigan Pier* as modernist anthropology", *Prose Studies*, 22.1 (1999), 71-102.

⁶ Baxendale and Pawling, *Narrating the Thirties*, p. 19.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20. See also the chapter on Mass-Observation in Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 296-340.

⁸ On this point, see also Cunningham, *British Writers*, p. 299. He writes that 1930s social realism "helped to slow down literary experiment and to smash up modernism".

modernist period. It brings to the fore the close kinship between documentary and avant-garde film and between the social realist novel and modernist formal experiment.

For the case of documentary film, Bill Nichols states that “the established story of documentary’s beginnings continues to perpetuate a false division between the avant-garde and documentary that obscures their necessary proximity”.⁹ Nichols here refers to a standard narrative of documentary’s history which maps the origins of documentary film as emerging from the work of Auguste and Louis Lumière in the late nineteenth century. The *cinématographe* devised by the Lumière brothers was portable, relatively easy to set up in different locations, and it allowed for easier development of films than the technology invented by Thomas Edison.¹⁰ The Lumières’ filming and screening of real life events such as *La sortie des usines Lumière* (1895) was marketed as the screening of *actualités*, referring to the filmic recording of real, everyday life occurrences and events. This focus on documenting actuality was then subsequently taken up by others filmmakers.¹¹ In *Screening the Body*, Lisa Cartwright examines Auguste Lumière’s lifelong interest and commitment to medical biology, pharmacology, and physiology as well as the usage of serial motion photography developed by Muybridge and Marey for the purpose of observing the body and the movement of organisms.¹² Cartwright points to the importance of image-making practices with a dedicated medical and scientific interest for the emergence of documentary film. As such, the documentary tradition in cinema has to be seen as not solely emerging from the Lumières’ *actualités*, but also from the wider scientific and medical interest in image-making and recording technologies at the turn of the century.

⁹ Bill Nichols, “Documentary Film and the Modernist Avant-garde”, *Critical Inquiry*, 27.4 (2001), 580-610 (p. 581).

¹⁰ Barnouw, *Documentary*, pp. 6-7.

¹¹ Richard M. Barsam, *Non-Fiction Film: A Critical History*, rev. edn (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), pp. 15-19.

¹² Lisa Cartwright, *Screening the Body: Tracing Medicine’s Visual Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 1-16.

Early Soviet film production, especially the work of filmmaker Dziga Vertov, is also frequently considered as a formative influence on early documentary film.¹³ Vertov had volunteered for the Cinema Committee in Moscow in 1917 and became responsible for the Soviet newsreel *Kino Nedelia* which served as an intersection of non-fictional material, news reports, and propaganda in support of the Bolshevik revolution.¹⁴ Vertov continued this line of work with a series of post-revolution non-fiction films, which combine Soviet political ideology with his artistic ambitions.¹⁵ In addition to the Lumière's *actualités*, medical and scientific image-making practices, and the Soviet newsreel, the travelogue and particularly the early work of American filmmaker Robert Flaherty also has its share in the standard narrative of documentary's origins: Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922), *Moana* (1926), and *Man of Aran* (1934) are curious amalgamations of fiction film, travelogue, and anthropological study.¹⁶ Flaherty staged and romanticised his subjects and materials to great success. John Grierson, who is now widely considered the "founding father" of the British Documentary Movement, admired Flaherty's work, commenting in a review of Flaherty's *Moana* on the "documentary value" of Flaherty's film.¹⁷ Although it is often assumed that Grierson was the first to coin the term "documentary", the American photographer Edward Sheriff Curtis had already described his own venture into filming and serially photographing native American tribes as the collection of "documentary material"

¹³ Barnouw, *Documentary*, pp. 51-71 and Barsam, *Non-Fiction Film*, pp. 65-75.

¹⁴ Barnouw, *Documentary*, pp. 52-55.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 51-71.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-51.

¹⁷ Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real: the Documentary Film Revisited* (London: BFI Publishing, 1995), p. 8. See also Barsam, *Non-Fiction Film*, pp. 46-54 on the "romantic tradition" of Flaherty's work. Cunningham suggests that travel films were important precursors to Grierson's idea of documentary. See Cunningham, *British Writers*, p. 341: "One of documentary film's acknowledged ancestors was the travel film. The French word *documentaire* on which Grierson calqued *documentary* meant *travelogue*."

in 1914.¹⁸

Grierson became Assistant Films Officer for the Empire Marketing Board (EMB) in the late 1920s and subsequently took on his role as Films Officer for the General Post Office (GPO) Film Unit in 1933. In this capacity, Grierson oversaw the activities of the GPO film unit and exerted a major influence over British documentary film production in the 1930s. His programme for the GPO Film Unit, and for British documentary more broadly, “encouraged [...] a repression of the 1920s avant-garde in the rise of documentary” by shifting the focus from formal experiments to the social and political message that could be conveyed through film.¹⁹ There is evidence to suggest that Grierson started his career with a certain openness towards avant-garde film and a willingness to experiment, as shown by his own early documentary *Drifters* (1929). Marcus notes that *Drifters* was influenced by both Flaherty’s romantic travelogues and Sergei Eisenstein’s avant-garde work *Battleship Potemkin* (1925).²⁰ Yet, as the 1930s progressed, Grierson became more dismissive of formal experiments on screen and, as Marcus writes, “alienated from concepts of ‘film art’”.²¹

In a report on the EMB Film Unit, Grierson assessed the economic situation in which he was moving: “there is money for films which will make box-office profits, and there is money for films which will create propaganda results. These only. They are the strict limits within which cinema has had to develop and will continue to develop.”²² In recognition of financial and political limitations for the documentary film, Grierson devised a programme

¹⁸ Barsam, *Non-Fiction Film*, p. 81. See also John Izod and Richard Kilborn, “The documentary”, in *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, ed. by John Hill and Pamela Gibson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 426-433. On Edward Sheriff Curtis, see Winston, *Claiming the Real*, pp. 8-9, 11-14 and Barnouw, *Documentary*, p. 99.

¹⁹ Nichols, “Documentary Film and the Modernist Avant-garde”, p. 582.

²⁰ Marcus, “The creative treatment of actuality”, p. 191.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

²² John Grierson, “The E.M.B. Film Unit”, in *Grierson on Documentary*, ed. by Forsyth Hardy (London: Collins, 1946), pp. 97-101 (pp. 97-98).

of action that framed documentary primarily as a form of socio-political cinema which had come as the result of a “natural evolution” from film’s indexical qualities of “documenting” to the emergence of fully fleshed out “documentary”.²³ In an interview with Elizabeth Sussex, Grierson further affirmed this narrative of documentary film’s emergence, stating that he thought that the British documentary film was influenced mainly by newsreels, travelogues, expedition films, scientific uses of the camera, and by Robert Flaherty’s early work. Grierson, possibly deliberately, excluded Dziga Vertov from his list of influences due to Vertov’s inclination to use more formally experimental filmmaking strategies.²⁴

The function of the GPO Film Unit was primarily that of a government-sponsored public relations unit, producing a range of documentary shorts and public information films on the living, working, and housing conditions of the British people in different regions of the nation. The aim was to promote British manufacturing, industry, communications systems, and British government and industry-sponsored initiatives:

Grierson’s filmmakers were motivated by a desire to represent the realities of everyday social life (and in this respect shared a good deal with Mass Observation) as well as to harness film’s potential to enhance democratic citizenship.²⁵

Higson rightly notes that the British Documentary Movement combined “social documentation as a cultural practice” with the “development of official public relations activity, corporate advertising, and state propaganda policy in Britain”.²⁶ In terms of style, Grierson ultimately affirmed his belief in realism and verisimilitude in order to achieve the movement’s aims. He commented that the creation of documentary film relied more firmly on “social”, rather than “aesthetic” principles:

²³ Nichols, “Documentary Film and the Modernist Avant-garde”, pp. 584-587.

²⁴ Sussex, *The Rise and Fall of British Documentary*, p. 2.

²⁵ James G. Mansell, *The Age of Noise in Britain: Hearing Modernity* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2017), p. 136.

²⁶ Andrew Higson, *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 181-182.

We were, I confess, sociologists, a little worried about the way the world was going. [...] The world had become very complex – and civic comprehension difficult. We were conscious of the abstraction of life under the new metropolitan skies. We saw that poverty of community life went hand in hand with the lack of civic comprehension. And of one thing we were pretty sure – that the old stiff-backed educational system was not doing very much to help towards comprehension. Nor, particularly, was the new myth-making machinery of the star-struck cinema. But if we were jealous of this myth-making influence and made film the instrument of our door-step drama, it was partly by accident. We were interested in *all* instruments which would crystallize sentiments in a muddled world and create a will toward civic participation. As it happened, the film had its special advantages. It could command millions; it had the power of simple image; and a few pioneers – though not allied to our specific social purposes – had shown us the descriptive way.²⁷

Grierson anchors documentary in realism, its perceived indexical relationship to reality, and its reliance on socio-political principles. In his 1942 essay on “The Documentary Idea”, Grierson would go as far as to label documentary an “anti-aesthetic movement”.²⁸ From Grierson’s point of view, there was little room for formal experiment and self-referential style. In *Documentary News Letter*, he and his editorial board asserted “if one aims at bringing reality to the screen, any reminder of the technical process by which this is achieved can only destroy that reality for the audience”.²⁹ Higson suggests that the British documentary’s focus on social realism partly stemmed from the broader desire to create a specifically British form of national cinema that would be separate from the Hollywood-style escapism of mass-entertainment.³⁰ In this view, there is little room for formal experiment, because the “moral realism” and “authentic iconography” of the documentary must prevail to achieve its socio-political aims.³¹

²⁷ John Grierson, “The Story of the Documentary Film”, *The Fortnightly Review*, August 1939, pp. 121-130 (p. 122).

²⁸ John Grierson, “The Documentary Idea: 1942”, in *Grierson on Documentary*, ed. by Forsyth Hardy (London: Collins, 1946), pp. 178-189 (p. 179).

²⁹ “New Documentary Films”, *Documentary News Letter*, March 1941, p. 47. This insistence on a form of realism is actually very close to the classical Hollywood film and its deliberate concealment of its representational strategies and technological processes. On conventions of classical film, see David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

³⁰ Higson, *Waving the Flag*, pp. 188-192.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

In parallel to the origin myth surrounding the British Documentary Movement, standard narratives of the 1930s novel have presented social realism and modernism as two antagonistic styles. Taking their cue from contemporary accounts of the literary landscape, for instance George Orwell's "Inside the Whale" (1940) and Stephen Spender's *The New Realism* (1939), a number of studies on the late modernist period, especially on the 1930s, have subsequently assumed that politically or socially "committed" literature is antagonistic to modernism and formal experiment, because political or social engagement and activism can only occur through a commitment to social realism. Spender, for instance, writes that "artists today turn outwards towards reality [...] because the phase of experimenting in form has proved sterile".³² He categorises his generation's writing as a necessary reaction against their modernist literary predecessors. This idea was taken up in the 1970s by Hynes's study of *The Auden Generation* and Bernard Bergonzi's *Reading the Thirties*. A decade later, it was reiterated by Cunningham in *British Writers of the Thirties*. Here, Cunningham asserts that social realism "helped to slow down literary experiment and to smash up modernism [...], pushing the novel back beyond Henry James into the arms of nineteenth-century bourgeois naturalism".³³ While Cunningham's survey of the period has been revised by a number of critics, there is a persistent subscription to Cunningham's point: Rosemary Colt, for instance, summarises a central feature of 1930s literary production as the

generally realistic quality of 'traditionalist' fiction [which] is in direct contradiction to the stunning experimentation of the Modernists. [...] politically committed novelists were also

³² Stephen Spender, *The New Realism: A Discussion* (London: Hogarth Press, 1939), p. 8. George Orwell's "Inside the Whale", as I have outlined in the first chapter of this thesis, also discusses social realism as fundamentally antagonistic to modernism. However, Orwell finds both types of writing equally unsuitable for addressing the concerns of the period. See George Orwell, "Inside the Whale", in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters, Volume 1: An Age Like This, 1920-1940*, ed. by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (Jaffrey, NH: Nonpareil, 2000), pp. 493-527.

³³ Cunningham, *British Writers*, p. 299.

working in a realist mode, but this was less obvious because of the radical nature of their ideas – Orwell is the best example of this.³⁴

Such a diagnosis of the 1930s literary landscape as being built upon a dichotomy between social realism and modernism is not exclusive to Britain. Writing on the novel in an American context, Janet Casey states that “the social realist movement, black and white, marks in many ways the pinnacle of the alignment of realism and socio-political impulses in the modern American novel”.³⁵ The social realist novel is framed as a departure from formal experimentation and avant-garde writing that is considered to be politically void or deeply compromised. Vice versa, there is a critical assumption that social and political engagement can only occur through a commitment to social realism. This view was further influenced and perpetuated by the Soviet critique of modernism as exemplified by the Soviet Writers Congress in 1934. Attacks on modernism as an outmoded, outdated, and politically void art form took on an international dimension and were not limited to a British context.³⁶

Keith Williams and Steven Matthews introduce their volume on *Rewriting the*

³⁴ Rosemary M. Colt, “Introduction”, in *Writers of the Old School: British Novelists of the 1930s*, ed. by Rosemary M. Colt and Janice Rossen (London: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 1-15 (pp. 3-4). The relationship between modernism and realism is discussed further in Astradur Eysteinnsson, *The Concept of Modernism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 179-242 and Simon Joyce, *Modernism and Naturalism in British and Irish Fiction, 1880-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 1-27.

³⁵ Janet G. Casey, “American Literary Realism: Popularity and Politics in a Modernist Frame”, in *A History of the Modernist Novel*, ed. by Gregory Castle (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 170-189 (p. 181).

³⁶ A good overview of these debates, especially on the Soviet critique of modernism and James Joyce, can be found in Emily Tall, “Eisenstein on Joyce: Sergei Eisenstein's Lecture on James Joyce at the State Institute of Cinematography, November 1, 1934”, *James Joyce Quarterly*, 24.2 (Winter 1987), 133-142. See also John Connor, “Anglo-Soviet Literary Relations in the Long 1930s”, in *A History of 1930s British Literature*, ed. by Benjamin Kohlmann and Matthew Taunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 317-330. Both Connor and Tall outline Karl Radek's critique of modernist writing à la Proust and Joyce as the “literature of a dying capitalism”. See Connor, “Anglo-Soviet Literary Relations”, p. 322. See also Andrzej Gasiorek, *A History of Modernist Literature* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), pp. 432-553 for a discussion of the criticism levelled against modernism in the 1930s. For a brief examination of the consequences of 1930s anti-modernism in a British context, see also Benjamin Kohlmann's coda in *Committed Styles: Modernism, Politics, and Left-wing Literature in the 1930s*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 197-200.

Thirties by stating the urgent need to revise this particular perception of the period as a “homogenous anti-modernist decade”.³⁷ Instead, they suggest that

writers such as Auden, Orwell, and Holtby were on the one hand anxious to adapt pragmatically the legacy and, indeed, currency of modernism, and on the other to resist its perceived obscurantism and indifference to social and economic facts. They adopted a whole variety of self-consciously ad hoc theoretical formulations and provisional solutions in their practice, which cannot simply be subsumed by any single aesthetic or political category because they stemmed from such a plethora of hybridized elements.³⁸

The political and intellectual climate of the 1930s is commonly taken to be uniquely responsible for the style of a diverse group of novelists firmly associated with the period’s alleged anxious treatment of modernism. For the case of Orwell, for instance, Michael Levenson claims that

George Orwell’s four novels of the 1930s could only have been written in that decade. As he left them behind, he often wondered how they could have been written at all. Orwell composed the books – *Burmese Days* (1934), *A Clergyman’s Daughter* (1935), *Keep the Aspidochelone Flying* (1936) and *Coming Up for Air* (1939) – with an intense consciousness that he was writing after the heady days of modernism and beneath its shadow. At the same time he never allowed himself to forget the degraded social reality that surrounded his literary work, a recognition of imminent catastrophe. This double sense – literary belatedness, social emergency – pervades the novels.³⁹

Levenson’s assessment of Orwell as “writing after the heady days of modernism and beneath its shadow” is more sympathetic than Cunningham’s dismissal of kinship between social realism and modernism. It resonates with recent critical reappraisals of both late modernism and of the literature of the 1930s which have developed a more complex picture of engagement and transformative exchange, foregrounding a “transformation and persistence of modernism and the function of modernist aesthetics”.⁴⁰ Building on these

³⁷ Keith Williams and Steven Matthews, “Introduction”, in *Rewriting the Thirties: Modernism and After*, ed. by Keith Williams and Steven Matthews (London: Longman, 1997), pp. 1-4 (p. 1).

³⁸ Williams and Matthews, “Introduction”, p. 2.

³⁹ Michael Levenson, “The Fictional Realist: Novels of the 1930s”, in *The Cambridge Companion to George Orwell*, ed. by John Rodden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 59-75 (p. 59).

⁴⁰ See Thomas S. Davis, “Late Modernism: British Literature at Mid-Century”, *Literature Compass*, 9.4 (2012), 326-337 (p. 328). A number of works in the last three decades have engaged in a process of revising received views of 1930s literature. See, for instance, Janet Montefiore, *Men and Women Writers of the 1930s: The Dangerous Flood of History* (London: Routledge, 1996); *High and Low*

critical efforts to reassess 1930s writing, I suggest here that some works in the late modernist period create for themselves a “hybrid idiom”, a weaving together of modernist and social realist elements, which is used to portray and record everyday life. Sound plays a central role in generating such hybrid forms of both literary and cinematic representation and communication: while the documentary film is exploring the limits and possibilities of sound, the novel in the late modernist period centres its efforts on textual recordings of local and regional lives and livelihoods, work, and speech.

Marcus suggests that the emergence of “new modes of realism” fostered by 1930s writers bore a close relationship to the modes of the documentary film.⁴¹ She further argues that “the documentary idea intersected different media [...] [and] created new terms for an interdisciplinary synthesis”.⁴² It is here that I explore an element of such “interdisciplinary synthesis”: the creation of a hybrid idiom via sound. As the novel of the 1930s, like its contemporary the documentary film, participated in the wider auto-ethnographic impulse of its day. It did so through a curious mixture of formal experiment and socio-political purpose. Works such as Lewis Grassic Gibbon’s *Sunset Song* (1932), Walter Greenwood’s *Love on the Dole* (1933), and George Orwell’s *A Clergyman’s Daughter* (1935) and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936) explore localised and class-specific issues of poverty, homelessness, the everyday life of the working classes, and manual labour in Greater

Moderns: Literature and Culture, 1889-1939, ed. by Maria DiBattista and Lucy McDiarmid (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Andy Croft, *Red Letter Days: British Fiction in the 1930s* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990); Benjamin Kohlmann, *Committed Styles: Modernism, Politics, and Left-wing Literature in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); *Intermodernism: Literary Culture in Mid-Twentieth Century Britain*, ed. by Kristin Bluemel (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009); *Rewriting the Thirties: Modernism and After*, ed. by Keith Williams and Steven Matthews (London: Longman, 1997). See also the special issue of *Critical Quarterly* on the literature of the “long 1930s”: *Critical Quarterly*, edited by Leo Mellor and Glyn Salton-Cox, 57.3 (2015) and the recent *A History of 1930s British Literature*, ed. by Benjamin Kohlmann and Matthew Taunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019). In addition, a new *Cambridge Companion to British Literature of the 1930s*, ed. by James Smith, is forthcoming with Cambridge University Press.

⁴¹ Marcus, “The creative treatment of actuality”, p. 190. Marcus writes further that “the words of the documentary writer are in dialogue with the images of the documentary film-maker” (p. 202).

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 205.

Manchester, the North East of Scotland, London, and Kent. With this context in mind, in what follows I read for sound in both 1930s documentary film and these novels to disclose the two media's shared concern with sound as a core element of their auto-ethnographic efforts. I argue that the sound strategies of documentary film and the novel's translation of everyday soundscapes generate a "hybrid idiom", a synthesis between modernist experiment and social realism.

Documentary Sound

In 1934, the year of Jessie Matthews' resounding success with the musical revue film *Evergreen*, the GPO acquired its first sound equipment. As we have seen from the introductory chapter on Hitchcock's *Blackmail*, public and industry responses to the introduction of synchronised sound technology to British commercial cinema were largely positive, while initial responses from intellectuals, critics, and writers like Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene were more ambivalent. One of the main reasons for this divided reception was the way in which the introduction of sound newly raised fundamental questions on the nature of film style and methods of cinematic representation. On the one hand, the introduction of sound was felt to enhance verisimilitude and realism on screen, while, on the other hand, the technology sparked a new wave of experimentation to explore the creative possibilities and limitations of sound in the cinema. When the GPO film unit received its first sound equipment, such questions and concerns vis-à-vis sound and filmic representation, style, and storytelling migrated and expanded from the commercial film industry to the British Documentary Movement and its socio-political agenda. The GPO film staff "were motivated by a desire to represent the realities of everyday social life [...] as well as to harness film's potential to enhance democratic citizenship".⁴³ The question of how to use sound within the British Documentary Movement sparked multiple and contradictory

⁴³ Mansell, *The Age of Noise in Britain*, p. 136.

responses and pinpoints some of the creative divisions within the GPO.⁴⁴

In 1934, the Brazilian-born filmmaker Alberto Cavalcanti was invited by John Grierson to join the GPO Film Unit. Cavalcanti had been influenced by surrealism and early Soviet theories on the role of sound in film. These approaches, as exemplified by Eisenstein's "Statement on Sound" discussed in the first chapter, largely favoured an experimental use of sound and saw its primary function in creating a counterpoint to the image (rather than employing sound as a feature that would merely enhance the illusion of realism on screen). With Cavalcanti's arrival at the GPO, some significant experimentation with sound began in the British Documentary Movement. Cavalcanti himself stated his belief that,

out of the conflict between the objectiveness of the picture and the subjectiveness of the commentary comes a third thing, a dramatic feeling which is different in essentials from, and I think deeper in effect than, either of the two elements which are combined to create it.⁴⁵

Cavalcanti favoured music and sound effects over prolonged sequences of recorded dialogue, arguing that film benefitted from a more creative use of sound effects. This idea was applied, for instance, in Cavalcanti's film *Pett and Pott: A Fairy Story of the Suburbs* (1934).⁴⁶ In a similar vein, the director Edgar Anstey asserted that some members of the GPO team "looked with contempt on dialogue because of the kind of thing they had in Hollywood films. [...] Our first approach to sound was to use it in a kind of abstract way [...] to try to take sounds and orchestrate them".⁴⁷ Meanwhile, Ken Cameron, the chief sound engineer of the GPO Film Unit, had a more pragmatic and functional view of sound:

Just as the perfect colour-film, the colour should not be noticed, so in the perfect sound film, the actual sound should be so perfectly wedded with the picture that the illusion of reality is

⁴⁴ Sussex also suggests that "there was a division of opinion in the documentary movement at a very early stage". See Sussex, *The Rise and Fall of British Documentary*, p. xi.

⁴⁵ Alberto Cavalcanti, "Sound in Films", in *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, ed. by Elisabeth Weis and John Belton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 98-111 (p. 102).

⁴⁶ *Pett and Pott: A Fairy Story of the Suburbs*, dir. by Alberto Cavalcanti, produced by John Grierson (GPO, 1934).

⁴⁷ Sussex, *The Rise and Fall of British Documentary*, p. 46.

complete, and the two together combine to form a perfect impression in the minds of the audience.⁴⁸

Cameron, who worked on creating soundtracks and sound effects for the British documentarists, gives overall a more practical account of the significance of sound and sound effects. Prioritising sound's function as a complement to the visuals in order to create the perfect "illusion of reality", Cameron maintains that sound and picture need to be "wedded perfectly"; audiences should not actively notice the soundtrack. From a practical and ideological point of view, this thinking is more in line with standard practices in commercial filmmaking and sound editing as they were developing in the Hollywood film of the classical era. Doane, for instance, explores how sound in classical film was required to be self-effacing.⁴⁹ While Cameron's practical perspective questions some of the documentary filmmakers' theoretical assumptions about the more creative and experimental treatment of sound, directors like Paul Rotha, Cavalcanti, and Humphrey Jennings made a point of using sound experimentally and playfully in their filmic work. Such ideas often directly clashed with Grierson's vision.⁵⁰

In his article "The GPO gets Sound", Grierson explained how acquiring their own recording equipment was a cost-effective and desirable step for the GPO in 1934:

It costs five pounds, I believe, to have a professional commentator, but we have never thought of spending so much on so little. We do the job ourselves if we want a commentary, and save both the five pounds and the quite unendurable detachment of the professional accent. Better still, if we are showing workmen at work, we get the workmen on the job to do their own commentary, with idiom and accent complete. It makes for intimacy and authenticity, and nothing we could do would be half so good.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Ken Cameron, *Sound in the Documentary Film* (London: Pitman & Sons, 1947), p. 1.

⁴⁹ Mary Ann Doane, "Ideology and the Practice of Sound Editing and Mixing", in *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*. ed. by Elisabeth Weis and John Belton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 54-62.

⁵⁰ The differences in approaches towards sound between Cavalcanti, Jennings, Rotha, and Grierson are discussed by James Mansell in "Rhythm, Modernity and the Politics of Sound", in *The Projection of Britain: A History of the GPO Film Unit*, ed. by Scott Anthony and James G. Mansell (London: BFI, 2011), pp. 161-167.

⁵¹ John Grierson, "The GPO gets Sound", *Cinema Quarterly*, 2.4 (Summer 1934), 215-221 (p. 216).

Grierson's comments on the value of having workers doing their own commentary reflects a broader concern with the quest for recording "authentic" voices of the people. BBC English was widely understood to be the voice of the political and intellectual elite and the broader interest in auto-ethnography extended to an emerging drive to record local dialects and accents.⁵² The short information film *Housing Problems* (1935), produced and directed by Arthur Elton and Edgar Anstey for the British Commercial Gas Association (BCGA), explores the living and housing conditions of the working classes in Stepney in order to promote new social housing schemes and slum clearances.⁵³ The documentary begins with footage of dilapidated housing and an omniscient voiceover commentary. A second commentator then introduces interviews with residents: "and now for the people who have to live in the slums. Here is Mr Norwood". The film then proceeds to show medium close-ups and upper body shots of different residents. All of the residents report their living and housing conditions while facing the camera (Fig. 8 and 9). Each resident is introduced by the voiceover commentary before they are given an opportunity to speak directly to the camera.



Figure 8: Mr Norwood in *Housing Problems*. Screenshot by the author.

⁵² See Cunningham, *British Writers*, pp. 317-318.

⁵³ *Housing Problems*, dir. by Arthur Elton and Edgar Anstey, produced for the British Commercial Gas Association (1935).



Figure 9: Mrs Hill in *Housing Problems*. Screenshot by the author.

Housing Problems allows working class men and women to give statements on their living conditions in their own voices. This was, to an extent, an innovative strategy in documentary filmmaking in 1935 and presents an attempt to put emphasis on documentary's subjects not just as objects of the audience's gaze, but as respondents who directly speak of their own experiences and in their individual voices and accents. Underscoring an impression of verisimilitude, the different accents and voices translate a version of sociolinguistic reality onto the screen.⁵⁴

In addition to recording the residents' statements in *Housing Problems* (1935), the voiceover commentary of this documentary film is spoken by two different commentators who take turns in providing contextual information. Not only does this indicate an attempt

⁵⁴ The introduction and consolidation of sound film brought questions of class and region as mediated and expressed through speech, idiom, and accent to the forefront of concerns for both the commercial film industry as well as for the documentary movement. Jo Fox summarised this development, writing that "the 'talkie' also presented new challenges in terms of representing social issues and identities. In the cinema, accent and language came to signify social status, just as much as sets, milieus, and costumes did. Class was no longer codified solely by visual clues, for authentic speech placed characters 'both geographically and socially.' Accent, syntax, and 'restricted [and elaborate] [sic] speech codes' created collective recognition of a character's status within a particular film and became an important tool for the filmmaker in the fashioning of a class- or region-specific scenario". See Jo Fox, "Millions Like Us? Accented Language and the 'Ordinary' in British Films of the Second World War", *Journal of British Studies*, 45.4 (2006), 819-845 (p. 822).

to shift filmic narration from one authorial voice to an account given by several voices, it also underscores a change in emphasis away from one omniscient narrator to an exploration of the issues at stake through multiple voices and through interaction between voices. Although the accounts were most likely rehearsed, the documentary film's framing insists that its speakers are not professional actors, but ordinary working men and women. During the making of the film, they were encouraged to speak honestly and freely in front of the camera by Ruby Grierson, John Grierson's sister.⁵⁵ The accounts given of the housing situation in Stepney tell of issues like poor plasterwork, crooked staircases, vermin in the home, and the lack of sanitary facilities. A similar approach of working class people speaking for themselves on camera is also taken by the 1935 film *Enough to Eat?* in which women are interviewed about whether they are able to feed their families appropriately on their low weekly incomes. The film explicitly links malnutrition to class and weekly income and makes a case for the necessity of council and government support schemes to provide a healthy and balanced diet for working class families and especially children. The documentary film historian Erik Barnouw describes this method as "direct testimony".⁵⁶ Nonetheless, documentaries like *Housing Problems* still rely on omniscient voiceover commentary to frame and explain the accounts given by the interviewees.

The Documentary Film Movement also experimented with a less straightforward use of voiceover commentary in films such as *Coal Face* (1935) and *Night Mail* (1936).⁵⁷ Alberto Cavalcanti's documentary *Coal Face*, a film about the British coal-mining industry and the working conditions in the pits, uses voiceover commentary, experimental piano and drum music by Benjamin Britten, a sound montage of male and female voices, and a short poem by W. H. Auden. This is just one example for how the Documentary Movement

⁵⁵ Sussex, *The Rise and Fall of British Documentary*, pp. 62-64.

⁵⁶ Barnouw, *Documentary*, p. 95.

⁵⁷ *Coal Face*, dir. by Alberto Cavalcanti (GPO Film Unit, 1935) and *Night Mail*, dir. by Basil Wright and Harry Watt (GPO Film Unit, 1936).

participated creatively in a larger cultural movement concerned with “opening the period’s ears to how people actually spoke in the lower social depths”.⁵⁸ In *Coal Face*, a miner’s choir accompanies footage of the beginning of the miners’ shift. The men’s singing, taken together with the voiceover commentary and footage of the pit, evokes the dark and grim working conditions. As we will see in the following discussion of sound in Orwell and Grassic Gibbon, the choir employed by Cavalcanti produces a sense of community that is mirrored by instances of singing and an integration of folk song in the 1930s novel. The film’s reliance on music and poetry to suggest impressions of community and belonging is strengthened further in the second half of the documentary, when a women’s choir sings as the men finish their working day. Logan proposes that the film

undermines the ideological purpose of documentary by detracting from desired naturalism [...]. It celebrates the miners as heroic individuals and as the class which sustains the industrial life of the country. This is achieved through the innovative technique of combining commentary with poetry.⁵⁹

One of the most commercially successful, but also one of the most experimental, documentaries was the GPO’s *Night Mail*, directed by Harry Watt. *Night Mail* is a short film about the Travelling Post Office, a postal train from London to Glasgow which collected and distributed letters and parcels as an overnight service during the 1930s. The film stars actual workers of the Post Office and records the nightly activities on the train. In the second half of *Night Mail*, the commentary abandons authoritative voiceover narration with the final three minutes of the film consisting of a verse commentary written by Auden and experimental music composed by Britten. The commentary turns into a poetry recital with changes in rhythm and tone that match Britten’s music, setting the whole sequence apart from the earlier commentary:

⁵⁸ Cunningham, *British Writers*, p. 316. Cunningham discusses this phenomenon in relation to language in the 1930s novel.

⁵⁹ Philip C. Logan, *Humphrey Jennings and British Documentary Film: A Re-assessment* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), p. 57. For the short poem used in *Coal Face*, see W. H. Auden, “O Lurcher Loving Collier”, in *The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings 1927-1939*, ed. by Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), p. 290. The poem was written in June 1935.

This is the Night Mail crossing the border, / bringing the cheque and the postal order, / Letters for the rich, letters for the poor, / the shop at the corner and the girl next door. / Pulling up Beattock, a steady climb: / the gradient's against her, but she's on time. / Past cotton-grass and moorland boulder, / shovelling white steam over her shoulder, / snorting noisily as she passes / silent miles of wind-bent grasses.⁶⁰

In his diary, Britten described the complicated process of recording music and verse for the film:

The music I wrote really comes off well- &, for what is wanted, creates quite a lot of sensation! The whole trouble, & what takes so much time is that over the music has to be spoken a verse – kind of patter – written by Auden – in strict rhythm with the music. To represent the train noises. There is too much to be spoken in a single breath by the one voice (it is essential to keep to the same voice and to have no breaks) so we have to record separately – me, having to conduct both from an improvised visual metronome – flashes on the screen – a very difficult job! [Stuart] Legg speaks the stuff splendidly tho'.⁶¹

Britten's diary reveals how verse and music are intended to keep to the rhythm of the moving train, representing the "train noises" through musical accompaniment and poetry. This shows an intricate engagement of sound with the moving image on screen. The commentary goes beyond omniscient explanation: its function is to mimic acoustically the relentless moving forward of the train and to provide an aural impression of the working environment for the staff on the train. The sounds of the spoken verse evoke an aural experience of the running train, creating an acoustic and linguistic marker for the visual forward-movement. The experimental use of Auden's verse commentary affirms both poetry as well as film as acoustic media, reminding audiences that poetry is intended to be heard as much as read. The fusion of prose narration and poetry lends the commentary a different sonic dimension that bridges realist conventions with formal experimentation.

The use of sound effects in *Night Mail* equally combines innovative experiment with the attempt to create a faithful and accurate rendition of the train's soundscape: sound close-ups and sound effects are used throughout the film to create the illusion of being on a

⁶⁰ W. H. Auden, "Night Mail", in *The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings 1927-1939*, ed. by Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), pp. 290-292. Auden wrote the poem in July 1935. It is grouped with his "Fragments for Film".

⁶¹ Benjamin Britten, Diary Entry for "Wednesday 15 January 1936", in *Journeying Boy: The Diaries of the Young Benjamin Britten 1928-1938*, ed. by John Evans (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), pp. 326-327.

running train. When, for instance, one of the heavy bags filled with letters and parcels intended for a station needs to be dropped off the running train, one of the workers asks when exactly to perform the task. A more experienced worker advises “you need to wait two bridges and forty-five beats” before the intended station will be reached. While the camera is focused on the inside of the train with the worker counting the appropriate number of bridges and beats, the soundtrack here provides the environment off-screen that is referred to. First, the sound of the train driving through two tunnels (the bridges) is heard. This is achieved by a change in reverberation of the train running over its tracks for a second or two. Then the soundtrack audibly focusses on the train running over its tracks by means of sound close-ups. The characteristic sound of a train crossing the joints of a track is counted as a “beat” by the worker. Harry Watt remembers how the recording team was unable to get this particular sound close-up from the recording of a real train: “our microphones were not selective enough to get the ‘clickity-clack’ – the general overall roar of the train drowned it out”.⁶² Instead, the recording team used a model to achieve the desired effect:

Off we went to Bassett-Lowke, the model train makers, and got a class-six engine, made to perfect scale. The model rails were also to scale. We pushed our tiny train by hand backwards and forwards on its section of line until we were in synchronism with the picture and then recorded it. It worked a treat. All we had to do was to marry this sound to the general noise of the train at speed, and we had got what we wanted.⁶³

The result enables the viewer to actively listen to the train running over its tracks and to understand how the workers use this sound feature as an indication of direction and timing to drop off their deliveries at the right moment. The sound effects in *Night Mail* not only create an authentic soundscape for the setting, but they also reference environments off-screen that cannot be seen by the audience. The film’s soundtrack combines and connects formal experiment with the more realist principles of documentary filmmaking outlined by Grierson. The sound effects fulfil a double function by enforcing impressions of both the on-

⁶² Harry Watt, *Don’t Look at the Camera* (London: Elek, 1974), p. 90.

⁶³ Watt, *Don’t Look*, p. 91.

screen working environment of the postal train workers and by indicating that which cannot be seen.

The soundtracks for *Nightmail*, *Housing Problems*, and *Coalface* exemplify the Documentary Movement's complex engagement with the representational possibilities and limitations of sound. These films combine music, sound effects, and a polyphonic approach to voiceover commentary and notably integrate poetry and choir performances to convey everyday working and living conditions. The work of sound in these films constructs a hybrid idiom of experimental and realist narrative styles to give expression to documentary's auto-ethnographic project. As the following discussion of Orwell, Greenwood, and Grassic Gibbon will show, there is a parallel interest in sound in the late modernist novel of the 1930s. Notably, these texts combine prose, poetry, drama, and musical notation to present characters' living and working conditions. There is also, as indicated above, a drive to integrate singing and folk songs into the texts to map a sense of local community and belonging. The texts are noticeably engaged in a "recording" of different accents and dialects and deploy multiple narrative voices that call into the question the authority of omniscient narration. The work of sound in these novels contributes to the genesis of a literary hybrid idiom that merges social realism and experimental narrative, suggesting that a faithful recording of everyday life in different parts of Britain requires a multiplicity of media forms and styles in the late modernist period.

Sunset Song

Lewis Grassic Gibbon's *Sunset Song* was first published in 1932 and reissued posthumously after his untimely death as the first part of the trilogy *A Scot's Quair* (1946).⁶⁴ The trilogy

⁶⁴ Lewis Grassic Gibbon was a pseudonym used by the Scottish writer James Leslie Mitchell, who also published a number of articles and novels under his actual name. This discussion uses Mitchell's pseudonym, because *Sunset Song* was published as the work of Lewis Grassic Gibbon.

follows the life of Chris Guthrie, a peasant girl from the Mearns (Kincardineshire) in the North East of Scotland during the first half of the twentieth century. *Sunset Song* traces the slow but steady decline of North East Scottish farming communities just before and during the First World War and is now one of Gibbon's most widely known works. It received renewed public attention due to a 2015 film version by Terence Davies and was subsequently voted Scotland's favourite book in 2016 in a poll for the BBC's *Love to Read* campaign. In what follows, I discuss *Sunset Song* as a key example for auto-ethnographic writing in the late modernist period, examining elements of its characteristic hybrid style through a reading for sound.

In literary criticism, *Sunset Song* is considered one of the most important works of the Scottish Renaissance, a movement that promoted the use of Scots language and firmly engaged with questions of Scottish national identity and history in literature and the visual arts. Artists and writers of the Scottish Renaissance drew on works of the Early Modern period as well as twentieth-century modernism.⁶⁵ In the wake of the New Modernist Studies, the movement has received critical attention in a wider effort to restore regional writing and "localized forms of modernism" to the twentieth-century canon.⁶⁶ Questions of genre

⁶⁵ Other writers most frequently associated with the Scottish Renaissance are Hugh MacDiarmid, Neill Gunn, Nan Shepherd, Naomi Mitchison, and Edwin and Willa Muir. See for instance: Scott Lyall, "That Ancient Self: Scottish Modernism's Counter-Renaissance", *European Journal of English Studies*, 18.1 (2014), 73-85; *Modernism and Nationalism: Literature and Society in Scotland, 1918-1939: Source Documents for the Scottish Renaissance*, ed. by Margery Palmer McCulloch (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2004); Margery Palmer McCulloch, *Scottish Modernism and Its Contexts 1918-1959* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009); Roderick Watson, "The Modern Scottish Literary Renaissance", in *The Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature*, ed. by Ian Brown and Alan Riach (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 75-87.

⁶⁶ On the wider effort to retrieve and restore regional writers to the canon of modernism and the literature of the 1930s, see David James, "Localizing Late Modernism: Interwar Regionalism and the Genesis of the 'Micro Novel'", *Journal of Modern Literature*, 32.4 (2009), 43-64; *Rural Modernity in Britain: A Critical Intervention*, ed. by Kristin Bluemel and Michael McCluskey (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018); *Regional Modernisms*, ed. by Neal Alexander and James Moran (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013); Dominic Head, *Modernity and the English Rural Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Steven Matthews, "English Regional Fiction and National Culture", in *The Reinvention of the British and Irish Novel, 1880-1940*, ed. by Patrick Parringer and Andrzej Gasiorek (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 506-21; Kristin Bluemel, "Beyond

and style are difficult but pertinent ones in any discussion of Grassic Gibbon's oeuvre. In recent criticism, he frequently appears as an important figure of both Scottish modernism and the Scottish literary Renaissance, while Cunningham classes him together with a group of social realist "proletarian writers" who rose to prominence in the 1930s.⁶⁷ In 1978, Gustav H. Klaus called *A Scot's Quair* the "outstanding Socialist prose work of the inter-war period".⁶⁸ More recently, Hanne Tange has described the trilogy as a compendium of social realist "Condition of Scotland" novels while Timothy C. Baker reads Grassic Gibbon as negotiating a "middle way" between realism and romance.⁶⁹ These different opinions derive from Gibbon's unusual narrative style and the themes addressed in his works.

Sunset Song notably develops its own unique language that intersperses Doric Scots, a dialect spoken in the North East of Scotland, and English. While previous novels set in Scotland or featuring Scottish characters traditionally tend to use Scots for direct speech and English as standard narrative voice (e.g. Walter Scott's *Waverley*), such a distinction also implies "assumptions (intended or not) about the authority of Standard English, with additionally implied class distinctions between the author and his characters".⁷⁰ Gibbon, as outlined by Ian Carter, does not follow this pattern and develops his own linguistic register for the novel which synthesises English and Doric Scots in order to abolish such potential

Englishness: The Regional and Rural Novel in the 1930s", in *A History of 1930s British Literature*, ed. by Benjamin Kohlmann and Matthew Taunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 17-30.

⁶⁷ Cunningham, *British Writers*, p. 307.

⁶⁸ Gustav H. Klaus, "Socialist Fictions in the 1930s: Some Preliminary Observations", in *The 1930s: A Challenge to Orthodoxy*, ed. by John Lucas (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1978), pp. 30-34 (p. 32).

⁶⁹ Hanne Tange, "Grassic Gibbon's Art of Community: *A Scots Quair* and the Condition of Scotland", *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 33.1 (2004), 247-262 (p. 262); Timothy C. Baker, "The Romantic and the Real: James Leslie Mitchell and the Search for a Middle Way", *Journal of Modern Literature*, 36.4 (2013), 44-61.

⁷⁰ Roderick Watson, "Alien Voices from the Street: Demotic Modernism in Modern Scots Writing", *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 25 (1995), 141-155 (p. 147).

sociolinguistic class distinctions.⁷¹ While many of the words in the novel are certainly standard English, the structure of sentences becomes inflected with the rhythm and word order of spoken Scots:

So there was such speak and stir as Kinraddie hadn't known for long, sugar was awful up in price and Chris got as much as she could from the grocer and stored it away in the barn. Then Ewan heard funny things about the sermon that the Reverend Gibbon had preached the Sunday before, and though he couldn't bear with a kirk he broke his habit and put on his best suit and went down to the service next Sabbath. There was a fell crowd there.⁷²

So they were douce and safe and blithe in Blawearie though Kinraddie was unco with Chae Strachan gone. Kirsty came up on a visit and cried when she sat in the kitchen beside the crib, Chris made her tea but she wouldn't take comfort. She said she knew well enough Chae'd never come back, he was in such a rage with the Germans he'd just run forward in his bit of the front and kill and kill till he'd fair lost himself.⁷³

Malcolm describes Gibbon's style as a "lightly Scoticised English" which prioritises readability over an "obscurantist approach that MacDiarmid adopted towards Scots in his early poetry".⁷⁴ Gibbon's endeavour to textually represent regional dialect is certainly not a new strategy of the 1930s novel. Writers like Emily Brontë (*Wuthering Heights*, 1847), Elizabeth Gaskell (*Mary Barton*, 1848; *North and South*, 1855), and Charles Dickens (*Great Expectations*, 1861) textually represent a speaker's accent and local dialect in the Victorian novel. However, in these texts the mediation of dialect and accent in spoken dialogue tends to be a device for making a wider point about class and socio-economic differences between speakers. This is where Grassic Gibbon's text arguably differs: his text emphasises community rather than social difference. The narration blends and intertwines Scots with English to reinvent the novel's capacity for mediating dialect and voice and for

⁷¹ Ian Carter, "Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *A Scot's Quair*, and the Peasantry", *History Workshop Journal*, 6 (1978), 169-185 (p. 174).

⁷² Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *A Scot's Quair* (London: Hutchinson, 1982), p. 148.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

⁷⁴ William R. Malcolm, *A Blasphemer & Reformer. A Study of James Leslie Mitchell/Lewis Grassic Gibbon* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1984), p. 127.

deconstructing sociolinguistic differences between the narrator and the characters.⁷⁵ This narrative style has been praised by Raymond Williams and Gibbon's biographer Ian Munro, with Williams asserting that *Sunset Song* "speaks for many who never got to speak for themselves in recorded ways" and Munro arguing that the novel records "the voice of the Scottish earth".⁷⁶

Omitting quotation marks for direct speech and italicising spoken interaction instead, the text minimises the typographical markers that separate the narrator's voice from those of the characters, thus further indicating the sociolinguistic proximity, rather than difference, between the narrator and the characters:

So when the minister came on him and cried out right heartily *Well, you'll be my neighbour Guthrie, man?* father cocked his red beard at the minister and glinted at him like an icicle and said *Ay, MISTER Gibbon, I'll be that.* So the minister held out his hand and changed his tune right quick and said quiet-like *You've a fine-kept farm here, Mr. Guthrie, trig and trim, though I hear you've sat down a bare six months.* And he smiled, a big sappy smile.⁷⁷

In addition, Watson observes that this narrative strategy "mixes speech, thought, and narrative in an internalized and colloquial narrative style in which Chris Guthrie's personal voice and the voice of her community and the impersonal authorial voice are all contained".⁷⁸ The style produces an impression of shared sociolinguistic community that encompasses thought, speech, and narration, reflected through an amalgamation of voices.

The importance of the local community is emphasised by the frequent recurrence of

⁷⁵ On this point, see also Charles Ferrall, "From Wells to John Berger: The Social Democratic Era of the Novel", in *The Cambridge History of the English Novel*, ed. by Robert L. Caserio and Clement Hawes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 807-822 (p. 812): "The novels of Lewis Grassie Gibbon's trilogy *A Scots Quair* [...] are the first to dispense with the division between a narrator who uses standard English and characters who speak in dialect."

⁷⁶ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (St. Albans: Paladin, 1975), p. 324 and Ian S. Munro, *Leslie Mitchell: Lewis Grassie Gibbon* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1966), p. 91. For Williams, *Sunset Song* is particularly relevant as "a classic statement of what is seen as the dissolution of the peasantry". See Williams, *Country*, p. 321.

⁷⁷ Grassie Gibbon, *A Scot's Quair*, p. 54.

⁷⁸ Watson, "Alien Voices", p. 146.

idiomatic phrases such as “folk said that ...” or “they said”. The narrator reports and records what members of the community have said or thought about an event. The all-encompassing “folk” or “they” refer to the village community of Kinraddie. The narrator hardly ever comments on events explicitly, but reproduces the voice and opinion of the locals in lieu of direct comment. As we have seen in the discussion above, the 1930s documentary film moves away from a single omniscient voice to provide commentary and explanation, and increasingly deploys multiple voices for framing and explaining events. The use of multiple narrative voices and short screen interviews combines realist and experimental uses of sound and voice. They produce a more complex image of the local community and its living and working conditions. Grassie Gibbon’s style in *Sunset Song* suggests a parallel narrative interest in deploying multiple voices as a means of conveying a complex impression of a specific region and its people. This, as I have outlined in my introduction, does not mean that *Sunset Song* is like a film, but that both Gibbon’s novel and the documentary film show a parallel interest in exploring local forms of language, idiom, and speech patterns as a means of representing regional forms of identity. Crucially, the novel does not shy away from hybrid literary styles: it creates a soundscape that bridges “vivid realism” and an experimental, polyphonic narrative to draw attention to the decline of traditional Scottish farming communities in the early twentieth century.⁷⁹

In a move reminiscent of Waugh’s structural adaptation of revue for *Vile Bodies*, *Sunset Song* structurally translates and adapts musical terminology and notation to create narrative order. Beginning with a “Prelude” and ending with an “Epilude”, the middle section, which consists of four parts, is called “the Song”. This terminology, chosen by Grassie Gibbon, lends the text overtly musical connotations, but also indicates an attempt to mix media forms, a project which appears characteristic of late modernism. Throughout the novel, singing and popular folk songs feature in the everyday life of the community. There

⁷⁹ Malcolm, *Blasphemer & Reformer*, pp. 140-142.

is singing and dancing at special occasions such as Chris' and Ewan's wedding,⁸⁰ but also everyday song and music as Chris is singing to herself while performing her daily tasks at the farm.⁸¹ Popular Scottish folk songs and ballads, such as the seventeenth-century "The Bonnie House o' Airlie" and the eighteenth-century "Auld Robin Gray" are referenced in the text and performed by characters of the farming community. The end of the "Epilude" notably integrates musical notation into the text when a memorial for the community's fallen men in the Great War is erected:

And then, as folk stood dumbfounded, this was just sheer politics, plain what he meant, the Highland man McIvor tuned up his pipes and began to step slow round the stone circle by Blawearie Loch, slow and quiet, and folk watched him, the dark was near, it lifted your hair and was eerie and uncanny, the *Flowers of the Forest* as he played it:



It rose and rose and wept and cried, that crying for the men that fell in battle, and there was Kirsty Strachan weeping quietly and others with her [...] He fair could play, the piper, he tore at your heart marching there with the tune leaping up the moor and echoing across the loch, folk said that Chris Tavendale alone shed never a tear, she stood quiet, holding her boy by the hand, looking down on Blawearie's fields till the playing was over.⁸²

⁸⁰ Grassic Gibbon, *A Scot's Quair*, pp. 128-129.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 176-177.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 193-194.

The text's structural reliance on and thematic integration of music reinforces the novel's key concerns of conveying the decline of local traditions and of changing working and living conditions. "Social developments in the countryside also mean that the traditional songs delivered at Chris's wedding [...] are now giving way to the 'sugary surge of Auld Lang Syne.'"⁸³ Indeed, as Malcolm suggests, the novel's references to music and musical structures emphasise its textual recording of a gradually vanishing way of life. The "Flowers of the Forest" played at the memorial service quoted above is "appropriately old-fashioned [...] symbolis[ing] the passing of an era."⁸⁴ Folk songs and ballads convey an impression of the local community and its customs, but changes in the songs sung by the population also draw attention to the end of the traditional farming lifestyle in the Mearns. The novel's attentiveness to and integration of music run parallel to the central issue of sound within the Documentary Movement. Experiments with sound and music were conducted to effectively portray living and working conditions of the British people in different parts of the country. As we have seen in the previous discussion of *Nightmail* (e.g. the use of a model train for recording distinctive sound effects) and *Coalface* (the crossover between voiceover narration and choir performance), experiments with sound were a key element of moving beyond a simple "voice of God" narration and naturalistic sound effects. Innovative composition of the soundtrack yielded new ways in which everyday living and working conditions could be shown on screen.

Innovative strategies for representing and conveying everyday life via sound also become central to Grassic Gibbon's novel. Drawing on the work of Cairns Craig, Morag Shiach argues that Grassic Gibbon's style presents readers with a unique "collision between international modernism and vernacular revival".⁸⁵ The hybrid fusion between Doric Scots

⁸³ Malcolm, *Blasphemer & Reformer*, p. 142.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Morag Shiach, "'A Scot's Quair' and the Times of Labour", *Critical Survey*, 15.2 (2003), 39-48 (p. 41). See also Cairns Craig, "'Twentieth Century Scottish Literature: An Introduction", in *The History of*

and English shows Gibbon's interest in mediating the dialect of the Mearns, Gibbon's birthplace, and the life of its communities while attempting to make both language and lifestyle more accessible for an English-speaking reader scarcely familiar with Scots and its local dialects. *Sunset Song* shows how the novel might approach the representation of local communities and their idioms and speech patterns by synthesizing local dialect with the narrator's voice to create the impression of polyphony. By abandoning speech marks to create a more fluid textuality, and by structurally and thematically relying on music, the novel further dissolves sociolinguistic distinctions between the narrator and the characters. *Sunset Song* uniquely portrays the voice of the local community, not just through the characters' direct speech, but through the narrator's report, the integration of music, and the creation of syntax that is suffused with the rhythm and diction of spoken language. *Sunset Song* is "an experimental novel which capitalises upon established modes and conventions, but which finally remains *sui generis*".⁸⁶ The novel's regionalism alludes to a broader tradition deeply rooted in the nineteenth-century (for example Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd*, 1874). However, the 1930s produce, as James and Williams have argued, a shift in the novel's regionalism. James notes that

[m]uch more is at stake in regional writing at this time than debates about the novel's capacity to document local struggle. Surpassing the functionalism of sociological reportage, a growing number of interwar [...] novelists complicated the dichotomy between domestic realism and formal innovation, whether in agricultural or urban contexts.⁸⁷

Sunset Song certainly contains elements of auto-ethnography and sociological interest in the way it records local farming communities and their lifestyle. However, the novel pushes the boundaries of what James calls "domestic realism" and does much more than simply record

Scottish Literature, Vol. 4: Twentieth Century, ed. by Cairns Craig (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987), pp. 1-9.

⁸⁶ Malcolm, *Blasphemer & Reformer*, p. xv.

⁸⁷ David James, "Localizing Late Modernism", p. 44. While James explicitly focuses on women's writing and considers regionalism in the fiction of Elizabeth Bowen, Rosamond Lehmann, Storm Jameson, and Sylvia Townsend Warner, his observations on the intersection between regionalism and formal innovation in the 1930s novel apply to a larger group of writers.

a way of life on the brink of extinction. The combination of text with musical notation, the multiple references to folk songs, the structural reliance on music, the synthesis of Doric Scots and English, and the omission of speech marks all integrate formally innovative elements into the realist novel, thus creating a hybrid idiom that appears characteristically late modernist in its mixture of styles and forms.

There is evidence to suggest that Grassie Gibbon was writing and thinking about sound film throughout the 1930s until his death in 1935. In an essay for *Cinema Quarterly* (incidentally the journal which also published some of Grierson's essays on documentary film throughout the 1930s), Grassie Gibbon makes explicit reference to Flaherty's documentary *Man of Aran* (1934).⁸⁸ This is not to suggest that there is a direct influence between sound film, documentary, and Grassie Gibbon's writing or that *Sunset Song* is written like a sound film. However, the preceding discussion of *Sunset Song*'s key elements indicates that the novel is explicitly concerned with translating voice, dialect, and music onto the page in order to convey a regional lifestyle and the impression of a local community in decline. This specific interest in matters of voice, dialect, and music in Gibbon's novel runs parallel to the sound debates and experiments in the British Documentary Movement as outlined above. Both the novel and documentary film of the early 1930s are raising questions about the use of sound for a wider auto-ethnographic project and experiment with different ways of deploying voice and music in their renditions of living and working conditions in different parts of Britain. While the Documentary Film Movement began to develop different strategies for recording and relaying sound that combined realism and

⁸⁸ See, for instance, Lewis Grassie Gibbon, "A Novelist Looks at the Cinema", in *Smeddum: A Lewis Grassie Gibbon Anthology*, ed. by Valentina Bold (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2001), pp. 739-743. The essay first appeared in *Cinema Quarterly*, 3 (1935), 81-85. In this article, Grassie Gibbon voices his opinion on travelogues and Flaherty's *Man of Aran*, which he judges a "righteous film". The extent to which Gibbon thought about film in relation to his writing was possibly cut short by his early death in 1935. There is evidence to suggest that he wanted to integrate film terminology into his planned autobiography, *Memoirs of a Materialist*. Unpublished notes for this unfinished work show that Gibbon was trying to adapt a structure made up of "camera eye" sequences and "scenario scripts". On this point, see Gillian Fothergill, *The Major Novels of Lewis Grassie Gibbon* (unpublished master's thesis, University of Durham, 1980), p. 11. Fothergill draws this information from Grassie Gibbon's unpublished papers that were made available to her by his widow Rebecca "Ray" Mitchell in 1977.

formal experiment from about 1934, Grassic Gibbon's *Sunset Song* had already demonstrated to its readers the novel's capacity for combining social realism and stylistic innovation via its textual evocation of soundscapes and voice.

Love on the Dole

Like *Sunset Song*, Walter Greenwood's *Love on the Dole* (1933) is considered one of the most influential auto-ethnographic novels of the early 1930s. Greenwood's text has received sustained scholarly attention, not least due to its successful stage and screen adaptations.⁸⁹ In 2018, Hopkins asserted that Greenwood's novel "retains its status as the representative working-class text of the 1930s".⁹⁰ Similar to Grassic Gibbon's *Sunset Song*, *Love on the Dole* puts particular emphasis on speech, voice, dialect, and music. The text mobilises these sonic features to present working class concerns and questions of class belonging within a locally specific community. While Greenwood's novel is less straightforwardly experimental in its narrative style than *Sunset Song*, the text similarly mobilises the rhythms of speech and soundscapes of the local community to convey and record English working-class life in the "Hanky Park" district of Salford, Greater Manchester. The novel follows the fate of siblings Sally and Harry Hardcastle and their local community during the depression years. The Hardcastle family struggle to make ends meet when both Mr. Hardcastle and Harry lose their jobs. Harry's situation becomes even more precarious when his love interest Helen

⁸⁹ See Chris Hopkins, *Walter Greenwood's "Love on the Dole": Novel, Play, Film* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018) as well as Hopkins' chapter on "Dialect and Dialectic: Region and Nation in Walter Greenwood's *Love on the Dole*", in *English Fiction in the 1930s: Language, Genre, History* (London: Continuum, 2006), pp. 43-50. See also Stephen Constantine, "Love on the Dole and Its Reception in the 1930s", *Literature & History*, 8.2 (1982), 232-247; Matthew Gaughan, "Palatable Socialism or 'the Real Thing'? Walter Greenwood's *Love on the Dole*", *Literature & History*, 17.2 (2008), 47-61; Jack Windle, "'What Life means to those at the bottom': *Love on the Dole* and Its Reception since the 1930s", *Literature & History*, 20.2 (2011), 35-50; Caroline Levine, "Propaganda for Democracy: The Curious Case of *Love on the Dole*", *Journal of British Studies*, 45.5 (2006), 846-874; Roger Webster, "Love on the Dole and the Aesthetics of Contradiction", in *The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Jeremy Hawthorn (London: Arnold, 1984), pp. 49-61.

⁹⁰ Hopkins, *Walter Greenwood's "Love on the Dole"*, p. 10.

falls pregnant and he loses the dole due to the newly introduced Means Test. Both the novel's setting and plot reflect and respond to working class life during the political and economic upheavals taking place in Britain during the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Upon publication, *Love on the Dole* was widely commended for its rendition of working class life. The *Times Literary Supplement* commented that "as a novel it stands very high, but it is in its qualities as a 'social document' that its great value lies".⁹¹ Stephen Constantine and Matthew Gaughan trace the novel's reception history, drawing attention to contemporary reviewers' praise of the novel as "authentic", "real", "faithful", and "true".⁹² In a more recent survey of the social realist novel in the twentieth century, Ferrall suggests that "Walter Brierley's *Means-Test Man* (1935) and Walter Greenwood's *Love on the Dole* (1933) are powerful evidence of the conditions of working people on the dole as they negotiate the threat of the means test".⁹³ The positive reception of the novel as a "social document" and Ferrall's description of the text as a form of "evidence" derive from the way the novel conveys an impression of working class everyday life. The description of living and working conditions as well as the community's local dialect and slang words are central to the narrative:

'Now, children. Now children. Can't y' ever agree? Like cat an' dog, y' are. Ne'er seen a pair like y',' said Mrs Hardcastle, wearily: 'Get y' breakfasts an' let y' food stop y' mouths. Come on, Sal. Y'll be quartered (fined a quarter hour's wages for impunctuality).'⁹⁴

Jack made a grimace, leant against the wood partition, crossed his legs and said: 'They'll leave y' alone, now. Y'll be one 'v us. Y've all got t' g' through it when y' first come. . . . Hey! Save us a draw: that's th' on'y tab end Ah've got.'⁹⁵

⁹¹ "New Novels", Review of *Love on the Dole* by Walter Greenwood, *Times Literary Supplement*, 29 June 1933, p. 444.

⁹² See Gaughan, "Palatable Socialism or 'the Real Thing'?", pp. 47-48; Constantine, "*Love on the Dole* and Its Reception in the 1930s", pp. 232-247.

⁹³ Ferrall, "Social Democratic Era", p. 815

⁹⁴ Walter Greenwood, *Love on the Dole* (London: Vintage, 2014), p. 18.

⁹⁵ Greenwood, *Love on the Dole*, p. 53.

In literary criticism, Greenwood's use of typical working-class terms and slang words (e.g. "quartered", "clemming", "threepenny treble") is a frequent matter for discussion.⁹⁶ These words are explained by the narrator in parentheses after they have been used by a character, providing lexicographic information for the reader. Greenwood's use of local dialect and slang words characterises the people and the community, but also makes their language and their manner of speaking more comprehensible and accessible for a middle-class reader. Jack Windle has recently defended Greenwood's text against Roy Johnson's claim that the explanation of working-class slang in parentheses are "gross disjunctures caused by authorial intrusion".⁹⁷ Equally critical of Greenwood's style, Stephen Ross writes:

The linguistic politics of *Love on the Dole* [...] reveal how Greenwood simultaneously draws on the force of authentic working-class idiom and undercuts it, implicating himself in a bourgeois aesthetic ideology that subverts the novel's ostensibly progressive aims.⁹⁸

In his defence of the novel, Windle suggests that Greenwood may have been encouraged by his publisher Jonathan Cape to be bolder in his use of slang, but that the author most likely self-censored parts of his text in order to secure publication in the first place. Windle writes:

Greenwood found himself in the typical position of the working-class writer: that is, one of wanting to articulate lived working-class experience in all its rich and complex detail, whilst having to do so in a manner acceptable to the hegemonic tastes and values of the middle class and the literary establishment.⁹⁹

The importance of sociolinguistic concerns in Greenwood's novel is underscored by the way in which the narrator seeks to draw attention to class differences through conversation and speech. Greenwood attempts to faithfully reflect northern working-class speech in his novel, but he also portrays subtle linguistic differences within the community. Sally and her

⁹⁶ See Roy Johnson, "The Proletarian Novel", *Literature & History*, 2.2 (1975), 84-95; Jack Windle, "What Life means to those at the bottom", 35-50 and Stephen Ross, "Authenticity Betrayed: The 'Idiotic Folk' of *Love on the Dole*", *Cultural Critique*, 56 (2004), 189-209.

⁹⁷ Windle, "What Life means to those at the bottom", 35-50. In his defence of Greenwood, Windle also quotes from Roy Johnson's critique. See Johnson, "The Proletarian Novel", p. 92.

⁹⁸ Ross, "Authenticity Betrayed", p. 192.

⁹⁹ Windle, "What Life means to those at the bottom", p. 37.

love interest Larry Meath, a self-educated Marxist, for instance, use slang words less frequently than Harry or his parents, Mr and Mrs Hardcastle, thereby offering some sociolinguistic nuances to characterise members of the community:

He [Larry] made a great effort to control the confusion of his thoughts: he said, in naked tones: 'Let's not deceive one another any longer, Sal. We both want the same thing. But you know my ideas,' bitterly: 'Forty-five bob a week. What a wage to build a future on. And look at Marlowe's: we none of us know when we're going to finish. What can I offer you? What can I...'¹⁰⁰

In this exchange with Sally, Larry tries to reason with her, arguing that they cannot be married on his low income. Larry is convinced that marriage (and children) on the low wages earned by him and the other men in Marlowe's factory only perpetuate working class poverty. Although they love each other, Larry tries to convince Sally that marriage and raising a family together would not be sensible in his financial situation. A similar exchange between Harry and his love interest Helen is rendered in a noticeably different accent and idiom:

Harry continued, warming to the optimistic side of the picture: '... Besides, when we're married they'll be bound t' give us money at workhouse... An' Ah'll stand a better chance o' getting' a job wi' bein' married. They're givin' married 'uns a chance before t'others wherever y' go... Single blokes don't get a smell in,' eagerly: 'Don't y' see, Helen? Why, Ah bet Ah'm workin' in next t' no time... You see. An' by time y' finish work t'day Ah'll have found a place for us. Ah will, really. Ah'll come an' meet y' tonight at mill'.¹⁰¹

Although Larry Meath is described as a self-educated Marxist who, like Harry, works in Marlowe's factory, Larry's manner of speaking indicates some subtle socio-cultural differences between the two men. While Harry uses contractions, drops vowels, and diverges from standard RP vowel pronunciation (typographically "Ah" instead of "I", or phonetically /a/ instead of /ai/), Larry's speech avoids contractions and appears much closer to the diction of the narrator's report, indicating a closer approximation to RP English and its concomitant middle-class associations. Although Larry is a member of the working class, he portrays what Windle describes as a "complex class continuum" that was evolving

¹⁰⁰ Greenwood, *Love on the Dole*, p. 151.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

throughout the 1930s, challenging and changing clear-cut class distinctions.¹⁰²

Greenwood, like Grassic Gibbon, uses references to music in the novel, albeit for a slightly different purpose: music, and knowledge of music, becomes an explicit marker of class belonging, drawing attention to the subtle differences between the characters' education. When Sally remembers an exchange with some young people from the local labour club where Larry is a frequent speaker, the novel indicates how even subtle differences in class and education are irrevocably played out through sound:

Then, remembering the kind of people comprising yesterday's company, [Sally] found that she was not so sure of herself. She felt greatly inferior to them all. It was as though they belonged to a different species. Somehow she identified them as people who could afford pianos and who could play them; people who lived in houses where there were baths. Their conversation, too, was incomprehensible. When the talk turned on music, they referred to something called the 'Halley' where something happened by the names of 'Baytoven' and 'Bark' and other strange names. [...] Yes, they were of a class apart, to whom the mention of a pawn shop, she supposed, would be incomprehensible. Suppose they saw her home; her bedroom! She blushed, ashamed.¹⁰³

Sally's memories of this encounter show her discomfort: she cannot relate to their conversation, it is quite literally "incomprehensible" to her. Knowledge of classical music by Beethoven and Bach lies outside her realm of experience. As people "who could afford pianos", Sally understands their social and intellectual position as infinitely superior to her own with the musical instrument standing in for a way of conceptualising the class differences described in the novel. The narration here switches to free indirect discourse, typographically recording Sally's listening experience of the words are unknown to her: "Baytoven", "Bark", the "Halley". Greenwood's novel subtly shows how textual references to music express broader issues surrounding class and education.

A third notable way in which Greenwood's novel mobilises sound for its socio-political agenda is the portrayal of working conditions through their sonic environment. One morning, Sally's brother Harry is caught up in a row of men marching to work. Harry,

¹⁰² Windle, "What Life means to those at the bottom", p. 40.

¹⁰³ Greenwood, *Love on the Dole*, p. 97.

still very young and impressionable, admires the men who work as “engineers” in a large local factory. One day, he falls into step with

with a great procession of heavily booted men all wearing overalls and all marching in the same direction. [...] Red and cream electric tramcars rattled by; alongside raced bicycles, municipal buses, privately owned charabancs crowded with men, the atmospheres within the vehicles opaque with tobacco smoke. [...] Over all, the air resounded with the ringing rhythmic beat of hobnailed boots. [...] He found himself listening to the beat of the men’s feet again; an entrancing tune, inspiring, eloquent of the great engineering works where this army of men were employed. Reverently he murmured its name: ‘Marlowe’s’.¹⁰⁴

The novel evokes the soundscape of the workers’ commute in the morning: Harry is fascinated by the “rhythmic beat” of the boots which goes on to form “an entrancing tune, inspiring, eloquent of the great engineering works where this army of men were employed”. By turning the marching bodies into the creators of an “entrancing tune”, the narrative expresses Harry’s admiration for the men and their sense of community. The novel’s description of the “rhythmic beat” of the boots resonates with Alberto Cavalcanti’s treatment of a similar scene in *Coal Face*. In this documentary film, the sound effects of men marching in line in an underground tunnel are acoustically represented through a succession of quick, rhythmic drum beats which create a “tune” similar to the one heard by Harry in Greenwood’s novel (Fig. 10):

¹⁰⁴ Greenwood, *Love on the Dole*, p. 19.



Figure 10: Miners marching underground in *Coal Face*. Screenshot by the author.

Both Harry's perception of the booted men in *Love on the Dole* as well as the miners' march in *Coal Face* evoke a sensation of busy routine, but also of community and sonic belonging. Harry's reference to the "army of men" attaches military connotations to the movement of the homogenous group of workers. The drum beat in *Coal Face* also lends the sequence in the film acoustic connotations of a military operation. In both cases, the soundscape problematises and complicates the situation: the workers are presented as both community and material resource.

Windle suggests that Greenwood's novel forges "a hybrid literary idiom" that, on the one hand, consists of his use of working class dialect and, on the other hand, of his explanations for middle-class readers.¹⁰⁵ In addition, the "carefully crafted style and tone" of the novel subverts romantic conventions and gender expectations in the novel.¹⁰⁶ The idea of a "hybrid literary idiom" is crucial. Similar to Grassic Gibbon's experimental fusion of Doric Scots and English in *Sunset Song*, Greenwood's rendition of dialect and slang with

¹⁰⁵ Windle, "What Life means to those at the bottom", p. 44.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

explanatory terms in parentheses searches for a way of recording the local communities' living conditions and voices and making them accessible and comprehensible to a middle-class (English) reader. Both Grassic Gibbon's and Greenwood's attempts to negotiate a linguistic position somewhere between local (working-class) community and middle-class reader run parallel to the Documentary Movement's concern with negotiating the possibilities and limitations of sound. The hybrid literary idiom created by Greenwood and Grassic Gibbon reflects and resonates with the sound strategies of the documentary films and their "hybrid" soundtracks: combining social realist and experimental elements, both these novels and documentary film productions were recording local, professional, and class communities with sound as a core concern.

A Clergyman's Daughter and Keep the Aspidistra Flying

The idea of a hybrid idiom with sound at the core of the novel's auto-ethnographic interest also helps us to reconsider the early fiction of George Orwell. Orwell's success in the 1930s mainly derived from his journalism and non-fiction works such as *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) and *Homage to Catalonia* (1938).¹⁰⁷ By contrast, his early novels, as Michael Levenson observes, have often been judged as "false starts towards the triumphs of *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*".¹⁰⁸ Roger Fowler similarly criticises a view of Orwell's "early fiction and documentary writings as try-outs by an apprentice".¹⁰⁹ To complicate our view of the early fiction further, Orwell has been variously described as a realist, naturalist, (be)late(d) modernist or intermodernist in

¹⁰⁷ Q. D. Leavis called Orwell's non-fiction "stimulating" while finding his novels of the 1930s "dreary" and "dull". See Q. D. Leavis, "The Literary Life Respectable: Reviews of Edwin Muir and George Orwell", in *Collected Essays. Vol. 3: The Novel of Religious Controversy*, ed. by G. Singh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 283-289. The review was first published in *Scrutiny*, 9.2 (September 1940).

¹⁰⁸ Levenson, "The Fictional Realist: Novels of the 1930s", p. 59.

¹⁰⁹ Roger Fowler, *The Language of George Orwell* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), p. 60.

literary criticism.¹¹⁰ However, Orwell's own essays, "Inside the Whale" (1940) and "Why I Write" (1946) in particular, doubtlessly demand a more nuanced reassessment of his fiction and style that cannot be easily or comfortably aligned with any of these categories. There is, in fact, an inherent stylistic hybridity suggested by Orwell himself, which resonates strongly with matters of sound and voice in the late modernist period. In "Why I Write", Orwell refers to the pleasure he found as a young man in "the sounds and associations of words" and his intentions of wanting to write "enormous naturalistic novels with unhappy endings, full of detailed descriptions and arresting similes, and also full of purple passages in which words were used partly *for the sake of their own sound*" [my emphasis].¹¹¹ Regarding the relationship between sound and literature, Orwell also commends (at least in principle) the conditions under which literature can be broadcast via radio, because the conditions of broadcasting reframe the writer's focus and put emphasis on literature (in this case poetry) as a *work of sound*:

The poet *feels* that he is addressing people to whom poetry means something, and it is a fact that poets who are used to broadcasting can read into the microphone with a virtuosity they would not equal if they had a visible audience in front of them. The element of make-believe that enters here does not greatly matter. The point is that in the only way now possible the poet has been brought into a situation in which reading verse aloud seems a natural unembarrassing thing, a normal exchange between man and man: also he has been led to think of his work as *sound* rather than as a pattern on paper. By that much the reconciliation

¹¹⁰ Fowler suggests that Orwell blends three styles of realism: descriptive realism, naturalism, and hyperrealism. Michael Levenson argues that Orwell "ultimately settled on a commitment to literary realism". Carl Freedman, George Woodcock, and Terry Eagleton align Orwell's literary style more closely with naturalism. Patricia Rae in particular has put forward a view of Orwell that underlines his admiration of and interest in modernism. Bluemel includes Orwell in her appendix on "Who Are the Intermodernists?". See Fowler, *The Language of George Orwell*, pp. 60-86; Levenson, "The Fictional Realist", pp. 59-60; Carl Freedman, *George Orwell: A Study in Ideology and Literary Form* (New York: Garland, 1988), p. 88; George Woodcock, *The Crystal Spirit: A Study of George Orwell* (London: Cape, 1966), p. 56; Terry Eagleton, *Exiles and Émigrés: Studies in Modern Literature* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), pp. 71-107; Patricia Rae, "Orwell, World War I Modernism and the Spanish Civil War", *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, 2.3 (2009), 245-258; Patricia Rae, "Mr. Charrington's Junk Shop: T. S. Eliot and Modernist Poetics in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*", *Twentieth Century Literature*, 43.2 (1997), 196-220; Kristin Bluemel, Appendix: "Who Are the Intermodernists?", in *Intermodernism*, ed. by Kristin Bluemel (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 208-224 (p. 219).

¹¹¹ George Orwell, "Why I Write", in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters, Volume 1: An Age Like This, 1920-1940*, ed. by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (Jaffrey, NH: Nonpareil, 2000), pp. 1-7 (pp. 2-3). The essay was first published in *Gangrel*, 4 (Summer 1946).

between poetry and the common man is nearer. It already exists at the poet's end of the aether-waves, whatever may be happening at the other end.¹¹²

These comments underscore how sonic and aesthetic qualities of language do play a central part in Orwell's attitude towards writing. Moreover, "Why I Write" also makes a number of references to Orwell's attempted synthesis between realist and experimental forms: among the "four great motives for writing", he lists "aesthetic enthusiasm", "historical impulse", and "political purpose [...] in the widest possible sense".¹¹³ Famously, the essay also stated his aim to "make political writing into an art".¹¹⁴ Since these remarks were first published in 1946, they form a commentary on Orwell's formative influences and early attitudes towards fiction written with the benefit of hindsight. Nonetheless they support a careful and nuanced assessment of Orwell's early fiction that remains open to ideas of hybridity and of a synthesis of styles and forms.

Orwell used his fiction of the 1930s to draw attention to specific problems in the immediate social world. He attended to states of social emergency and political crisis, but he did so by focussing on "individual experience", often from the point of view of a "limited, prejudiced, and confused narrator".¹¹⁵ *Burmese Days* (1934), for instance, is a detailed critique of imperialism and *A Clergyman's Daughter* (published in the US as *The Clergyman's Daughter*) maps out the experience of religious crisis and unsustainable faith when faced with more pressing human needs such as food, shelter, or companionship. Orwell "was repeatedly drawn to the idea of an autonomous art – a position that partly explains his deep

¹¹² George Orwell, "Poetry and the Microphone", in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters, Volume 2: My Country Right or Left, 1940-1943*, ed. by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (Jaffrey, NH: Nonpareil, 2000), pp. 329-336 (p. 332). The essay was possibly written in autumn 1943 and first published in the *New Saxon Pamphlet*, 3 (March 1945).

¹¹³ Orwell, "Why I Write", pp. 3-4.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹¹⁵ Orwell's interest in "individual experience" and his deployment of limited point-of-view narration is discussed in detail by Rae in "'Orwell, World War I Modernism and the Spanish Civil War", 245-258. While Rae focuses on Orwell's specific rendition of war experience and its proximity to accounts of World War I, her argument concerning narration and point of view can be extended to Orwell's fiction prior to *Homage to Catalonia* (1938).

attraction to modernism – but he would also dismiss the ‘illusion of pure aestheticism’”.¹¹⁶ The following analysis of *A Clergyman’s Daughter* and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* reads both novels for sound in order to underscore the extent to which Orwell’s early fiction participated in the wider 1930s documentary effort and its hybrid approach towards realist and experimental forms.

Keep the Aspidistra Flying was published by Victor Gollancz in April 1936. This semi-autobiographical novel draws on Orwell’s experience of working in a bookshop in London.¹¹⁷ The novel addresses the systemic failures of capitalism, the experience of poverty, and hypocrisy of middle-class values. Gordon Comstock, the novel’s protagonist, is an aspiring poet who works part-time in a bookshop. He has left his relatively well-paid position as a writer for an advertising firm due to his contempt for both middle-class respectability and capitalist economy. Although Comstock wants to devote more time to his writing, his low income soon ensures his descent into poverty, which hinders his creativity, negatively impacts upon his relationship with his love interest Rosemary, and destroys his capacity to intellectually engage with any subject matter. Financial worries and insecurities shape Comstock’s life and he bitterly concludes that there can be no poetry without money, that being able to produce good writing is yet another luxury of the upper and middle classes.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ David Dwan, *Liberty, Equality, and Humbug: Orwell’s Political Ideals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 25.

¹¹⁷ John Rodden and John Rossi, *The Cambridge Introduction to George Orwell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 38.

¹¹⁸ Orwell returns to this central point in chapter five of *The Road to Wigan Pier*, where he asserts that “there is no doubt about the deadening, debilitating effect of unemployment upon everybody, [...]. The best intellects will not stand up against it. Once or twice it has happened to me to meet unemployed men of genuine literary ability; there are others whom I haven’t met but whose work I occasionally see in the magazines. Now and again, at long intervals, these men will produce an article or a short story which is quite obviously better than most of the stuff that gets whooped up by the blurb-reviewers. Why, then, do they make so little use of their talents? They have all the leisure in the world; why don’t they sit down and write books? Because to write books you need not only comfort and solitude--and solitude is never easy to attain in a working-class home--you also need peace of mind. You can’t settle to anything, you can’t command the spirit of hope in which anything

The use of free indirect style merges the narrator's voice with that of Gordon Comstock. With Gordon as the central focalizer, the novel predominantly offers the limited perspective of his point of view:

Gordon made an effort, sat upright and stowed his packet of cigarettes away in his inside pocket. He was perishing for a smoke. However, there were only four cigarettes left. Today was Wednesday and he had no money coming to him till Friday. It would be too bloody to be without tobacco tonight as well as all tomorrow. [...] The money clinked in his trouser pocket as he got up. He knew the precise sum that was there. Fivepence half-penny – twopence halfpenny and a Joey. He paused, took out the miserable little threepenny-bit and looked at it. Beastly, useless thing! And bloody fool to have taken it!¹¹⁹

Like Grassic Gibbon and Greenwood, Orwell uses free indirect style in his fiction, interlacing the narrator's voice with that of the characters as well as serving a sense of literary belatedness. Free indirect style had been used by realist writers such as Austen and Flaubert, as well as by modernists such as Woolf, Lawrence, and Kafka. In adapting free indirect style for his own purpose, Orwell makes use of a narrative strategy that had previously accommodated both realist and modernist forms of expression. Pushing against a purely realist style, Orwell's early fiction also includes a combination of literary forms which become either synthesised or integrated into novelistic prose narration. The integration of both poetry and dramatic dialogue, for instance, foregrounds a sonic, performative element in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* as well as in *A Clergyman's Daughter*. *Aspidistra* fuses prose narration with poetry that renders explicit Gordon Comstock's aspirations to become a writer:

Outside, all was bleak and wintry. A tram, like a raucous swan of steel, glided groaning over the cobbles, and in its wake the wind swept debris of trampled leaves. The twigs of the elm-tree were swirling, straining east-ward. The poster that advertised QT sauce was torn at the edge; a ribbon of paper fluttered fitfully like a tiny pennant. In the side-street, too, to the right, the naked poplars that lined the pavement bowed sharply as the wind caught them. A nasty raw wind. There was a threatening note in it as it swept over; the first growl of winter's anger. Two lines of a poem struggled for birth in Gordon's mind: Sharply the something wind – for instance, threatening wind? No, better, menacing wind. The menacing wind blows over – no, sweeps over, say. The something poplars – yielding poplars? No, better, bending

has got to be created, with that dull evil cloud of unemployment hanging over you". See Orwell, *Wigan Pier*, pp. 75-76.

¹¹⁹ George Orwell, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 1.

poplars. Assonance between bending and menacing? No matter. The bending poplars, newly bare. Good.

Sharply the menacing wind sweeps over.

The bending poplars, newly bare.

Good. "Bare" is a sod to rhyme; however, there's always "air", which every poet since Chaucer has been struggling to find rhymes for. But the impulse died away in Gordon's mind. He turned the money over in his pocket. Twopence halfpenny and a Joey – twopence halfpenny. His mind was sticky with boredom. He couldn't cope with rhymes and adjectives. You can't, with only twopence halfpenny in your pocket.¹²⁰

In this excerpt, Gordon is inspired by sound of the wind outside to write a new poem. The first two lines "struggle for birth" in his mind when he hears the sound of the wind rushing through the trees: the "threatening note" and the "growl of winter's anger" becomes transcribed and recorded in verse, expressing Gordon's creative process of writing poetry within the confines of the prose novel. Gordon's attention to the sound of his composition ("No, better, bending poplars. Assonance between bending and menacing?") translates his listening experience of the wind into the sonic quality of his writing. However, the composition of poetry, of composing sound inspired by other sounds, is frequently inhibited and halted by the lack of money: "The impulse died away in Gordon's mind. He turned the money over in his pocket." Gordon's financial circumstances, albeit self-imposed, prevent him from reaching his full potential as a writer. This particular passage of the novel resonates with Orwell's comments in "Why I Write". The prose narration translates onto the page the poet's preoccupation with words "used partly for the sake of their own sound", with the sonic and aesthetic qualities of language.

A similar, more overt reliance on sound and mixed literary forms appears in Orwell's previous novel, *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935), which traces the religious crisis of Dorothy Hare, the daughter of an impoverished rector in an English village. Dorothy dutifully performs the work of a servant and housekeeper to her father but she constantly worries about money. Suddenly, without any explanation, she finds herself homeless in London suffering from amnesia. Unable to remember her name or identity, Dorothy's faith is tested

¹²⁰ Orwell, *Aspidistra*, pp. 4-5.

in the face of more pressing concerns such as money, food, or shelter. The third chapter of *A Clergyman's Daughter* is written entirely in dramatic dialogue:

(*Scene*: Trafalgar Square. Dimly visible through the mist, a dozen people, Dorothy among them, are grouped about one of the benches near the north parapet.)

Charlie (singing): "Ail Mary, 'ail Mary, 'a-il Ma-ary – "

(Big Ben strikes ten)

Snouter (mimicking the noise): "Ding dong, ding dong! Shut your – noise, can't you? Seven more hours of it on this – square before we got the chance of a set-down and a bit of sleep! Cripes!"

Mr Tallboys (to himself): "*Non sum quails eram boni sub regno Edwardi!* In the days of my innocence, before the Devil carried me up into a high place and dropped me into the Sunday newspapers – that is to say when I was Rector of Little Fawley-cum-Dewsbury ..."

Deafie (singing): "With my willy willy, with my willy willy – "

Mrs Wayne: "Ah, dearie, as soon as I set eyes on you I knew as you was a lady born and bred. You and me've known what it is to come down in the world, haven't we, dearie? It ain't the same for us as what it is for some of these others here."¹²¹

The chapter recalls episode fifteen, "Circe", of James Joyce's *Ulysses*.¹²² While there are some intertextual connections between Joyce and Orwell in this chapter, Orwell adapts this feature of Joyce's high modernist text for his own, more socio-political agenda: the dramatic dialogue displays a cacophony of voices that Dorothy encounters on her nightly, homeless wanderings in Trafalgar Square. She meets Mr Tallboys, who used to be a rector, Snouter who tries to sleep in Trafalgar Square, and Mrs Wayne who wants to strike up a conversation with Dorothy, telling her she knows what it means to "come down in the world". The scene incorporates singing, the sound of Big Ben striking ten o'clock, Snouter mimicking the noise of the clock, and Mr Tallboys reciting Latin. There is little interaction between the characters. The scene's focus is less on recording dialects and different forms of speech (as opposed to Grassic Gibbon and Greenwood), and more on creating a polyphonic montage in which each voice vies for the reader's (and Dorothy's) attention.

¹²¹ George Orwell, *A Clergyman's Daughter* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 151.

¹²² James Joyce, *Ulysses*, based on the 1939 *Odyssey* print edition with annotations by Sam Slote (London: Alma Classics, 2012), pp. 308-428.

Like Greenwood, Orwell uses references to singing and music to make a broader point about the socio-economic position of his characters. In *A Clergyman's Daughter*, Dorothy joins workers on a hop farm in Kent when she is amnesiac and in dire need of money.¹²³ The workers pass their time on the fields singing:

When the sun was shining, everybody sang as they worked; the plantations rang with singing. For some reason all the songs were sad that autumn – songs about rejected love and fidelity unrewarded, like gutter versions of *Carmen* and *Manon Lescaut*. There was:

There *they go* – in *their joy* –

'appy *girl* – lucky *boy* –

But 'ere am I-I-I-

Broken – 'a-a-arted!¹²⁴

The hop-pickers of 1930s Kent sing “gutter versions” of famous operas. Orwell suggests that not all music is made equal and the lack of familiarity with or experience of works such as *Carmen* or *Manon Lescaut* produces a distorted version of the workers' song. In contrast to Sally's incorrect typographical rendition of “Baythoven” and “Bark”, the focalizer in *A Clergyman's Daughter* knows how to spell the operas' titles correctly, but the point about socio-economic inequality remains the same as the workers create their own “gutter versions” of classical opera.

Poverty and socio-economic inequality are also expressed through singing in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*. When Gordon Comstock walks past a pub, his thoughts are dominated by his yearning for a drink:

He felt dreadfully thirsty already. It had been a mistake to let himself think of beer. As he approached the Crichton, he heard voices singing. The great garish pub seemed to be more

¹²³ Like *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, *A Clergyman's Daughter* partly draws on Orwell's own life. From August to October 1931, he spent some time tramping and hop-picking and kept a diary on this experience. Orwell notably ends his diary entries with some sociolinguistic observations. Having lived among the seasonal workers, he notes some of their idioms: “*Rhyming Slang*. I thought this was extinct, but it is far from it. The hop-pickers used these expressions freely: A dig in the grave, meaning a shave. The hot cross bun, meaning the sun. Greengages, meaning wages.” See George Orwell, *Diaries*, ed. by Peter Davison (London: Harvill Secker, 2009), pp. 2-22 (p. 21).

¹²⁴ Orwell, *A Clergyman's Daughter*, p. 114.

brightly lighted than usual. There was a concert or something going on inside. Twenty ripe male voices were chanting in unison:

'Fo-or ree's a jorrigoo' fellow,

For ree's a jorrigoo' fellow

For ree's a jorrigoo fe-ELL-OW –

And toori oori us!

At least, that was what it sounded like. Gordon drew nearer, pierced by ravishing thirst. The voices were so soggy, so infinitely beery. When you heard them you saw the scarlet faces of prosperous plumbers. [...] He went round to the other side of the pub. The beer-choked voices followed him.¹²⁵

The singing voices in this sequence indicate the wealth and happiness of those inside the pub who are able to afford a drink. Gordon is concerned not so much with the content of the song, but with the sound of the voices: they are “ripe, male voices”, sounding “soggy, so infinitely beery”. The “concert” inside the pub makes Gordon imagine what the men’s faces look like, what their occupation might be. To Gordon, they must be “prosperous” – a conclusion he draws from simply listening to cheerful sounds emanating from the pub. The voices, “beer-choked”, become an acoustic marker of Gordon’s longing for small luxuries that remain unattainable in his precarious financial situation. Even in such subtle ways, the acoustic characteristics of voice and song become reminders of the socio-economic inequality that pervades Orwell’s text.

Like *Sunset Song* and *Love on the Dole*, Orwell’s early fiction does not take direct inspiration from the sound film. Nor is it written with the intention to sound like a film. In fact, as Dwan notes, “the political effects of modern pleasure-seeking [...] worried Orwell”.¹²⁶ In chapter seven of *Aspidistra*, Gordon Comstock criticises blind obedience to “bankers, newspaper peers, novelists of all four sexes, American pugilists, lady aviators, [and] film stars”.¹²⁷ In *Wigan Pier*, Orwell’s discomfort with modern media and entertainment culture becomes even more evident. Here, he writes acerbically that “it is quite likely that fish-and-

¹²⁵ Orwell, *Aspidistra*, pp. 79-80.

¹²⁶ Dwan, *Liberty, Equality, and Humbug*, p. 186.

¹²⁷ Orwell, *Aspidistra*, p. 167.

chips, art-silk stockings, tinned salmon, cut-price chocolate (five two-ounce bars for sixpence), the movies, the radio, strong tea, and the Football Pools have between them averted revolution".¹²⁸ Although Marcus suggests that *Wigan Pier* contains elements of cinematic framing and both she and Peter Davison propose that Gollancz' idea to commission *Wigan Pier* may have been influenced by Elton and Anstey's documentary *Housing Problems*,¹²⁹ there are no grounds to assume a direct or unilateral influence between documentary film and Orwell's fiction of the 1930s. However, like the works of Grassie Gibbon and Greenwood discussed earlier, Orwell's novels address and experiment with translations and adaptations of sound, music, and voice as a way of recording and presenting localised and class-specific ways of living and working in the 1930s. Orwell's wider project of rendering political writing into art, from its early stages, is grounded in a hybrid literary idiom, a synthesis of social realism and modernist formal experiment, which gains intelligibility through our reading for sound and which appears characteristic of late modernist writing in its mixture of forms and styles.

Hybrid Idioms

In this chapter, I have discussed how 1930s novels by Lewis Grassie Gibbon, Walter Greenwood, and George Orwell deploy sound, particularly voice, local dialect, and music, in order to represent the everyday life of the working classes in different parts of Britain. The forging of a hybrid literary idiom, the use of free indirect discourse, multiple voices, and the integration of poetry, dramatic dialogue, and musical notation all contribute to a revised understanding of the auto-ethnographic novel and its alleged straightforward adherence to social realism. As the discussion has shown, there are significant attempts to experiment with different stylistic and formal means which suggest synthesis and connection, rather

¹²⁸ Orwell, *Wigan Pier*, p. 83.

¹²⁹ See Marcus, "The creative treatment of actuality", pp. 203-205 and Peter Davison, *George Orwell: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1996), p. 72.

than antagonism, between social realism and modernist experiment. The hybrid idiom I have traced in this chapter appears characteristic of late modernism: it connects and synthesises different styles, modes, and media forms.

These features resonate with the different responses to sound that were developing in the British Documentary Movement. The introduction of sound equipment to the GPO film unit, for instance, required filmmakers to rethink their approach towards documentary and cinematic representation and to reconsider their own position towards the subjects of their gaze. The varied sound practices employed by the British Documentary Movement forge connections between realist and experimental styles, indicating a willingness to mix modes and media forms in the pursuit of recording everyday life. The coming of sound indubitably introduced a new phase of formal experimentation to the Documentary Movement. The filmmakers were aiming not just for authenticity or verisimilitude, but for an exploration of the different ways in which the documentary film could empathetically and sympathetically inform and draw attention to social inequality within the constraints of a government and industry-sponsored public relations unit. Documentary films that dealt with social issues and working conditions such as *Housing Problems*, *Coal Face*, *Enough to Eat*, and *Night Mail* employed sound effects, the new form of the interview, the integration of poetry, sound montage, and music to aid in the presentation of their subjects.

The discussion has argued further that a reading for sound complicates standard narratives of the origins of documentary film and standard accounts of the auto-ethnographic novel in the late modernist period by showing both media's balancing act between realism and modernist experiment. The documentary filmmaker as well as the novelist faced the question of how to present everyday reality, working class conditions, and socio-economic inequality. In both media, sound, and particularly the mediation of voice, speech, dialect, and music, appears as a shared concern in this endeavour. While the chapter did not argue for a causal relationship between the sound practices of British Documentary and the narrative strategies of the novel, the chapter does show how the

soundscapes of a selection of 1930s documentary films and late modernist novels imply a broader concern for recording as a crucial activity within the period's wider auto-ethnographic activities. Social and economic issues and class differences are mediated through speech, voice, sound effects, and music, thus pointing towards the relevance of sound as a means of representation and self-examination. In this context, the fiction of authors like Grassie Gibbon, Orwell, and Greenwood actively constructs a hybrid idiom. Their texts foster a connection and synthesis between modes of realism and modernism and give textual expression to a wider concern with sound and its role in 1930s documentary and auto-ethnographic projects.

Chapter Four

Patterns of Difference: Noir's Sound Style and the Writing of Anxiety

The preceding chapters have examined two of the ways in which a reading for sound produces a new understanding of the complex relationship between the late modernist novel and sound film. In the first case study, we encountered the novel and sound film as two media competing in the interwar media system. Waugh's *Vile Bodies* exemplifies a parodic literary response to sound film's appropriation of the musical revue and asserts the novel's capacity to be a key player in its own right in an increasingly audio-visual entertainment industry. In my second case study of the auto-ethnographic novel and documentary film, a reading for sound has shown us a different facet of the relationship between film and the novel in the late modernist period. Here, sound appears as an element of shared concern in the period's auto-ethnographic efforts as recording becomes an activity as important as observation. Offering writers and filmmakers new opportunities for combining social realist and experimental stylistic elements, sound reconfigures standard narratives of 1930s aesthetics which present social realism as fundamentally antagonistic to modernism and contributes to the emergence of hybrid literary and cinematic idioms that bridge this divide.

Having moved roughly chronologically through the 1930s, we are now approaching the end of the decade and the beginning of the Second World War. The events of the Spanish Civil War and British appeasement efforts produced a growing sense of impending political crisis. In this political and cultural climate, sound was increasingly used to express a growing sense of anxiety, reflecting what we might call the "mood" or "period sense" of this historical moment. The immateriality of sound arguably renders it a key device for denoting a sense of instability, insecurity, and fear that is invisible, yet painfully tangible. This chapter reads late modernist texts by Graham Greene, Jean Rhys, and Patrick Hamilton alongside

what would retrospectively be labelled “film noir”. The chapter examines how both the late modernist novel and film noir deploy sound to give expression to a nightmare world of instability, violence, and threat that becomes particularly pronounced in renditions of character psychology. I argue that the novels and films discussed here integrate and deploy sound through patterns of difference and non-conformity. They build on and modify some of the literary and cinematic tropes, themes, and imagery of their predecessors in order to present worlds and minds that have become destabilised, traumatised, and violent. As the real world teeters precariously on the brink of another world war, strategies of literary and cinematic representation have to be remade: neither the playful escapism and frivolous entertainment of the Bright Young Things as they are presented in *Vile Bodies* nor the hybrid idiom constructed by documentary filmmakers and auto-ethnographic writers can appropriately capture the sense of war’s catastrophic inevitability.

“It sounds like a thriller, doesn’t it?”

The mid-twentieth century, and especially the late 1930s and 1940s, have been characterised by a pervading period sense of anxiety and a fear of violence and trauma in the wake of an increasingly precarious political situation.¹ Patricia Waugh suggests that for

¹ See, for instance, W. H. Auden, *The Age of Anxiety: a Baroque Eclogue* (London: Faber and Faber 1948) and E. M. Forster, “The 1939 State”, *The New Statesman and Nation*, 10 June 1939, pp. 888-889. For a historical study that addresses the period sense of anxiety, see Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain between the Wars* (London: Allen Lane, 2009). This mood or period sense of fear, anxiety, insecurity, and war-dread has been addressed widely by literary critics from different angles. See, for instance, Patricia Waugh, “Precarious Voices: Moderns, Moods, and Moving Epochs”, in *Moving Modernisms: Motion, Technology, and Modernity*, ed. by David Bradshaw, Laura Marcus, and Rebecca Roach (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 191-216; Steve Ellis, *British Writers and the Approach of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Lyndsey Stonebridge, *The Writing of Anxiety: Imagining Wartime in Mid-Century British Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2007); Patricia Rae, “Double Sorrow: Proleptic Elegy and the End of Arcadianism in 1930s Britain”, *Twentieth Century Literature*, 49.4 (Summer 2003), 246-275; John Whittier-Ferguson, *Mortality and Form in Late Modernist Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Leo Mellor, *Reading the Ruins: Modernism, Bombsites, and British Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). See also Marina MacKay, “Total War”, in *A History of 1930s British Literature*, ed. by Benjamin Kohlmann and Matthew Taunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 362-375. She suggests that writers of the period were “‘interwar’ in more than a purely chronological sense, their work shaped by violence both recalled and anticipated” (p. 362).

British writers at mid-century, this sense of anxiety operates on at least two levels: there is a becoming-conscious of the “true fragility of things and of humans and of their world” as well as the writer’s “legitimate anxiety [...] concerning their own imaginary afterlives”.² It is this double sense of anxiety, and sound’s representational relationship with it, that takes centre stage in this chapter. I suggest that reading for sound in certain late modernist works by Greene, Rhys, and Hamilton reveals both this sense of fear and the renewed urgency for formal experiment outlined by Waugh. As sound participates in literary expressions of anxiety, psychological trauma, and threat, the novels revisit and reconfigure modernist themes, tropes, and imagery, demonstrating the late modernist novel’s urge to position itself within a longer literary trajectory. In a parallel move, the emergence of film noir during the 1940s draws on sound as a crucial device for giving expression to its nightmare worlds. I show that noir’s sound style is concerned with “patterns of nonconformity” that go against previous idioms of cinematic scoring practices.³

This reading for sound establishes some of the parallel developments between late modernist “writing of anxiety” and the emergence of noir style in the cinema.⁴ Both media are grappling with the question of how to respond to their socio-cultural and historical circumstances and they seek out ways of building on, but also defining themselves against cinematic and literary representational practices that have come before them. In what follows, I first explore the relationship between sound and late modernist writing of anxiety

² Waugh, “Precarious Voices”, pp. 191, 193. Waugh makes the latter point in relation to the writer’s fear “of being beige-washed by literary history into invisibility”.

³ See David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 75.

⁴ I take the term “writing of anxiety” from Lyndsey Stonebridge. She writes: “The writing of anxiety [...] can be read as describing a kind of historiography of trauma; a writing which treats history not so much as enigmatic or unrepresentable [...], as a form of imaginative provocation.” In the run up to and during the Second World War, such writing is expression of what Henry Green called a “dreading forward”, meaning an “anticipatory response to the uncertainty of the future”. See Stonebridge, *The Writing of Anxiety*, pp. 5-6. On the condition of anxiety in the late 1930s and throughout the Second World War, see also Lyndsey Stonebridge, “Anxiety at a Time of Crisis”, *History Workshop Journal*, 45 (Spring 1998), 170-182.

through a discussion of works by Graham Greene, whose texts of the late 1930s and 1940s prominently capture the period sense. I then expand the discussion to consider works by Jean Rhys and Patrick Hamilton, before moving to an analysis of the sound strategies present in film noir in the second half of the chapter.

Published in 1938 during the height of British appeasement policy towards Nazi Germany, Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock* subtly reflects a mood of impending catastrophe through its examination of gang violence, murder, and corruption.⁵ Marc Silverstein suggests that all of "Greene's thrillers represent a serious attempt to establish the spy novel as an appropriate vehicle for exploring the tensions, ambiguities, darkness and sense of alienation which characterize the experience of modernity in the twentieth century".⁶ In an argument akin to Kracauer's assertion that the surface level expressions of popular culture allow us deeper insights into the political and sociological conditions of society at a specific historical moment,⁷ Silverstein argues that Greene's reconfiguration of the thriller genre is a way of reflecting on the social and political conditions of his time.⁸ The fictional world created in Greene's texts plays a crucial role for such a reading: Arthur Calder-Marshall first

⁵ DeVitis, for instance, suggests that "in *Brighton Rock* Greene relates for the first time the theme of corrupted innocence, the theme of betrayal, the motif of the chase, and his own symbols of evil". See A. A. DeVitis, "Allegory in *Brighton Rock*", *Modern Fiction Studies*, 3.3 (1957), 216-224 (pp. 216, 219).

⁶ Marc Silverstein, "After the Fall: The World of Graham Greene's Thrillers", *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 22.1 (1988), 24-44 (p. 24).

⁷ Siegfried Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament", in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, tr. and ed. by Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 75-87 (p. 75).

⁸ Greene's reconfiguration of genre is a particularly pertinent strand in literary criticism on his work: Matthew Levay argues that Greene's late modernism hinges on his "experiments with genre [which] reflect a greater formal commitment to the interrogation of literary conventions, and, by extension, to the representational possibilities offered by the manipulation of popular forms". Levay characterises *Brighton Rock* as a "psychological case study" which "speaks to the concerns of both modernist and genre fiction," particularly in its revision of detective and crime fiction. See Matthew Levay, "The Entertainments of Late Modernism: Graham Greene and the Career Criminal", *Modernist Cultures*, 5.2 (2010), 315-339 (pp. 317-318). Similarly, Chris Hopkins suggests that Greene's fiction of the 1930s "shows a strong sense of the thriller as superficially inauthentic, and yet also the only genre really able to represent the emptiness of the modern world". See Chris Hopkins, *English Fiction in the 1930s: Language, Genre, History* (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 131.

called this particular diegetic world “Greeneland” in 1940.⁹ Diemert defines Greeneland as the “allegedly stylized and distorted milieu in which almost all of his [Greene’s] fictions take place” while Silverstein adds that the world of Greene’s thrillers is

a nightmare world where distinctions between the probable and the improbable, the actual and the fantastical, and the expected and the absurd, become blurred and finally vanish [...] a world which has assumed the nightmare dimensions of the thriller.¹⁰

Silverstein rightly states that “historical circumstances provid[e] the genesis for Greene’s thrillers”.¹¹ Yet, history is not just supplying blueprints for Greene’s plots, but also injecting a sense of urgency into the remaking of form. Reflecting on a pervading sense of social and political instability, disillusionment, and anxiety, Greene wrote in *Journey without Maps* (1936) that “today our world seems peculiarly susceptible to brutality”.¹² In 1940, shortly after the beginning of the Second World War, violence, instability, and chaos had become the characteristic features of the world according to Greene:

Violence comes to us more easily because it was so long expected – not only by the political sense but by the moral sense. The world we lived in could not have ended any other way. The curious waste lands one sometimes saw from trains – cratered ground round Wolverhampton under a cindery sky with a few cottages grouped like stones among the rubbish: those acres of abandoned cars round Slough: the dingy-fortune-teller’s on the first floor above the cheap permanent waves in a Brighton back street; they all demanded violence, like the rooms in a dream where one knows that something will presently happen – a door fly open or a window catch give and let the end in. [...] the hint of it [violence] had

⁹ Arthur Calder-Marshall, “The Works of Graham Greene”, *Horizon*, 1.5 (May 1940), 367-375. Calder-Marshall writes first about the characters populating Greene’s novels, calling them “Greenelanders”, stating that “Greenelanders are homeless men” (p. 368). Of Greeneland itself, Calder-Marshall suggests that it is “a world as harsh, treacherous, violent and cowardly to the adult mind, as the witch on the nursery landing was to the child” (p. 371).

¹⁰ See Brian Diemert, *Graham Greene’s Thrillers and the 1930s* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), p. 42 and Silverstein, “After the Fall”, p. 27.

¹¹ Silverstein, “After the Fall”, p. 28: “When we consider the historical circumstances providing the genesis for Greene’s thrillers—the rise of totalitarianism in eastern Europe for *Stamboul Train*; the Spanish Civil War for *The Confidential Agent*; the blitz and the activities of Nazi fifth columnists in London for *The Ministry of Fear*; the Cold War intrigues in Cuba preceding Castro’s revolution for *Our Man in Havana*—we can well understand why Greene saw an aura of fear, crime and violence engulfing the ‘real’ world as well as the fictional world of Le Queux.”

¹² Graham Greene, *Journey without Maps* (London: Vintage, 2010), p. 9.

to be there to satisfy that moral craving for the just and reasonable expression of human nature left without belief.¹³

Such sentiments and observations are incorporated into the fictional worlds created by Greene as is made explicit by one of his most frequently quoted lines from the *Ministry of Fear* (1943):

It sounds like a thriller, doesn't it, but the thrillers are like life – more like life than you are, this lawn, the sandwiches, that pine. You used to laugh at the books Miss Savage read – about spies, and murders, and violence, and wild motor-car chases, but dear, that's real life: it's what we've all made of the world since you died. I'm your little Arthur who wouldn't hurt a beetle and I'm a murderer too. The world has been remade by William Le Queux.¹⁴

Greene's remaking of the thriller world, which simultaneously plays on and resists conventions of the genre, is indicative of a broader concern that begins to pervade the mediascape in the late 1930s. The late 1930s, as Leo Mellor puts it, enter a phase of renewed literary experiments which are "revelatory of acute war-dread".¹⁵

Greene's *Brighton Rock* is arguably one of the key texts of the period, which reveals this sense of war dread and anxiety without ever explicitly mentioning any anticipation of military conflict. Although the novel has been described previously with special attention to its "cinematic" (visual) stylistic qualities, the novel's diegesis is first and foremost a world that is shaped and rendered sinister by sound.¹⁶ The novel establishes an explicit connection between murder and music and incorporates the characters' encounter with sound

¹³ Graham Greene, "At Home", in *Collected Essays* (London: Bodley Head, 1969), pp. 447-451 (pp. 447-448).

¹⁴ Graham Greene, *The Ministry of Fear* (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 65.

¹⁵ Leo Mellor, "The 1930s, the Second World War, and Late Modernism", in *The Cambridge History of Modernism*, ed. by Vincent Sherry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 142-160 (p. 154).

¹⁶ In his preface to *Brighton Rock*, J. M. Coetzee describes the diegesis as a predominantly visual rendition of Greeneland, arguing that chapters "characteristically end with the focus being pulled back from human actors to the greater natural scene" as if a camera were surveying the diegetic thriller world. See J. M. Coetzee, "Introduction", in Graham Greene, *Brighton Rock* (London: Vintage, 2004), pp. vii-xv (p. xi). Coetzee also discerns the influence of film directors such as Alfred Hitchcock and Howards Hawks on *Brighton Rock's* treatment of violence. He derives such observations notably from Greene's own statement that his descriptions of scenes were "capture[d] [...] with the moving eye of the cine-camera".

recording technology as an encounter with the symbolic inscription of evil. In the beginning of the novel, just before Hale dies, he meets the singer Ida (known to many by one of her stage names, Lily), or rather, Hale meets Ida's voice, when "somewhere out of sight a woman was singing, 'When I came up from Brighton by the train': a rich Guinness voice, a voice from a public bar."¹⁷ Ida's alcohol-fuelled voice provides the soundtrack to Hale's realisation that he is about to be murdered by Pinkie and his gang: "A wreath of orange blossoms, / When next we met, she wore;/ The expression of her features / Was more thoughtful than before."¹⁸ This initial link between murder and music, established in the first chapter of *Brighton Rock*, continues, when Hale is murdered while waiting for Ida outside a public washroom. Ida sings to herself in the mirror, "softly this time, in her warm winey voice",¹⁹ and by the time she has exited the bathroom, Hale has been killed. While the reader only receives the information of Hale's murder after the fact, the novel retrospectively suggests a parallel timeline that synchronises Ida's singing inside the women's washroom with Hale's gruesome death.

The novel cultivates the connection between violence and sound through Pinkie's attitude towards music. Diemert suggests that Pinkie's emotional reactions to music and his memory of singing in a church choir as a boy indicate "a repressed desire for goodness and peace",²⁰ but such a reading neglects the broader network of sinister connotations that the novel establishes between murder and music. When Pinkie walks on the pier, he hears an orchestra playing, but the music is registered as "wail[ing] in his guts".²¹ Music, when Pinkie encounters it next, "moaned in his head in the hot electric light, it was the nearest he knew

¹⁷ Greene, *Brighton Rock*, p. 4.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

²⁰ Diemert, *Graham Greene's Thrillers*, p. 120.

²¹ Greene, *Brighton Rock*, p. 20.

to sorrow”.²² Music saddens and threatens Pinkie, it is an unpleasant experience that he perceives as “wailing” and “moaning”. When he takes Rose out to dance, the live music makes him

stare[...] at the spotlight: music, love, nightingale, post-men: the words stirred in his brain like poetry: one hand caressed the vitriol bottle in his pocket, the other touched Rose’s wrist. The inhuman voice whistled round the gallery [...] It was he this time who was being warned; life held the vitriol bottle and warned him [...] *It spoke to him in the music*, and when he protested that he for one would never get mixed up, *the music had its own retort at hand* [my emphasis].²³

The singer’s voice is “inhuman” and sounds like a warning to Pinkie. The listening experience is aligned with a sense of constant danger that becomes more pressing as the sound is gradually personified, thus also gaining power over Pinkie. First, it is “inhuman”, then it appears as a medium through which a warning is communicated to him, and finally the music acquires its own sinister agency, having “its own retort at hand”.

The novel’s connection of violence and sound culminates in the gramophone record which becomes the material signifier of Pinkie’s cruelty. When walking on the pier, Rose asks for a recording of Pinkie’s voice as a souvenir of their wedding day, but Pinkie angrily dismisses her request. “He didn’t like the idea of putting anything on a record: it reminded him of finger-prints.”²⁴ His conviction that the recording would come to serve as a kind of evidence, leaving a permanent trace of his crimes, recalls the use of the phonograph in the court room sequence in *Evergreen*. While the musical film uses the recorded voice to resolve the criminal charges against the protagonist, *Brighton Rock* reconfigures this positivist attitude towards recording as a form of evidence from the point of view of the criminal anti-hero.

Despite Pinkie’s protestations, Rose insists on the recording: “Perhaps one day you

²² Greene, *Brighton Rock*, p. 48.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

might be away somewhere and I could borrow a gramophone. And you'd speak."²⁵ In this way, Rose subscribes to a nostalgic and romantic idea of voice recording, believing that a recording of Pinkie would not simply serve as a memento of their wedding day, but as an affirmation of his affection for her. When she insists on the recording, Pinkie

went into the box and closed the door. There was a slot for his sixpence: a mouthpiece: an instruction, 'Speak clearly and close to the instrument'. The scientific paraphernalia made him nervous. He looked over his shoulder and there outside she was watching him, without a smile. He saw her as a stranger: a shabby child from Nelson Place, and he was shaken by an appalling resentment. He put in a sixpence, and, speaking in a low voice for fear it might carry beyond the box, he gave his message up to be graven on vulcanite: 'God damn you, you little bitch, why can't you go back home for ever and let me be?' He heard the needle scratch and the record whirr: then a click and silence.²⁶

The text, characteristically matter of fact, stylistically emulates Pinkie's detached and cold manner as his reaction moves from discomfort and nervousness to resentment and hatred. Cammack suggests that the recording process reflects a form of violence, a forceful physical-material engraving of sound waves into a malleable fabric.²⁷ Sound recording's symbolic connotations of violence are enforced by Pinkie's cruel message: after his death, Rose fetches the recording of Pinkie's voice to listen to it. Unaware of the message awaiting her on the gramophone record, she walks "towards the worst horror of all".²⁸ The voice recording leaves no doubt about Pinkie's disgust for and hatred of Rose and his notorious inability to feel love or to show kindness. The recording, like the fingerprint, leaves a permanent, physical trace of deceit and violence, which is framed by the narrator as a crime much worse than murder or theft. Recalling Kurtz' dying voice that speaks of unnameable horror in Conrad's proto-modernist *Heart of Darkness* (1899), Pinkie's voice, forever etched into the record, remains the "worst horror of all".

²⁵ Greene, *Brighton Rock*, p. 193.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Susanne S. Cammack, "The Death of a Gramophone in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September*", *Journal of Modern Literature*, 40.2 (2017), 132-146 (pp. 134-135).

²⁸ Greene, *Brighton Rock*, p. 269.

In addition to this link between violence and sound recording suggested by Cammack, Sebastian Knowles argues that “from its infancy, the gramophone is associated by both of its progenitors [Edison and Berliner] with the utterances of the death-bed, and the recording of the dying”.²⁹ While preserving the voices of the dead seemed like a desirable function of sound recording at the turn of the century, twentieth-century writers and artists developed a more ambivalent relationship to it.³⁰ Chronicling the role of the gramophone in Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922), Woolf’s *Between the Acts* (1941), and Greene’s *Brighton Rock*, Knowles identifies the voice of the gramophone record as the “voice of death”.³¹ Following Benjamin and Adorno, who reflect on the aura of the artwork in the age of reproducibility, Knowles argues that modernist fiction reacts against sound recording: the aura of the work of art, of live music performance, is devalued and destroyed by sound recording and reproduction technology.³² According to Knowles, modernist writers began to associate sound recording with the process of reproducibility that diminished the aura of live performance. As sound recording enabled mass reproduction and commodification of both sound and text, the recorded voice came to signify death in the modernist fiction of Woolf, Joyce, Eliot, Lawrence (and, a little later, in Beckett, Huxley, and Greene).³³ Greene’s

²⁹ Sebastian D. G. Knowles, “Death by Gramophone”, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 27.1 (2003), 1-13 (p. 1). On this point, see also chapter six, “A Resonant Tomb”, in Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 287-333. Sterne writes that “if there was a defining figure in early accounts of sound recording, it was the possibility of preserving the voice beyond the death of the speaker” (p. 287).

³⁰ Jonathan Sterne, “Preserving Sound in Modern America”, in *Hearing History: A Reader*, ed. by Mark Michael Smith (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2004), pp. 295-318.

³¹ Knowles, “Death by Gramophone”, pp. 4-11.

³² On this point, see also Josh Epstein, *Sublime Noise: Musical Culture and the Modernist Writer* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), p. 67: “Eliot [...] fears not popular music itself, but its commodification and reliance on technology, which threatens to sterilize the ritual functions of art.”

³³ See Knowles, “Death by Gramophone”, pp. 2-4, 12-13. See also Epstein, *Sublime Noise*, p. 177. Epstein writes that Joyce’s references to sound reproduction technologies in *Ulysses* reveal the work’s “many anxieties about spectres, ghosts, and the speaking dead (the haunting presence of Kittler’s

Brighton Rock builds on such a modernist tradition that portrays the gramophone record as a symbol of death and sound recording as the physical-material emblem of violence. Weaving a connection between sound and violence, Pinkie's voice from the grave brings neither love nor comfort (as Rose hopes it will), but serves as the conclusive piece of evidence which confirms his brutality and detachment. Reaching back to modernist representations of sound recording, the gramophone record in the novel also signifies a metacommentary on the painful circularity of both literary and political history. Greene's integration of sound and sound recording as markers of violence reaches back to the modernist tropes and reflections of his literary predecessors. As we will see in the following sections, both Jean Rhys and Patrick Hamilton continue and modify this legacy in their renditions of character psychology.

"Cheap gramophone records starting up in your head": *Good Morning, Midnight*

The notion of painful circularity and a traumatic living and reliving of violent experience is taken up in Jean Rhys' *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939). The novel explores the psyche of Sophia "Sasha" Jansen, an impoverished middle-aged woman who returns to Paris after many years in the hope of a quiet holiday. Having been abandoned by her husband Enno after the death of their baby, Sasha struggles to come to terms with her past. The novel charts her experience of being caught up in a deterministic world in which the odds are decidedly against her. Sound takes centre stage in her wanderings through Paris as inanimate objects gain agency and voice:

'Quite like old times,' the room says. 'Yes? No?'³⁴

It shouts 'Anglaise', my hat. And my dress extinguishes me.³⁵

'writing without a subject'), as well as its attempts to process the glitchy 'dead noise' that both disrupts and enables communication, 'records of all that ever wherever was'".

³⁴ Jean Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* (London: Penguin, 2016), p. 3.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

'While we live, let us live,' say the bottles of wine. When we give, let us give. Besides, it isn't my face, this tortured and tormented mask. I can take it off whenever I like and hang it up on a nail. Or shall I place on it a tall hat with a green feather, hang a veil over the lot, and walk about the dark streets so merrily? Singing defiantly 'You don't like me, but I don't like you either. Don't like jam, ham or lamb, and I *don't* like roly-poly. . . . Singing 'One more river to cross, that's Jordan, Jordan. . . .' I have no pride – no pride, no name, no face, no country. I don't belong anywhere. Too sad, too sad. . . . [...] All this time I am reading the menu over and over again.³⁶

Good Morning, Midnight shares *Brighton Rock*'s interest in character psychology, recording the gradual unwinding of a traumatised mind, but it is more overtly concerned with the repudiation of modernist tropes and themes in its representation of sound.³⁷ Seeking to console herself with drink and handsome strangers, Sasha wanders the streets of Paris. Her only goal is

to have a programme, not to leave anything to chance – no gaps. No trailing around aimlessly with cheap gramophone records starting up in your head, no 'Here this happened, here that happened'. Above all, no crying in public, no crying at all if you can help it.³⁸

Sasha is confronted with two worlds – her past and her present, both of which become increasingly hard to separate as she loses her grip on reality. Sasha's past, her memories of "here this happened, here that happened" are presented as "gramophone records starting up in [her] head". Such a metaphor seems apt, not just for Sasha, but for all of Rhys' female protagonists in her fiction of the 1930s.³⁹ Rhys' fiction of the period chronicles stories of abandonment, failed relationships, and emotional and physical abuse, expressing women's

³⁶ Rhys, *Good Morning*, p. 33.

³⁷ Both *Brighton Rock* and *Good Morning, Midnight* overlap significantly with the emerging noir style in the wider interwar mediascape, because noir, as Philip Simpson notes, derives its story from a "protagonist caught up in a deterministic world" where "events conspir[e] against him or her", evoking "a sense of fatalistic inevitability". See Philip Simpson, "Noir and the Psycho Thriller", in *A Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Lee Horsley and Charles J. Rzepka (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 187-197 (p. 192).

³⁸ Jean Rhys, *Good Morning*, p. 8.

³⁹ The relevance of sound for understanding Rhys' complete oeuvre of the 1930s goes beyond the scope of this chapter, but it is interesting to note that the initial title for *Voyage in the Dark*, the novel directly preceding *Good Morning, Midnight*, was "Two Tunes" according to Rhys' friend and editor Carole Angier. See Carole Angier, "Introduction", in Jean Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark* (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. v-xiv (p. vii).

confusion and trauma by including references to popular music, multiple voices, the soundscape of the city, and fragments of different languages, most notably French and German alongside English.⁴⁰ Reconfiguring stock characters of the 1930s entertainment industry, Rhys' female characters modify the reader's perspective on the type of the revue girl or the aspiring singer and dancer that we encountered in the discussion of *Vile Bodies*, *Evergreen*, and *Elstree Calling*: some of Rhys' protagonists, notably Marja in *Quartet/Postures* (1928) and Anna Morgan in *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), are or were chorus girls who become victims of a showbusiness that exploits them and sound recording technology that threatens them.

Taking up the modernist idea of recorded sound as the symbolic inscription of violence, *Good Morning, Midnight* revolves constantly around the gramophone record as a metaphor for traumatic memory. Both Kittler and Cammack discuss how memory and sound recording had been linked as early as 1880 in the writing of philosopher Jean-Marie Guyau, who reads the phonographs' late nineteenth-century reproduction of sound analogously to the reliving of subconscious memory as "invisible lines [...] incessantly carved into the brain cells".⁴¹ When Sasha attempts to prevent the "gramophone record from starting up in [her] head", what she means is to prevent the reliving of traumatic memory. In representing memory as a gramophone record, the novel metaphorically expresses the sheer endless and repetitive nature of Sasha's physical wanderings in Paris as well as the circular motion of her thoughts and emotions. Yet, far from merely

⁴⁰ See for instance Rhys, *Good Morning*, p. 6: "But one mustn't put everything on the same plane. That's her great phrase. [...] Of course not. And this is my plane. . . . Quatrième à gauche, and mind you don't trip over the whole in the carpet. That's me. [...] 'Il ne faut pas mettre tout sur le même plan. . . ." See also p. 18: "Jesus, Help me! Ja, ja, nein, nein, was kostet es, Wien ist eine sehr schöne Stadt, Buda-Pest auch ist sehr schön, ist schön, mein Herr, ich habe meinen [sic] Blumen vergessen, aus meinen grossen Schmerzen mach ich die kleinen Lieder, homo homini lupus (I've got that one, anyway), aus meinen grossen Schmerzen homo homini doh ré mi fah so la ti doh . . ."

⁴¹ See Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, tr. and with an introduction by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 31. Kittler suggests that this idea also emerges as a central theme from Rainer Maria Rilke's modernist piece "Primal Sound" (1919). On this point, see also Cammack, "The Death of a Gramophone", 132-146.

reproducing the trope of the modernist flâneuse, the metaphor is degraded: Sasha devalues her own memory as a “cheap gramophone record”, undercutting possible highbrow connotations and suggesting Rhys’ self-reflective and critical take on some of the strategies of representation and imagery established by her modernist predecessors.

Following her monotonous programme, Sasha visits the same cafés, restaurants, and cinemas repeatedly to avoid emotional and psychological breakdown and to reintroduce some sense of stability into her life. “At four o’clock next afternoon I am in a cinema on the Champs-Élysées, according to the programme. Laughing heartily in the right places. It’s a very good show and I see it through twice.”⁴² Despite following the schedule she has invented for herself, the record of her memory hardly ever stops playing: “I walk along, remembering this, remembering that, trying to find a cheap place to eat – not so easy round here. The gramophone record is going strong in my head: ‘Here this happened, here that happened....’”⁴³ Sasha wants nothing more than for the world to be quiet, telling herself that what she needs is a “quiet” stay in Paris.⁴⁴ In a desperate attempt to shield herself from memory, Sasha seeks silence, and yet there is noise everywhere in the Parisian cityscape. Acoustic stimuli, particularly music, bring back painful thoughts and memories:

Walking to the music of *L’Arlésienne*, remembering the coat I wore then [...] The orchestra was playing *L’Arlésienne*, I remember so well. I’ve just got to hear that music now, any time, and I’m back in the Café Buffalo, sitting by that man. And the music going heavily. And he’s talking away about a friend who is so rich that he has his photograph on the bands of his cigars. A mad conversation.⁴⁵

Translating a listener’s experience of musical variations onto the page, the phrase returns only a few pages later, slightly altered and more ironically self-conscious, when Sasha is “walking to the music of *L’Arlésienne* [...] Pull yourself together, dearie. This is late

⁴² Rhys, *Good Morning*, p. 9.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24: “Now, quiet, quiet. . . . This is going to be a nice sane fortnight. ‘Quiet, quiet,’ I say to the clock when I am winding it up, and it makes a noise between a belch and a giggle.”

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

October, 1937, and that old coat had its last outing a long time ago".⁴⁶ Music thus accompanies Sasha's memory walks through the streets of Paris, not least, because her husband Enno "was a chansonnier before he became a journalist".⁴⁷ Zimring suggests that Rhys' postwar fiction takes "music scenes as inspirations for modernist interiority".⁴⁸ While this is certainly an appropriate reading, it is important to recognise the emphasis on music, sound reproduction, and "audio-vision" in Rhys' earlier work of the 1930s. Indeed, the music of Sasha's memory-walks and her devaluation of the trope of the modernist flâneuse arguably aims less for a performance of purely modernist interiority and, instead, enacts the relationship between sound and vision encountered by the novel in the late modernist period.

When first married, Sasha can only think of herself as a musical instrument

"tuned up to top pitch. Everything is smooth, soft and tender. Making love. The colours of the pictures. [...] Tuned up to top pitch. Everything tender and melancholy – as life is sometimes, just for one moment. . . . And when we get to Paris; *when – we – get – to- Paris. . .*"⁴⁹

Now, abandoned by Enno and mourning the death of their baby, Sasha returns to this metaphor. With her circumstances so drastically changed, she cannot help but think of herself as a broken instrument: "Yes, I am sad, sad as a circus-lioness, sad as an eagle without wings, sad as a violin with only one string and that one broken."⁵⁰ Rehearsing these different similes, Sasha settles on the broken instrument, because it most appropriately denotes her downward spiral, suggesting that in a world that is filled to the brim with sound, her desperation and trauma can really only find expression in the idea of a broken instrument

⁴⁶ Rhys, *Good Morning*, p. 74.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁴⁸ Rishona Zimring, "Making a Scene: Rhys and the Aesthete at Mid-Century", in *Jean Rhys: Twenty-First-Century Approaches*, ed. by Erica L. Johnson and Patricia Moran (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp. 40-58 (p. 40).

⁴⁹ Rhys, *Good Morning*, p. 96.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

as something that used to belong to, but is now unable to participate in the soundscape enveloping it.

Although the pervasive sound style of *Good Morning, Midnight* suggests the novel's embeddedness in a twentieth-century media culture that is heavily reliant on sound, studies of Rhys' work still privilege a discussion of metaphors of cinematic vision, notably because Sasha tells readers of her "film-mind".⁵¹ Yet, the context in which Sasha uses references to cinema to describe her thoughts and memories is often less rigorously examined. While Sasha's "film-mind" may invite critical readings of Rhys' narrative style as replicating strategies of representation that purely translate cinema's visual means of storytelling (such as montage or cross-cutting) onto the page, Rhys complicates these interpretations by rendering Sasha's "film-mind" distinctly audio-visual. Driving in a taxi with a young man, Sasha asks him to "whistle that tune, will you? The one you said is the march of the Legion".⁵² Only when he obliges does her mind begin to wander. While she is listening to the tune, she remembers an encounter with another man who was also whistling that song.⁵³ Only when the sound begins does she think of her "film-mind. . . . ('For God's sake watch out for your film-mind. . . .')".⁵⁴ In Rhys' text, image and sound firmly belong together.⁵⁵

⁵¹ See, for instance, Lisa Stead, *Off to the Pictures: Cinema-going, Women's Writing and Movie Culture in Interwar Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016). Stead devotes a chapter to the discussion of Rhys' fiction of the 1930s and its relationship to the cinema. However, Stead is primarily interested in the visual aspect of cinema and how this is reflected in Rhys' novels by "examining the interrelations between Rhys's literary appropriation of technological aspects of cinematic vision and her depiction of cinema and cinema-going itself directly within her texts". Stead, *Off to the Pictures*, p. 107.

⁵² Rhys, *Good Morning*, p. 145.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ The fact that Sasha's film-mind importantly consists of the interplay of image and sound is also stated by Judith Kegan Gardiner, who writes that "throughout the novel, Sasha makes us conscious of the tunes and pictures that float through her head. This is her 'film-mind'". See Judith Kegan Gardiner, "*Good Morning, Midnight; Good Night, Modernism*", *boundary 2*, 11.1/2 (Autumn 1982 - Winter 1983), 233-251 (p. 238).

While Sasha's "film-mind" enacts the audio-vision of the 1930s and 1940s mediascape, Rhys herself experienced and recorded sound as a central element of the 1940s entertainment industry. In her unfinished autobiography, she reports a visit to a local cinema:

Yesterday at the cinema in the one and threes, watching the usual thing. Biff. Bang. Why, you dirty-double-crossing. Bang. Biff. I am so sick of fights. It is a funny sort of . . . I cannot remember the word. Anodyne. Lovely lovely word. Anodyne. Sitting in the darkness in the one and three. Bang, Biff. Revolver shots. Surrounded by small boys, infants in arms who wail, fat mothers, old age pensioners. After a long speech from the screen, small boy, 'I wanna know what the lady was saying.' Mother, 'Don' know, ducks.' Small boy, 'What was the gentleman saying, Mum?' Mother, 'You keep quiet or you'll get smacked.' You can't do this to me, You dirty double-crossing.⁵⁶

While Rhys does not give her readers a value judgment on the sound film, her textual representation of this visit to the cinema noticeably draws on sound and noise in the movie theatre. By listing the sound effects of the revolver, the long speech from the screen, the babies wailing, and the audience's problems with understanding the soundtrack, the text indicates that Rhys' memory of this experience is substantially grounded in sound. Rhys' sensitivity to sound in this example resonates with the sonic worlds experienced by Sasha in *Good Morning, Midnight*. Leo Mellor writes of Rhys' novel that it is characteristic of late modernism insofar as it "is [...] an attempt to capture aesthetically the problem of contingency, of not knowing (or believing) in grand narratives or shaping purposes".⁵⁷ Indeed, the text repeatedly returns to the question of contingency: the narrative integration of sound examines sensory, and especially acoustic, overstimulation, which impedes Sasha's sustained attempts at making sense of the world surrounding her.

"And there was no music": *Hangover Square*

As outlined in the introduction of this thesis, Hamilton's novel is one of the key late modernist texts suggesting the interplay of new forms of literary representation and

⁵⁶ Jean Rhys, *Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), p. 160.

⁵⁷ Mellor, "The 1930s", pp. 153-154.

synchronised sound's diffusion and consolidation in the 1930s and 1940s mediascape. In *Hangover Square*, the reader encounters the metaphor of a film soundtrack breaking down to represent and psychologise the experience of mental illness. Here, I want to return to the passage quoted in the introduction of this thesis to discuss Hamilton's novel in greater detail:

Click! . . . Here it was again! He was walking along the cliff at Hunstanton and it had come again . . . Click! . . . Or would the word 'snap' or 'crack' describe it better? It was a noise inside his head, and yet it was not a noise. It was the sound which a noise makes when it abruptly ceases: it had a temporarily deafening effect. It was as though one had blown one's nose too hard and the outer world had suddenly become dim and dead. And yet he was not physically deaf: it was merely that in this physical way alone could he think of what had happened in his head. It was as though a shutter had fallen. It had fallen noiselessly, but the thing had been so quick that he could only think of it as a snap or crack. [...] A film. Yes, it was like the other sort of film, too – a 'talkie'. It was as though he had been watching a talking film, and all at once the sound-track had failed. The figures on the screen continued to move, to behave more or less logically: but they were figures in a new, silent, indescribably eerie world. Life, in fact, which had been for him a moment ago a 'talkie', had all at once become a silent film. And there was no music.⁵⁸

The novel commences with a sound, the "click!" experienced by George Harvey Bone on Christmas Day 1938. This sound recurs throughout the text, sometimes in variations, as a "snap", "pop", or "crack". Each "click" forms the beginning (and sometimes the end) of George's bouts of schizophrenia.⁵⁹ Reminiscent of a Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde plot, the usually gentle and sensitive George dips in and out of a second personality whose aim it is to kill the cold and calculating aspiring actress Netta Longdon, with whom George is hopelessly infatuated. Treated cruelly by Netta and her circle of fascist friends, George ultimately kills her.

Whenever George undergoes one of his schizophrenic episodes, the narrator describes this experience by referring to the breaking down of a film soundtrack. Steeped in the experience of the late 1930s mediascape, life, for George, is a "talkie" which suddenly

⁵⁸ Patrick Hamilton, *Hangover Square: A Story of Darkest Earl's Court* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 15.

⁵⁹ The small noises that introduce George's schizophrenic episodes also recall the white noise and slight acoustic distortion that is produced when a needle is first placed onto a gramophone record.

ceases to play with sound. George's experience of schizophrenia turns the world into a silent film:

A silent film without music – he could have found no better way of describing the weird world in which he now moved. He looked at passing objects and people, but they had no colour, vivacity, meaning – he was mentally deaf to them. They moved like automatons, without motive, without volition of their own. He could hear what they said, he could understand their words, he could answer them, even; but he did this automatically, without having to think of what they had said or what he was saying in return. Therefore, though they spoke it was as though they had not spoken, as though they had moved their lips but remained silent.⁶⁰

The novel pursues the idea that schizophrenia is experienced as a “mental deafness”, an experience that moves the realm of everyday noise and conversation into the realm of silence. It is not simply that the world appears as a “silent film”, but as a silent film “without music”. The absence of music as well as other forms of sound indicates the complete and utter estrangement George experiences. The idea of “mental deafness” is particularly interesting as it aligns George's psychological disorder with his hearing faculties and his ability to process and understand sound. This idea is perpetuated consistently throughout the novel:

Snap! . . . Click! – just like that . . . [...] *Click!* . . . It was as though his head were a five-shilling Kodak camera, and someone had switched over the little trigger which makes the exposure. He knew the sensation so well, yet he never failed to marvel at its oddity. Like a camera. But instead of an exposure having been made the opposite had happened – an *inclosure* – a shutting down, a locking in. [...] A moment before his mind had heard and answered: now he was mentally deaf and dumb.⁶¹

George experiences “inclosure”, the sensation of being locked in his body, which is predominantly felt through the absence of sound. He feels “mentally deaf and dumb” (but, notably, not visually impaired) denoting his inability to hear, to listen, and to process the soundscapes of his environment. George dubs these intervals his “dead moods”.⁶²

⁶⁰ Hamilton, *Hangover Square*, p. 17.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 16. There is an interesting parallel between George's experience of these “dead moods” and actual patients' experience of a similar phenomenon. Louis Sass writes that “individuals with schizophrenia often describe themselves as feeling dead yet hyperalert – a sort of corpse with insomnia: one such patient spoke of having been ‘translated’ into what he called a ‘death-mood’”. See

The novel establishes a clear set of connotations for sound and silence. While the intervals of schizophrenia, experienced as a silent film, carry connotations of death, mystery, and numbness, George's everyday life, experienced as a sound film, is clear, bright and sane:

Click! . . .

Hullo, hullo – here we are! – here we are again!

He was on Hunstanton station and it had happened again. Click, snap, pop – whatever you like – and it all came flooding back! The sound-track had been resumed with a sudden switch; the grim, dreary, mysterious silent film had vanished utterly away, and all things were bright, clear, vivacious, sane, colourful and logical around him, as he carried his bag, at three o'clock on Boxing Day, along the platform of the little seaside terminus.⁶³

Every time the soundtrack resumes in George's life, he is hyperaware of the sounds and sights of his surroundings and enjoys the new listening experience. Everything is as if "heard by him for the first time".⁶⁴ By reintegrating George back into the flow of everyday life, hearing and listening become markers of sanity and well-being. Indeed, George feels happy and elated whenever he is able to hear again:

What a noise that engine made! And yet it exhilarated him. He always had these few moments of exhilaration after his brain had 'blinked' and he found himself hearing and understanding sounds and sights once again. After that first tremendous rush of noise and comprehension – exactly like the roar of clarification which would accompany the snatching away, from a man's two ears, of two oily blobs of cotton wool which he had worn for twenty-four hours – he took a simple elated pleasure in hearing and looking at everything he passed.⁶⁵

While the novel predominantly centres on this dichotomy between the experience of sound film and the experience of silent film to map George's mental illness, sound and sound technology's potential for psychologising emotion and cognition is exploited further

Louis Sass, *Madness and Modernism. Insanity in the Light of Modern Art, Literature, and Thought*, rev. edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. xxvii.

⁶³ Hamilton, *Hangover Square*, p. 20.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

by the text in other contexts, too. Remembering how he fell in love with Netta, George reminisces:

She was telling him about herself, the small part she was playing in the film. Then it happened. At one moment she was just something he was talking to and looking at; at the next she was something of which he was physically sensible by some means other than that of sight or sound: she was sending out a ray, a wave, from herself, which seemed to affect his whole being, to go all through him like a faint vibration. It was as though she were a small amateur wireless station, and he alone was tuned in to her and listening. And the message she was tapping out was, of course, her loveliness. [...] She continued talking, and he answered her clearheadedly, and all the time she was talking and all the time he was answering, he was 'listening in'.⁶⁶

Falling in love with Netta, to George, felt like he was “listening in”. Expressing his devotion and attentiveness towards Netta, George describes his affection as a kind of attunement to her whole being. The only way he can grasp the sensation of falling in love with her is to think about himself as the receiving end of her invisible sound waves, a “faint vibration”. It is sound waves and sound technology such as radio which become suitable metaphors for George’s falling in love. The novel makes a point of presenting George not as a talker, but as a sensitive listener who enjoys hearing others and the world surrounding him. A character of his time, George is so attuned to the soundscape of the interwar entertainment industry, that sound is denoted as “normal” whereas his bouts of schizophrenia are described as a silent film without music, the latter expressing the severity and disturbing nature of his illness. It is the absence of sound that is most distressing to George. Since Hamilton has configured the psychology of his character as a “listener”, the loss of sound appears particularly apt in capturing the qualities of alienation and disconnection which are frequently discussed as the hallmarks of psychosis and schizophrenia.⁶⁷

In the course of the novel, aided by the unfeeling treatment he receives from Netta

⁶⁶ Hamilton, *Hangover Square*, p. 50.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 249, 256, 257. On alienation and disconnection as important markers of schizophrenia, see recent discussions in Sass’ revised edition of *Madness and Modernism* (2017) and Angela Woods, *The Sublime Object of Psychiatry: Schizophrenia in Clinical and Cultural Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

and some of her acquaintances, George's schizophrenic breaks become progressively worse:

Crack! . . .

It almost knocked him down. It made him reel. It was as though he had been hit by something. And yet he knew what it was. It was only his head, cracking back. And with the crack everything came flooding, rushing, roaring back – noise, colour, light, the fury of the real everyday world. It was almost more than he could bear. [...] That crack! Usually it was a little click, a pop, a snap. But this time his brain had almost burst in two: it had practically knocked him off his feet. These attacks were getting worse. He was an ill man.⁶⁸

The sound of the “crack!” takes on a more sinister nature as George experiences its physical, violent impact when “his brain had almost burst into two”. George is not so much fazed by the length of time that he has been experiencing schizophrenic intervals, but by the volume and violence of the sound in his head which, as he notes, is getting louder and more painful throughout the course of the novel. A little “click” or “pop” is suddenly transformed into a loud and forceful “crack” which emphasises the severity of George's condition. Finally, George experiences his last transition from normal everyday life into a schizophrenic break that will ultimately lead him to kill Netta and her lover Peter before taking his own life:

CLICK! . . .

[...] It was an extraordinary sensation, but he was used to it. It was as though a shutter had rolled down on his brain, and clicked tight. It was as though the sound-track in a talkie had broken down and the still-proceeding picture on the screen of existence had an utterly different character, mysterious, silent, indescribably eerie.⁶⁹

The severity and finality of this last transition is expressed through capital letters, a feature used frequently by Hamilton to lend additional emphasis to a word. The metaphor for George's mental illness consistently remains the same from beginning to end, hinging on the idea that the lived experience of schizophrenic illness can be represented as the soundtrack of a talking film which has broken down.

The key point of *Hangover Square's* metaphor is not to claim that schizophrenic illness functions exactly like the breaking down of a soundtrack, but to establish an

⁶⁸ Hamilton, *Hangover Square*, p. 170.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

imaginative network that represents *the experience* of mental illness as *the experience* of watching a sound film with the soundtrack suddenly breaking down. Although by its very nature as a prose text the novel is dealing in words, its inventory of language is based on extra-textual media experience. Patricia Waugh writes of *Hangover Square* that

[i]n this novel, everything feels mediated; technology is the vehicle for the distribution of mood thought of as 'wired'. Lives are lived through wires, phones, reproduction of talk. Images of the 'net' and the mediated and distributed network of modern communications, wireless waves, magnetic resonances, phone lines string themselves across the locked-in, the screened, distant and celluloid, the cinematic performance; it is as if to be in this world is to have the experience of an experience, to live in a condition of 'as if', the world a set of images running on a screen.⁷⁰

Waugh's comments draw attention to the tentative way in which the novel phrases its representation of a murderer's consciousness. The "as if" and "as though" carefully weaves a network of imaginative associations and metaphorical expression that frames George's illness within the sound-silence dichotomy.

As a text of its time, *Hangover Square* draws on the frightening experience of utter silence when a medium or an experience is meant to generate or reproduce sound. This condition also recalls Hitchcock's sophisticated use of silence in *Blackmail*, which expresses the menacing and isolating connotations of silence in a world that is wired for sound. The "silent film" in which George finds himself during his schizophrenic episodes is a grim and sinister world, and the repeated switch from sound to silence becomes a means of expressing George's sense of displacement and isolation that is a condition of his mental illness. In this way, *Hangover Square* uses the familiarity with both silent and sound film of its contemporary readers to create new associative and imaginative networks for psychologising the gradual unravelling of a character's mind. Hamilton's novel firmly embeds itself into a new representational ontology through its rendition of character psychology: the character George Harvey Bone has fully embraced the omnipresence of sound in modern culture, which, in turn, also leads to a perception of complete silence as

⁷⁰ Patricia Waugh, "Precarious Voices", p. 201.

sordid and sinister.⁷¹

The preceding discussion has argued that late modernist "writings of anxiety" integrate and deploy representations of sound to present worlds and minds that have become destabilised and violent. These texts draw on tropes, themes, and imagery of their modernist predecessors, but also modify and adapt these themes and tropes in an attempt to position themselves within a wider literary trajectory. In the following section, I explore how the late modernist sound worlds of Greene, Rhys, and Hamilton resonate with film noir's sound style in the cinema. I first introduce the idea of noir as a sound style and then discuss elements of the soundtracks of *Gaslight* (1940), *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), *Double Indemnity* (1944), and *The Third Man* (1949) to demonstrate the parallel development of the late modernist novel and film noir.

Noir's Sound Style

Far from limiting itself to the realm of the Hollywood thriller in the classical studio era, the idea of "film noir" spans a variety of different film genres, ranging from the 1920s ("proto-noir") to the new millennium ("neo-noir").⁷² Although the term was coined as a post-war

⁷¹ The 1945 film adaptation of *Hangover Square* turns George Bone into a composer and pianist to express his attachment to sound and his fears and anxieties over silence. Although the film significantly alters the plot and setting of the novel, the text's foundational dichotomy between sound and silence is translated onto the screen by turning the protagonist into a musician. See *Hangover Square*, dir. by John Brahm, starring Laird Cregar and Linda Darnell (20th Century Fox, 1945).

⁷² There are, for instance, Western and Science Fiction noir movies: *Pursued*, dir. by Raoul Walsh, starring Teresa Wright and Robert Mitchum (United States Pictures and Warner Bros., 1947) and *Station West*, dir. by Sidney Lanfield, starring Dick Powell and Jane Greer (RKO Pictures, 1948) are examples of Western noir; *Soylent Green*, dir. by Richard Fleischer, starring Charlton Heston and Leigh Taylor-Young (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1973) and *Blade Runner*, dir. by Ridley Scott, starring Harrison Ford and Rutger Hauer (Warner Bros., 1982) may be classed as Science Fiction noir films. In their seminal study on the classical Hollywood film, Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson also suggest that noir is not a genre, but something more of a style which can apply to different genres. See Bordwell et al., *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, p. 75. See also Andrew Spicer, *Film Noir* (Harlow: Pearson, 2002), pp. 234-236: Spicer draws up a list of antecedents to British noir which begins with Hitchcock's *The Lodger*. In a separate section on the "Genesis of British Film Noir", Spicer writes that "Hitchcock's British crime thrillers were influential, notably the expressionist *The Lodger* (1926) and *Blackmail* (1929)" (p. 178). Since the new millennium, a number of neo-noir films have been released: e.g. *Mulholland Drive*, dir. by David Lynch, starring Naomi Watts and Justin Theroux (Universal

response of French film critics to a group of five American thriller movies of the 1940s, it quickly migrated into different national film traditions.⁷³ In spite of, or perhaps because of, noir's diversity, film scholars have repeatedly tried to define what "noir" actually *is*. Based on Gombrich's reflections on style from an art-historical point of view, Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson suggest that it is productive to attempt definitions of noir by focussing on what it is *not*. In other words, they suggest that noir style is in fact best defined by its non-conformity, its repudiation of standards and norms, and its difference from other contemporary productions of the classical studio era.⁷⁴ Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson suggest some key differences between noir and other films of the classical studio era: noir's rejection or problematisation of "psychological causality", noir's "challenge to heterosexual romance", and its "rejection of the motivated happy ending".⁷⁵ These differences resonate with noir's presentation of an unreliable world that is perhaps best described as chaotic,

Pictures, 2001), *Sin City*, dir. by Robert Rodriguez and Frank Miller, starring Benicio del Toro and Bruce Willis (Miramax, 2005), and *Drive*, dir. by Nicolas Winding Refn, starring Ryan Gosling and Carey Mulligan (FilmDistrict, 2011).

⁷³ Naremore provides a list and further discussion of the context. The five films were *The Maltese Falcon*, dir. by John Houston, starring Humphrey Bogart and Mary Astor (Warner Bros, 1941), *Double Indemnity*, dir. by Billy Wilder, starring Fred MacMurray and Barbara Stanwyck (Paramount Pictures, 1944), *Laura*, dir. by Otto Preminger, starring Gene Tierney and Dana Andrews (20th Century Fox, 1944), *Murder, My Sweet*, dir. by Edward Dmytryk, starring Dick Powell and Claire Trevor (RKO Pictures, 1944) and *The Lost Weekend*, dir. by Billy Wilder starring Ray Milland and Jane Wyman (Paramount Pictures, 1945). These films were screened in the summer of 1946 in Paris, inspiring Nino Frank and Jean-Pierre Chartier to publish the first two critical essays on film noir. See James Naremore, *More than Night: Film Noir in Its Contexts*, updated edn (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 13-16. The term "noir" is, of course, also deeply connected to literature for two reasons. Film critics tend to point out that the idea of "film noir" was initially born as an analogy to the *série noire* by French publisher Gallimard. It was a series of hard-boiled American detective and crime fiction that was translated into French and published by Gallimard in the 1940s. Spicer also notes that "the work of the American 'hard-boiled' writers, such as Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and James M. Cain was frequently used as the basis for films noirs [sic]." See Spicer, *Film Noir*, pp. 2, 5. See also Naremore, *More than Night*, pp. 12-17. The idea of noir as an important part of different national film cultures has gained momentum more recently with the publication of collections such as *European Film Noir*, ed. by Andrew Spicer (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013) and *East Asian Film Noir: Transnational Encounters and Intercultural Dialogue*, ed. by Chi-Yun Shin and Mark Gallagher (London: Tauris, 2014).

⁷⁴ See Bordwell et al., *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, p. 75.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

morally ambiguous, and violent.⁷⁶ Such a world is arguably generated through noir's rejection of psychological causality, motivated happy endings, and audience expectations of normative gender stereotypes and heterosexual romance plots.

Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson suggest that noir's repudiation of classical cinematic norms also applies to film's formal and aesthetic strategies: noir style entails a "criticism of classical technique" vis-à-vis lighting, editing, space and narration, denoting a rejection of the "neutrality and 'invisibility' of classical style".⁷⁷ On this point, the pride of place is usually given to the *visual* elements of noir. Spicer's monograph *Film Noir*, for instance, primarily attends to visual style, iconography, and typical visual patterns:

The label 'film noir' designates a cycle of films that share a similar iconography, visual style, narrative strategies, subject matter and characterisation. Their iconography (repeated visual patterning) consists of images of the dark, night-time city [...]. The visual style habitually employs high contrast (chiaroscuro) lighting, where deep, enveloping shadows are fractured by shafts of light.⁷⁸

Similarly, Jim Leach's account of "British Noir" reflects an emphasis on visual elements in descriptions of noir. Leach writes that "most definitions of noir [share] 1) a corrupt and threatening urban setting in which crime is endemic, and 2) a visual style emphasising low-key lighting, deep shadows and unusual camera angles".⁷⁹ James Naremore's insightful monograph *More than Night* suggests that "our collective memory of noir style probably has less to do with a camera technique than with a kind of *visual iconography*" [my emphasis].⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Naremore, for instance, summarises that brutality, "violent confusion, ambiguity, and disequilibrium" were taken as the "basis of noir" from its early critical history. Naremore here draws on the seminal work of Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton. See Naremore, *More than Night*, p. 21. See also Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton, *A Panorama of American Film Noir, 1941-1953*, tr. by Paul Hammond (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2002). Borde and Chaumeton first published their seminal study in France in 1955 as *Panorama du film noir américain*.

⁷⁷ Bordwell et al., *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, p. 76.

⁷⁸ Spicer, *Film Noir*, p. 4.

⁷⁹ Jim Leach, "British Noir", in *International Noir*, ed. by Homer B. Pettey and R. Barton Palmer (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp. 14-35 (p. 14).

⁸⁰ Naremore, *More than Night*, p. 168. Naremore's work is helpful in its critical interrogation of noir as a "discursive construct". He writes that noir "belongs to the history of ideas as much as to the

Complementing such critical emphasis on noir's visual characteristics (iconography, camera work, and lighting techniques), the remainder of the chapter centres firmly on noir's sound style and the idea of difference and non-conformity as it emerges from the specific use of the soundtrack. Richard Ness suggests that noir sound reacts *against* musical scoring practices in classical cinema. It does so, for instance, by employing fewer instruments, abandoning melody, and by making use of modernist, atonal composition or (a little later) jazz-influences.⁸¹ Overall, the work of noir sound gives acoustic expression to the experience of a morally and epistemologically unstable world. From the discussion of Greene, Rhys, and Hamilton above, emerge a number of ways in which sound participates in the novel's expression of anxiety, psychological trauma, confusion, and threat in the late 1930s and early 1940s. These texts are revising and reconfiguring modernist takes on sound and sound technology to convey the confusing and violent worlds in their fictions of anxiety, demonstrating the late modernist novel's attempts to position itself within a larger literary trajectory.

The remainder of the chapter shifts our attention to the noir soundtrack of the 1940s, arguing that film noir's sound style develops in parallel with the late modernist novel's expression of chaos and violence: the noir soundtrack enacts "patterns of nonconformity" that go against previous cinematic idioms.⁸² My reading of noir's sound strategies establishes a connection between the late modernist novel's deployment of sound for conveying character psychology and the emergence of noir's sound style in the cinema. These two media forms show a parallel concern with sound, seeking out ways in which they can acoustically position themselves distinctively within a longer cinematic and literary trajectory whilst presenting a diegetic world that reflects the period's mood.

history of cinema". It is "an important cinematic legacy and an idea we have projected onto the past" (p. 11).

⁸¹ Richard R. Ness, "'A Lotta Night Music': The Sound of Film Noir", *Cinema Journal*, 47.2 (Winter 2008), 52-73 (pp. 52-55).

⁸² See Bordwell et al., *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, p. 75.

The discussion centres on central elements of noir sound style which can be found in both British and American noir productions throughout the 1940s. While this thesis is predominantly concerned with British film, the late 1930s and 1940s experienced a surge of exchange and co-production between Hollywood and the British film industry. Indeed, the British Board of Trade did agree a more favourable “deal” for American studios when it came to the Second Cinematograph Films Act in 1938 which effectively made special allowances for American producers to encourage their investments in and support of British productions.⁸³ As a consequence, Hollywood film as well as a number of Anglo-American co-productions found their way more easily into British cinemas and the British market became one of Hollywood’s most important targets, notably resulting in a number of big-budget American productions that relied on British source material, British actors, or British directors.⁸⁴

Early forays into noir’s sound style can be heard in the British production *Gaslight* (1940).⁸⁵ Directed by Thorold Dickinson, the film was based on Patrick Hamilton’s stage play of the same name. The play and film derive their suspense from the psychological manipulation and emotional abuse of a young wife by her husband, a process which became subsequently known as “gaslighting”. The film’s (and play’s) success inspired an American remake in 1944 featuring Ingrid Bergman, but the earlier film version remains of critical value as an example of a British proto-noir style which adheres more closely to Hamilton’s stage play.⁸⁶ The film music for the 1940 version was composed by Richard Addinsell, who

⁸³ See Sarah Street, *British National Cinema*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 11-12.

⁸⁴ See Tom Ryall, *Britain and the American Cinema* (London: Sage, 2001), pp. 111-113. Consider, for instance, *Rebecca* (1940), which was produced by David O. Selznick in the United States, but employed Hitchcock as director, was based on du Maurier’s successful novel, and cast Laurence Olivier as the male lead.

⁸⁵ *Gaslight*, dir. by Thorold Dickinson, starring Diana Wynyard and Anton Walbrook (Anglo-American Film Corp., 1940). Both the film and stage play were released in the United States as *Angel Street*.

⁸⁶ Spicer lists *Gaslight* (1940) as an example of early British noir. The focus on violence and murder within the family unit may also be inherited from a wider Gothic tradition which has been noted as a formative influence on the emergence of noir in the twentieth century. See Spicer, *Film Noir*, pp. 10-

would later be known for composing the “Warsaw Concerto” for the film *Dangerous Moonlight* (1941). Addinsell’s score for *Gaslight* departs from classical scoring practices: it uses music primarily as a tool for conveying mood, rather than underpinning characterisation or action. In contrast, classical Hollywood scoring practices, which were largely influenced by romantic and neo-romantic music, would use symphonic scoring and musical leitmotifs to enhance characterisation, to underscore action, to convey emotion, to enforce narrative continuity, and to smooth over cuts and changes in place or time.⁸⁷ As a result of these different tasks, the score of classical Hollywood film tends to underpin large parts of each movie, its non-diegetic presence often taking precedence over diegetic sound.⁸⁸ A prominent example for this practice are the scores of Erich Wolfgang Korngold,

11 and Thomas Schatz, *Boom and Bust: American Cinema in the 1940s* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 232-239. Schatz writes of a “female Gothic tradition” as relevant for the emergence of noir. Spicer claims that “fundamentally, like its American counterpart, British film noir developed from hard-boiled crime stories and Gothic fiction, but their polarity was reversed: in Britain the Gothic strand was, initially at least, the more powerful and important.” Spicer, *Film Noir*, p. 178.

⁸⁷ Both Brown and Kalinak describe the romantic and neo-romantic influence on Hollywood scores of the 1930s and 1940s. Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Max Steiner, Franz Waxman, and Alfred Newman were all composing in a (neo-)romantic, symphonic idiom for film. See Royal S. Brown, *Overtones and Undertones: Reading Film Music* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 96-118 and Kathryn Kalinak, *Settling the Score: Music and the Classical Hollywood Film* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), pp. 66-110. Kalinak writes that “[w]ith the exception of American-born Alfred Newman, the development of the classical Hollywood film score in the crucial decade of the thirties was dominated by a group of composers displaced from the musical idiom in which they had been trained. It was in Hollywood that they were able to reconstitute what John Williams has called ‘the Vienna Opera House [in] the American West’”. See Kalinak, *Settling the Score*, p. 100. Brown adds that “[i]t is hardly surprising, given the Viennese origins of early Hollywood film composers such as Max Steiner and Erich Wolfgang Korngold and the Middle European origins of many others such as Franz Waxman, that much of the music that accompanied early sound film had a decidedly late romantic cast to it. Such diverse composers as Wagner, Puccini, Johann Strauss, Jr., Richard Strauss, and Gustav Mahler all left their mark on melodic, harmonic, and instrumental profiles. Nondissonant if mildly chromatic harmonies, monophonic textures, broad, sweeping melodies, and lush instrumentations were the order of the day, both because of the aesthetic proclivities of the ‘first wave’ composers and because of the tastes of both studio and music department heads”. Brown, *Overtones and Undertones*, p. 96. For a concise summary of classical Hollywood scoring practices, see also Carol Flinn, “The Most Romantic Art of All: Music in the Classical Hollywood Cinema”, *Cinema Journal*, 29.4 (1990), 35-50.

⁸⁸ *Gone with the Wind*, dir. by Victor Fleming, starring Clark Gable and Vivien Leigh (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1939) has a running time of 222 minutes, but only 30 minutes are without music (i.e. about 86% of the film are scored). *The Sea Hawk*, dir. by Michael Curtiz, starring Errol Flynn and Brenda

who composed for a number of highly successful Swashbucklers starring Errol Flynn (e.g. *Captain Blood* in 1935, *The Adventures of Robin Hood* in 1938, *The Sea Hawk* in 1940).

Kalinak explains that

In *Captain Blood*, for instance, Korngold scores the principle [sic] leitmotif for Peter Blood, a brass fanfare, relying on the power of the horns to suggest heroism; uses the pathos of two violins for the love theme; and exploits the gypsy associations of the cimbalom to evoke the exoticism of the pirates on Tortuga.⁸⁹

[...] there are leitmotifs for Peter Blood as well as for King James and King William; for all the important locations, Port Royal (also used to accompany the governor of Jamaica), Tortuga, Virgen Magra, England, and France; for the love between Peter Blood and Arabella Bishop; and for the torturous slavery on Colonel Bishop's plantation (which doubles as a motif for Colonel Bishop).⁹⁰

Anticipating noir's musical style, Addinsell foregoes the leitmotif-based scoring outlined by Kalinak and instead uses music to invoke a particular (in this case sinister) mood. The music is also used relatively sparsely in the film with music's absence allowing for the audience's full attention to be directed towards crucial sound effects, such as the husband secretly walking in the attic over his wife's bedroom to make her believe that she is imagining the sound of the footsteps and slowly losing her mind. There are also some interactions between diegetic and non-diegetic music which draw attention to the film's frame and disrupt ideals of continuity editing and of the invisibility (or inaudibility) of classical style. Two crucial confrontations between husband and wife take place in settings in which diegetic music is played. As the tension between them rises, the diegetic music stops but, after a short pause, is replaced by non-diegetic scoring. This happens, for instance, in a climactic scene where the couple attend a piano recital. The pianist plays, creating diegetic sound, while the husband begins to whisper to his wife, accusing her of having stolen his pocket watch (Fig. 11).

Marshall (Warner Bros., 1940), has a running time of 128 minutes and contains only 28 minutes without music (approximately 78% of the film are scored). On this point, see also Brown, *Overtones and Undertones*, p. 97. He also draws on *Gone with the Wind* as an important example.

⁸⁹ Kalinak, *Settling the Score*, p. 101.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 105.



Figure 11: The couple attend a piano recital in *Gaslight*. Screenshot by the author.

When she rejects his accusations, the discussion becomes more heated and she suffers a nervous breakdown. The pianist in the diegetic world stops his performance and the couple leave the concert venue in silence. A cut shows them travelling home and horns introduce a return of non-diegetic scoring that fills the silence in the diegetic world. The transition between these two sequences of music is jarring rather than fluid, underscored by the change of location. The film draws attention to its use of non-diegetic music rather than trying to render it intangible.

While *Gaslight* thus contains some proto-noir sound elements, Alfred Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) and Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (1944) more firmly enact noir's repudiation of classical cinematic sound style.⁹¹ *Shadow of a Doubt* was one of Hitchcock's early American productions. It remains significant for counting amongst Hitchcock's personal favourites and for transferring noir motifs from the urban landscape to rural, small-town America. The film traces the efforts of Uncle Charlie, the "Merry Widow Murderer", to escape the police by hiding in his sister's family home in the small town of Santa Rosa. Upon arriving in Santa Rosa, his favourite niece, who is also called Charlie,

⁹¹ *Shadow of a Doubt*, dir. by Alfred Hitchcock, starring Teresa Wright and Joseph Cotten (Universal Pictures, 1943); *Double Indemnity*, dir. by Billy Wilder, starring Fred MacMurray and Barbara Stanwyck (Paramount Pictures, 1944).

suspects that he is the sought-after murderer and begins to investigate. The film focusses on a murderer within the family unit, making the point that moral corruption and violence are not exclusive to the urban landscape, but can also appear in the small-town family home. The film's soundtrack enacts noir's repudiation of the classical, neo-romantic film score: the composer Dimitri Tiomkin uses Franz Lehár's "Merry Widow Waltz" extensively for the film's soundtrack, but Lehár's piece is alienated from its original setting and cultural context. Hitchcock's direction and Tiomkin's composition turn the piece into something sinister: the theme tune of a murderer on the run.

The opening credits feature a non-diegetic sequence in which a group of men and women in Edwardian evening dress dance while Lehár's famous waltz is playing (Fig. 12). The title sequence dissolves into a cityscape. A cut follows to show Uncle Charlie lying on his bed. This exposition establishes a connection between the waltz and Uncle Charlie, but the precise nature of this connection appears unclear at this early stage of film.



Figure 12: Title Sequence of *Shadow of a Doubt*. Screenshot by the author.

When Uncle Charlie arrives at his sister's house in Santa Rosa, he gives his niece an emerald ring which he stole from one of his victims. Little Charlie discovers that the ring is engraved and begins to suspect that her uncle acquired it through unsavoury means. The dancing

couples now reappear and Lehár's waltz plays as non-diegetic music. The dancers slowly dissolve into an upper body shot of Uncle Charlie (Fig. 13), creating two images which seem to merge with each other. The scene recalls the film's opening credits and strengthens the visual and acoustic connection between Uncle Charlie and Lehár's waltz.



Figure 13: Uncle Charlie and the dancing couples in *Shadow of a Doubt*. Screenshot by the author.

A cut to the dinner table shows little Charlie helping to serve dinner. Suddenly she begins humming the “Merry Widow Waltz”, turning the nondiegetic piece of music into a part of the diegetic world. She keeps humming, but struggles to recall the melody's title: “I can't get that tune out of my head [...]. Do you know what it is, Uncle Charlie?” Charles suggests that “It's the Blue Danube Waltz”, but when his niece rejects this suggestion and recognises the piece, she is prevented from saying its name by Uncle Charlie tipping over a glass on the table. His actions are not enough to drive the waltz from his niece's mind. Later, she is still humming the tune.

The actual title of Lehár's waltz, *Lippen schweigen* (Lips remain silent), turns the piece into a subtle, musical comment by both Tiomkin and Hitchcock on the film's plot which

largely derives from Uncle Charlie's attempts to keep his niece quiet. This broader interest in silence vis-à-vis crime also links back to Hitchcock's exploration of silence in *Blackmail*, as discussed in chapter one of this thesis. The first foreshadowing of how Uncle Charlie will fail to keep his niece's lips shut occurs when little Charlie begins humming the "Merry Widow Waltz". As Brown notes,

things begin to break down for Uncle Charlie when the 'Merry Widow Waltz' metamorphoses from nondiegetic music into diegetic music as Uncle Charlie's niece [...] begins to hum it after Uncle Charlie has made the fatal (for him) mistake of wedding her to his universe by giving her a ring taken from one of his victims.⁹²

The waltz moves between the diegetic and non-diegetic worlds of the film signifying Uncle Charlie's loss of control over the situation.⁹³ The music's ability to move from nondiegetic accompaniment to an element actively shaping the diegesis also turns it into a plot device. Young Charlie humming the tune, identifying it correctly as the "Merry Widow Waltz", and being faced with her Uncle's strange reaction, sets her detective work into motion. The waltz establishes a connection between Uncle Charlie and his niece and triggers her suspicions in the story world. In addition, the music acts as a non-diegetic clue for cinema audiences and destabilises the border between the story world of the film and its narration. In narratological terms, we might say that the way in which the film uses the waltz contributes to a blurring of the levels of story and discourse, a process which creates instability for the viewer. The film thematically collapses the ideal of the safe core family unit, but it also formally collapses notions of narrative stability by using the music to blur the boundaries between story and discourse. This is a similar move to *Gaslight*'s earlier use of sound which draws attention to both non-diegetic and diegetic soundscapes, thus destabilising the idea of classical style's intangibility and seamless continuity.

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, Lehár's operetta *The Merry Widow* and its final piece, the "Merry Widow Waltz", were popular with international

⁹² Brown, *Overtones and Undertones*, p. 72.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

audiences. The comic operetta had had successful runs in Vienna, London, New York, Hamburg, Berlin, Buenos Aires, and elsewhere since its premiere in 1905:

Decades before the rise of the international megamusical, Franz Lehár's operetta *Die lustige Witwe* (*The Merry Widow*) traveled the world, becoming a franchise surrounded by a constellation of commodities. Within two years of its opening in Vienna on 30 December 1905, the romantic tale of Hanna Glawari's second chance at love was playing in theatres across Europe [...] [and] colonial communities in Africa and Asia.⁹⁴

Brown remarks that "1940s audiences [...] would have immediately recognized the 'Merry Widow Waltz'".⁹⁵ Hitchcock's film and Tiomkin's score use the public awareness and long-lasting commercial success of the piece while fundamentally altering its connotations. In Lehár's operetta, the waltz is a merry affair, giving musical expression to the happy reunion of lovers and presenting a grand finale to the comic operetta. Hitchcock's film, however, turns the waltz into the murderer's theme song. The waltz turns noir with its concomitant connotations of instability, insecurity, threat, and the breakup of moral codes of conduct. The film modifies the cultural connotations associated with the waltz, which takes on a substantially darker meaning in the film. *Shadow of a Doubt* constructs an acoustic metacommentary on how classical film scoring is turning sinister, telling its audiences that grand orchestral and (neo-)romantic scoring practices are no longer suitable for the themes and stories that emerge from the thriller of the 1940s.⁹⁶

Although the choice of Lehár's waltz as the main theme for the film may initially seem a rather naïve scoring choice (the "Merry Widow Waltz" for the "Merry Widow Murderer"), its specific application in the film is complex and sinister: the waltz serves as a recurring motif for both the murderer and the film's detective figure. Crogan remarks that

⁹⁴ Marlis Schweitzer, "'DARN THAT MERRY WIDOW HAT': The On- and Offstage Life of a Theatrical Commodity, circa 1907-1908", *Theatre Survey*, 50.2 (2009), 189-221 (p. 189).

⁹⁵ Brown, *Overtones and Undertones*, p. 73.

⁹⁶ The dark secret music might bear is also a foundational theme in one of Hitchcock's last British films before the war, *The Lady Vanishes* (1938). In this film, a secret message that may decide over Britain's fate in a looming war is encoded in a song, known only to the eponymous lady who disappears. See *The Lady Vanishes*, dir. Alfred Hitchcock, starring Margaret Lockwood and Michael Redgrave (United Artists, 1938).

the waltz expresses the psychological double-bind between Uncle Charlie and his niece, affirming the film's projection of doubles.⁹⁷ As the waltz becomes associated with the film's detective figure and killer, the music implicates both characters in the moral instability of the diegetic world. In contrast to Korngold's leitmotif-based scoring practices that assign distinctive musical patterns to hero and villain, *Shadow of a Doubt* uses Lehár's waltz to forego such a practice and to forge an acoustic connection between the killer and his adversary, suggesting that there is no clear dividing line between good and evil.

Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (1944) is one of the five films screened in post-war France that led to the coinage of the term "film noir". The film adds to our understanding of noir's sound style by employing two important strategies: a manipulation of audience expectations and voiceover narration. In the final showdown between Walter Neff and Phyllis Dietrichson, she shoots him in the arm, but then she is unable to pull the trigger to deliver a second, deadly shot. Neff walks towards Phyllis and asks her why she did not pull the trigger a second time. The camera shows a close up of Phyllis' face over Neff's shoulder. With tears in her eyes, Phyllis admits that "I never loved you, Walter, you or anyone else. I am rotten to the heart...until a minute ago when I couldn't fire that second shot". Phyllis' confession is accompanied by Miklós Rózsa's "Phyllis Theme". Played by cellos, the music's low and soft tone suggests that what will follow is an admission of love and a reunion of Phyllis and Neff (Fig. 14).

⁹⁷ Patrick Crogan, "Between Heads: Thoughts on the Merry Widow Tune in *Shadow of a Doubt*", *Senses of Cinema*, 6 (May 2000). <<http://sensesofcinema.com/2000/conference-for-the-love-of-fear/heads/>> [accessed 24 October 2018].



Figure 14: Phyllis and Walter in *Double Indemnity*. The music suggests that the couple's reconciliation is imminent. Screenshot by the author.

The viewer's expectation of an imminent reconciliation is heightened when, during Phyllis' speech, the music is augmented by further string instruments joining in. Gaining in volume, the music sounds more fully orchestral, and invokes, albeit only briefly, the classical Hollywood tradition of grand symphonic, neo-romantic love themes. The two embrace as Phyllis asks Neff to "hold [her]". The music lulls the audience into a sense of security. Then, suddenly, while still embracing Phyllis, Neff coldly says "Goodbye, Baby" and shoots her twice (Fig. 15).



Figure 15: Walter shoots Phyllis in *Double Indemnity*. Screenshot by the author.

The gunshots are heard, but not seen, and their harsh and abrupt reverberation forcefully interrupts the music that suggested, a few seconds ago, a romantic moment during which the lovers might reconcile. Brown rightly describes this scene as “one of the most brutal film/music manipulations in cinema”.⁹⁸ This sonic manipulation transfers the instability of the diegetic world onto the viewer by refusing to meet audience expectations of a happy ending through the reconciliation of lovers and by unsettling the viewer’s certainty of being able to interpret the film’s visual and acoustic clues correctly.

The soundtrack’s manipulation of the audience is enhanced further by Walter Neff’s dictaphone confession which begins as voiceover narration during the film’s exposition. Throughout *Double Indemnity*, the camera regularly returns to shots of Neff in the present day of the diegesis, recording his confession with the dictaphone (Fig. 16). As Neff speaks into the dictaphone, the film cuts to the past of the diegesis, visualising Neff’s memories as long flashback sequences. As the action progresses, the film’s past and present are slowly converging and the viewer becomes aware that the voiceover narration is provided by the injured Neff who is now facing criminal charges for murder and insurance fraud.

⁹⁸ Brown, *Overtones and Undertones*, p. 130. Barbara Beeghly Fox also discusses this moment from a musical point of view, emphasising the initial tenderness of the exchange between Walter Neff and Phyllis and the shocking and abrupt nature of the gunshots. Fox also draws on Brown as her main source. See Barbara Beeghly Fox, “Obsession and Crisis: Film Music and Narrative in *Double Indemnity* (1944), *Laura* (1944), and *Psycho* (1960)” (unpublished master’s dissertation, University of Nevada, 2005), pp. 24-25.



Figure 16: Walter records his confession with a dictaphone. Screenshot by the author.

The voiceover narration recounts Neff's affair with Phyllis and the murder they planned and committed together. Gradually, as the film's narrated past merges with Neff's present, the dictaphone confession draws attention to the film as a fabricated product of Neff's storytelling. The voiceover narration in *Double Indemnity* invites audiences to witness Neff's psychological disintegration alongside his descent into murder and fraud motivated by his desire for Phyllis.⁹⁹ As the film is informed by Neff's highly subjective narration, his role as the film's narrator-focaliser arguably produces the film's framing of Phyllis as the quintessential femme fatale. As was argued in chapter three for the case of documentary film, the act of voiceover narration is never an objective undertaking. Here, noir's voiceover narration similarly co-constructs the object of its narrative. Audiences encounter Phyllis as she is constructed by Neff's narration, which, in turn, is inflected with his desire, guilt, and anger at having been shot by Phyllis.

The film self-consciously brings the unreliability and subjectivity of the voiceover narration into focus by showing Neff recording his testimony with a dictaphone. *Double*

⁹⁹ Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson note that "voice-over narration, flashbacks, and subjective point-of-view" all serve to convey "the protagonist's mental states" in film noir. See Bordwell et al., *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, p. 76.

Indemnity here also draws attention to the making of its soundtrack and the technological processes involved in recording and relaying voiceover narration. As we have seen in the earlier discussions of the phonograph in *Evergreen* and the gramophone record in *Brighton Rock*, sound recording devices and recordings themselves can function as pieces of evidence, express or affirm identity, and form a metacommentary on the underlying technological processes of synchronised sound film. In the case of *Double Indemnity*, Neff's dictaphone confession renders explicit the technological process involved in filmic narration and renders visible the source of the film's voiceover commentary. In this manner, the film undermines the intangibility of classical cinema's formal strategies and underlying technological processes.

The Third Man

The different sound strategies discussed in the previous section are all employed in Carol Reed's *The Third Man*, which is now considered a crucial British contribution to film noir.¹⁰⁰ Co-produced by Alexander Korda and David O. Selznick, it was "the highest grossing British film of its release year, 1949".¹⁰¹ The film's soundtrack is an excellent example for how noir sound is chiefly mobilised to convey the instability, uncertainty, and moral ambiguity of the noir world. Written by Graham Greene, the film tells the story of pulp fiction writer Holly Martins who comes to Vienna to visit his friend Harry Lime, only to be told that Lime died in a car accident. Martins discovers that Lime has been acting as the central figure in a penicillin racket and has now faked his own death to evade a police investigation. In the film's famous showdown sequence, Lime is hunted and killed by Martins and the police in the underground sewers of Vienna. While Robert Krasker's cinematography, with its play of light and shadows, jarred camera angles, and distorted camera focus, is most frequently

¹⁰⁰ *The Third Man*, dir. by Carol Reed, starring Joseph Cotten, Orson Welles, and Alida Valli (British Lion Film Corporation/ StudioCanal, 1949).

¹⁰¹ Spicer, *Film Noir*, p. 177.

cited as the main reason for characterising this production as film noir, Falk suggests that “no discussion [...] about the impact of this film [...] can be complete without mention of Anton Karas’s zither music”.¹⁰²

In an interview, Carol Reed recounted how he discovered Karas by chance in a small Viennese restaurant where the musician played zither for dinner guests. Reed liked the music and wondered, given that the zither was so “typical of Vienna”, whether it would be possible to create the whole soundtrack for the film with only one instrument. Karas played different tunes for Reed until they eventually settled on a melody Karas had composed about 15 years earlier. This piece of music would later be known as “The Third Man Theme” or “The Harry Lime Theme”. It is a challenging piece of music:

What’s driven other zither players mad (they can never figure out how it’s done) is that he [Karas] played the tune, then with an earphone rerecorded it, adding thirds. In the ordinary way, no zither player could do it.¹⁰³

Although the film score uses the zither as its single instrument, suggesting relative musical simplicity, it actually consists of a number of layers which rely on an initial recording and at least one re-recording to add further notes, meaning that the piece is not replicable by a single player in a live performance in the exact way that it is heard in the film. Like its namesake in the film, the Harry Lime theme is elusive and just out of grasp for a musician seeking to copy it in a single performance.

Reed’s decision to use only a single instrument moves against ideals of classical, symphonic film scoring which remained in place until well into the mid-twentieth century. Both the starkly decimated number of instruments and the choice of a slightly unusual

¹⁰² Quentin Falk, *Travels in Greeneland: The Cinema of Graham Greene*, rev. edn (London: Quartet Books, 1990), p. 90.

¹⁰³ Charles Thomas Samuels, Interview with Sir Carol Reed, in *Encountering Directors* (New York: Putnam, 1972), pp. 163-178 (pp. 171-172). The interview was conducted by Samuels on 23 October 1971 in London.

instrument are fairly typical of noir scoring by the end of the 1940s.¹⁰⁴ The specific choice of the zither for *The Third Man* seems apt as it was originally a popular nineteenth-century household instrument in Southern Germany, Austria, Slovakia, and Switzerland. The zither gained popularity and prestige as a virtuoso concert instrument with Johann Strauss II's *Geschichten aus dem Wiener Wald* (1868), a waltz composition which included a zither solo, connecting the instrument more firmly with the city of Vienna in the minds of its audiences. The zither holds various, sometimes paradoxical cultural meanings: as a folk instrument, the zither signifies simplicity, harmony, and folk musical tradition, while its virtuoso concert solo in Strauss' famous waltz also links the instrument to a concert-hall tradition and to the city of Vienna specifically. This versatility of the zither, the ability to appear as both simple folk and complex virtuoso instrument, also finds expression in the tonal variety and range which can be achieved with this instrument in its different tunings.

William Whitebait reviewed *The Third Man* in 1949 in the *New Statesman*, writing of the opening credits and the musical score:

What sort of music it is, whether jaunty or sad, fierce or provoking, it would be hard to reckon; but under its enthrallment the camera comes into play [...]. A corpse floats under a bridge. And all the while (a hundred seconds, maybe) that little tune or another little tune sprung from the first, goes nipping away, indefinitely. To its liveliness, as to the jaunt of an old ballad that may enshrine the bloodiest tragedy, a train draws in and a man steps down [...] The tune that's already ours introduces *him* – for, to the world, he doesn't after all look so gay. His steps lead him to a cemetery where earth is being shovelled on his best friend, and that lilt in the blood, as he glances from face to face, has lapsed to a minor hum. But it will revive. It will see us through the whole adventure. At moments the plucked chords will instil a plangent horror. The unseen zither-player (whose name by the way is Anton Karas) is made to employ his instrument much as the Homeric bard did his lyre. [...] Karas's improvisations, Graham Greene's characters and dialogue, and Carol Reed's narrative skill with camera, actors, and background form a collaboration of genius and provide tensions that lift this film high out of its thriller class. Here is that orchestral handling of image, talk, and music that one has looked for, so often in vain, since its early apparition in *Sous le toit de Paris*.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ *Spellbound*, for instance, uses the Theremin, a rare and largely unknown instrument, to sonically express the experience of mental illness in the film. See *Spellbound*, dir. by Alfred Hitchcock, starring Ingrid Bergman and Gregory Peck (United Artists, 1945).

¹⁰⁵ William Whitebait, "The Movies. 'The Third Man,' at the Plaza. 'The Blum Affair,' at the Academy", *The New Statesman and Nation*, 10 September 1949, p. 272.

The unique achievement of the music is that it is “indefinably” and unsettlingly ambiguous, serving to both emphasise the sense of post-war disillusionment and instability created by the film and to simultaneously counteract such a mood. The music can sound cheerful and sad at the same time, often producing conflicting or contradictory impressions in conjunction with the picture. It is, in fact, at times acting quite similarly to the musical manipulation of audiences that we have encountered in both *Shadow of a Doubt* and *Double Indemnity* above: although the zither theme may sound cheerful at times, it is fundamentally associated with the villain Lime whose greed and desire for profit and power has led to the death of hundreds of people. The tension produced by the music, a tension Whitebait duly describes as the music’s capacity to sound “jaunty or sad, fierce or provoking”, maps onto the immanent ambiguity and tension audiences experience through Lime’s character and actions past and present. In the famous ferris wheel sequence, Lime shares his views with Martins: he has no regard for human life, money is his sole objective. The calm, even humorous delivery of Lime’s explanation by Orson Welles clashes with the brutality and cold detachment of the character. The music consistently expresses this tension, sometimes tricking and manipulating audiences through its “liveliness”, before drawing them back to the realisation that they are witnessing a grim and deadly conspiracy. In an interview with Royal S. Brown, the film composer John Barry also observes the tension outlined above by understanding the zither score as an acoustic counterpoint to the image, stating that its “nineteenth-century, mid-European kind of nursery-rhyme feel [...] played against the picture”.¹⁰⁶ As the catchy melody becomes increasingly associated with the secretive and immoral character of Lime, it produces a disorientating and jarring effect for the audience.

“The Harry Lime Theme” became a world-wide success. In a memo dated 25 November 1949, co-producer David O. Selznick could hardly believe his good fortune:

Cannot commence to tell you sensation caused by Karas’s zither music for “The Third Man”. It is the rage of England and has already sold more record copies than any other record in entire history of record business in England. It is widest-played dance music in England. It is

¹⁰⁶ Brown, *Overtones and Undertones*, p. 330.

biggest single success of film, and ads here use “Hear Harry Lime Theme” etc. in type dwarfing all other billing. It is one of those unpredictable, tremendous sensations that I cannot expect any of you to understand who have not been here. Entirely unrelated newspaper articles and editorials, even on politics, continually refer to it. Inevitably, this success will be repeated [in] America if we are prepared for it. We should be able to make a fortune out of this music.¹⁰⁷

The central role played by the zither music, its involvement in the creation of noir style, is visualised in the very beginning of the picture when the opening credits are shown over close-up footage of a zither’s strings being played (Fig. 17).



Figure 17: Title Sequence of *The Third Man*. Screenshot by the author.

In a twist on classical Hollywood scoring practices that employ different leitmotifs for different characters and places, as in the example of *Captain Blood* quoted above, *The Third Man* exclusively employs “The Third Man Theme” in different variations. The music, whilst becoming firmly associated with Harry Lime, also accompanies Holly Martins’ movements in Vienna, particularly throughout the first half of the film before Martins discovers that Lime is still alive. The zither music signifies both Lime’s absence and presence, but also appears more broadly as the soundtrack of a bleak post-war Vienna, its disillusioned population, and the criminal activities taking place just below the surface of the city. The

¹⁰⁷ Falk, *Travels in Greenland*, pp. 91-92.

film does not interweave different leitmotifs, as would be typical of the classical Hollywood score, but uses the same piece for different characters and actions, for Vienna as a setting, and to signify both absence and presence of the criminal Lime. As such, the music renders audible the film's moral ambiguity and the unstable world that Martins finds himself in: there are no clear acoustic markers to distinguish good from evil, or rather, all acoustic markers take audiences back to the film's central villain, Harry Lime. In this way, the music implicates the setting, the characters, and even the detective figure Martins into Lime's criminal world.

While Karas' music plays such an important role in the film, *The Third Man* also uses sound effects, silence, and the deliberate absence of music in sophisticated ways that enhance the film's noir style, thus also taking us back to Hitchcock's use of sound and silence in *Blackmail* and to Hamilton's dichotomy of sound and silence in *Hangover Square*. The famous showdown sequence in which Lime tries to hide from his pursuers in the Viennese sewerage system uses sound effects, particularly echoes, to evoke the cavernous, catacomb-like tunnel systems and their claustrophobic atmosphere and confusing layout. This is one of very few sequences in the film which is not accompanied by Karas' music, thus drawing attention purely to the soundscape of the underground tunnel system. Voices and footsteps echo while the sound of flowing water, constantly changing in volume, accompanies Lime's attempts to escape.



Figure 18: The underground tunnel system in *The Third Man*. Screenshot by the author.

Having wandered around the tunnel system, Lime struggles to decide where to turn next: voices and sounds echo from everywhere (Fig. 18). Lime stands still for a moment, listening intently and trying to determine which path might lead to freedom. The camera cuts to close-ups of the different tunnel entrances, with the sound of voices emanating from each tunnel. After some deliberation, Lime turns into one of the tunnels, but his choice proves fatal. Martins shouts to his friend in the dark to surrender, but Lime, unwilling to give in, shoots a police officer. The sound of the shot helps the police to locate Lime's position more accurately. Another shot fired by Major Calloway injures Lime, who crawls out of sight in one final attempt to escape. Martins finds him and the two men look at each other. The camera cuts to Calloway who hears the final gunshot echoing through the underground tunnel system (Fig. 19). Martins has shot his old friend, but the scene remains off-screen with the gunshot sound the only indication of what has taken place.



Figure 19: Calloway hears the gunshot that kills Harry Lime. Screenshot by the author.

The absence of music in this sequence heightens suspense and draws viewers' attention to the few acoustic clues that the scene provides. The absence of the music also indicates that Lime's constant, and often invisible, presence in the story is about to end. The multitude of echoes in the underground tunnel system becomes central in this sequence, but these echoes do not help the characters to navigate underground. Instead, the soundscape of the tunnel system creates a sense of confusion and disorientation. The final gunshot which kills Lime becomes the acoustic marker of death as the shot is heard, but the act of killing remains unseen. Using music, sound editing, and sound effects in this way, *The Third Man's* soundscape plunges audiences into the chaotic, unstable, and fundamentally ambiguous world of post-war Vienna.

Patterns of Difference

The events of the Spanish Civil War and British appeasement efforts increasingly produced a sense of impending political crisis and fear of military conflict. These anxieties did eventually culminate in Britain's declaration of war on Germany in 1939, which intensified the sense of a world on the brink of collapse. In this cultural climate, sound was increasingly

mobilised by film and literary fiction to express anxiety, trauma, violence, and fear. In this political and cultural climate, both the late modernist novel and film noir address the question of how to respond aesthetically to their specific socio-cultural, political, and historical circumstances. This chapter has argued that a reading for sound connects selected works of late modernist fiction by Graham Greene, Jean Rhys, and Patrick Hamilton with an emerging “film noir” style in the cinema. In a parallel move, both these late modernist texts and film noir deploy sound to give expression to destabilised, traumatised and violent worlds and minds. Greene’s *Brighton Rock* establishes a connection between sound and violence that culminates in the gramophone record of Pinkie’s voice as the permanent, physical-material trace of his brutality and inhumanity. Rhys’ *Good Morning, Midnight* uses the metaphor of the gramophone record in her exploration of female psychological trauma, but consistently devalues this metaphor and its highbrow modernist connotations as “cheap”. Rhys’ text is firmly embedded in the twentieth-century entertainment culture, but her character’s “film-mind” is a restless and hopeless one. Hamilton’s *Hangover Square* takes these themes a step further as the schizophrenic protagonist George Harvey Bone experiences his mental illness as the breakdown of a film soundtrack. These texts draw on and reconfigure modernist themes and tropes in an attempt to define themselves and their position within a wider literary trajectory.

In parallel, the gradual emergence of film noir in the 1940s draws on sound as a crucial device for giving expression to its typically unstable, ambiguous, and unreliable diegetic worlds. Noir’s sound style draws on classical scoring practices, prominently modifying, subverting, and reconfiguring cinematic sound. These sonic “patterns of nonconformity” reject previous cinematic idioms in an attempt to find new ways to aesthetically convey a “period sense” of anxiety.¹⁰⁸ From its early traces in *Gaslight* to the quintessential *The Third Man*, film noir uses sound to convey a sinister and anxious mood, to manipulate and disorientate audiences, to create ambiguity, and to alter the cultural

¹⁰⁸ See Bordwell et al., *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, p. 75.

connotations of well-known music, as in the case of *The Merry Widow Waltz*, thus demonstrating some of the ways in which the sonic idioms of the past need to be remade for the present. As both film and the novel are grappling with the question of how to respond to their socio-cultural and political circumstances, they seek out ways of defining themselves against some of the cinematic and literary traditions and representational strategies that have come before them.

Chapter Five

“These are not Hollywood Sound Effects”: The Politics of Wartime Soundscapes

The preceding chapter has considered how late modernist texts by Greene, Rhys, and Hamilton as well as noir films of the 1940s use sound in their efforts to express a world of instability, anxiety, trauma, and threat, a mood fuelled by the sense of impending war. I have argued that both film and the novel integrated and deployed sound noticeably through patterns of difference and non-conformity. As the world of the past was leading into an increasingly precarious political situation, the strategies of representation of both noir film and the late modernist novel began more firmly to define themselves against their literary and cinematic predecessors. While the films and texts discussed in the previous chapter have engaged with the fictional worlds emerging just before and during the Second World War in light of Graham Greene’s retrospective diagnosis that “the world we lived in could not have ended any other way”, this chapter now explores further the terminus of war from a different angle. Considering the work of sound in state-sponsored propaganda film and Home Front writing, I suggest that both propaganda film and the late modernist novel share a concern with real or imagined wartime soundscapes, but that their representation and use of sound in this context substantially differ. I argue that government-sponsored film offered structured and politicised takes on wartime sound with the aim of casting its audiences as a united community of listeners. In contrast, late modernist fiction by Elizabeth Bowen, Patrick Hamilton, and George Orwell refuses to deploy sound as a structuring principle to construct a narrative of the national community at war. Instead, the novel underscores the disruptive and dangerous implications of sound and interrogates the misuses of sound in the context of total war.

“He could not think without it”

In Elizabeth Bowen’s *Heat of the Day* (1948), the antagonist Harrison attends a wartime open-air concert by a “Viennese orchestra”.¹ For Harrison, the “sound [...] had become a necessary circumstance: having begun to think in it he could not think without it”.² This phrasing recalls Virginia Woolf’s “Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid” (1940), in which, due to the resounding drone of enemy planes overhead, sound “begins sawing its way in the brain”.³ Both Bowen’s novel and Woolf’s essay contemplate the wartime soundscape as something that takes hold of the mind, something that might inspire ideas, but more likely as something that dangerously influences or even impedes thinking. Woolf writes that it is the enemy planes’ droning “sound that interrupts cool and consecutive thinking about peace”.⁴ Similarly, it seems telling that it is the antagonist, and not the heroine, in Bowen’s novel who cannot think without sound.

Taking these observations as a starting point, the chapter will examine the rendition of sound in officially sanctioned propaganda film of the Second World War and late modernist Home Front writing. I suggest that real or imagined wartime soundscapes become a central concern for both filmmakers and novelists, but that their renditions of sound differ. Taking its cue from strategies of representation that evolved during the First World War, films made by the Crown Film Unit (CFU), such as Humphrey Jennings’ *London Can Take It!* (1940) and *Listen to Britain* (1942), as well as officially sanctioned written accounts of the Blitz, such as William Sansom’s *The Blitz: Westminster at War* (1947), structure, interpret, and politicise wartime sound, casting their audiences as a united and unified community of listeners. In short, sound here features in a politicised narrative

¹ Elizabeth Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* (New York: Anchor Books, 2002), p. 3.

² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³ Virginia Woolf, “Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid”, in *Selected Essays*, ed. by David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 216-220 (p. 217).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

construction of the official history of the British and Allied war effort.⁵ This becomes particularly apparent through an analysis of the soundtrack of the Anglo-American co-production *The True Glory* (1945), which received the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature in 1946. In the following discussion, I first attend to the representation and use of sound in officially commissioned film and, in a second step, I examine how Bowen's *Heat of the Day*, Hamilton's *The Slaves of Solitude* (1947), and, to a lesser extent, Orwell's *Coming Up for Air* (1939), disrupt and critically interrogate official renditions of wartime sound.

Such a discussion is necessitated by sound's intricate relationship to morale and propaganda during the Second World War. The government's Emergency Powers (Defence) Act (1939) included a Control of Noise Order, effectively managing and restricting "the public use of sound-emitting objects" and "giving bells, whistles, and sirens specific wartime meanings".⁶ These developments firmly regulated the soundscape at the Home Front with the intention to protect the population and to shape the public perception of sound under the conditions of total war. Mansell suggests that the soundscape of the Home Front "structured not just the memory of the conflict but also played an active part in the imagination of national community during the war itself".⁷ Examining the deployment of sound in both cinematic and literary representations of the Home Front thus provides key insights into the construction and framing of narratives about the nation at war.

⁵ The effort of framing audiences as a united community of listeners through various media outlets also resonates with Jacques Ellul's early theory of propaganda (1965). Ellul writes that in effective propaganda, "the individual never is considered as an individual, but always in terms of what he has in common with others, such as his motivations, his feelings, or his myths. [...] [T]he individual must never be considered as being alone; the listener to a radio broadcast, though actually alone, is nevertheless part of a large group [...]. Radio listeners have been found to exhibit a mass mentality". See Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, tr. by Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York: Vintage, 1973), p. 7. While such aims and activities are discernible from the films discussed in this chapter, the novels by Orwell, Bowen, and Hamilton resist such a framing and insist on the phenomenological individuality of the listening experience.

⁶ James G. Mansell, *The Age of Noise in Britain: Hearing Modernity* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2017), pp. 150-151.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

Wartime Soundscapes

The Second World War's politics of "total war" generally designate a greater involvement of the civilian population that contrasts with the First World War's politics of the *Materialschlacht*.⁸ Indeed, as Kent Puckett observes, the Second World War "did, after all, turn on the way it practically undermined conceptual differences between soldier and civilian".⁹ The advent of the bomber and developments in air warfare, for instance, meant that enemy attacks were conducted widely and far beyond the frontlines, putting large numbers of the civilian population at risk. The experience of war sound (such as the drone of enemy planes overhead as encountered in "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid") thus concerned and affected large numbers of the civilian population and pertained to a multitude of sounds.¹⁰ For this reason, this chapter defines the wartime soundscape broadly and comprehensively, encompassing, for instance, the noise of weapon tests, air raids, AA guns, collapsing buildings, sirens, bombings, and explosions, but also extending to the soundscape of everyday civilian experience during wartime, such as the noise of work environments, heavy machinery, and sound performances like concerts and broadcasts.

Writing in 1941, James Purves-Stewart, a neurologist and member of the British Noise Abatement League, described the reach and nature of the wartime soundscape as follows:

The most extreme of war noises, all too familiar to some of us, is the shattering noise of a high-explosive bomb. [...] There are also other familiar varieties of war noise, such as the growling, roaring crackle of an incendiary bomb on a burning building; the high-pitched tinkle of breaking window glass; the crash of falling bricks, roofs, masonry. There are also the hum of the aeroplanes [...]; the scream of the falling air-bomb; and the zoom of the low-flying dive bomber plane often accompanied by machine-gun bullets. [...] In totalitarian

⁸ Murphy estimates that the number of military personnel killed during the Second World War (circa 300,000) was "matched by a similar number of civilians". See Robert Murphy, *British Cinema and the Second World War* (London: Continuum, 2000), p. 3.

⁹ Kent Puckett, *War Pictures: Cinema, Violence and Style in Britain, 1939-1945* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), p. 9.

¹⁰ On air warfare and its wider social, cultural, and political impact in the period, see, for instance, Ian Patterson, *Guernica and Total War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007) and Leo Mellor, *Reading the Ruins: Modernism, Bombsites, and British Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

warfare all these noises are familiar, not only to the members of our fighting forces, on land, at sea, and in the air, but also to most of our civilian population, exposed to the same risks and the same noises as the fighting men themselves.¹¹

Purves-Stewart renders explicit the connection between the extensive civilian experience of wartime sound and the reach of totalitarian warfare. Similarly, John Langdon-Davies, who worked as a war correspondent during the Spanish Civil War, called for the cultivation of civilian “resilience to noise” during the Second World War that had become necessary in the age of modern warfare: “Now the tremendous noises of modern war are designed to attack the nerves of the soldier and of the man in the street. Let us, therefore, train ourselves before the Big Noise begins to deal with it as reasonably as we can.”¹² According to Mansell, a reasonable adjustment to noise was presented as one of the “civilian’s most important contribution[s] to the war effort” in newspapers and official publications of the 1940s.¹³ A “reasonable” approach towards sound seemed absolutely crucial, not least due to the German government’s prowess in staging listening experiences for its people via sound media such as radio and film as well as through live performance, which all played a key role in the reworking of national identity and Germany’s troubling journey towards fascism.¹⁴ It seems therefore hardly surprising that the British wartime administration considered it vital to devise a number of strategies through which the wartime soundscape could be structured and politicised in order to facilitate appropriate interpretations in support of the war effort.

In order to manage civilian responses to the wartime soundscape, the media system was indispensable: print media, radio, and especially cinema had expanded their reach

¹¹ James Purves-Stewart, “Noise and Nerves in Wartime”, *Quiet*, 2 (1941), 7-9 (pp. 7-8).

¹² John Langdon-Davies, *Nerves versus Nazis* (London: Routledge, 1940), pp. 30-31. See also Mansell, *Age of Noise*, pp. 170-171.

¹³ Mansell, *Age of Noise*, p. 171.

¹⁴ Carolyn Birdsall discusses, for instance, how radio broadcasting was mobilised to promote and politicise carnival celebrations under the National Socialist Regime in the 1930s. See Carolyn Birdsall, *Nazi Soundscapes: Sound, Technology and Urban Space in Germany, 1933-1945* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), pp. 74-82.

throughout the 1930s and were crucial in shaping interpretations of and reactions to wartime sound.¹⁵ While television broadcasts, which had begun in 1936, were halted during the war, the cinema proved vital. Britain's declaration of war on Germany on 3 September 1939 had initially prompted a closure of movie theatres, a precautionary measure, but cinemas were reopened within a month.¹⁶ The British film industry had to cope with limited financial means and staff shortages during wartime, "contract[ing] to one-third of its former size," with considerably fewer films being produced.¹⁷ However, this decrease in film output did not translate into diminished cinema attendance. In fact, "average weekly cinema attendance increased during the war from an estimated 19 million in 1939 to a peak of 30 million in 1945".¹⁸ The Wartime Social Survey also indicates that almost a third (32%) of British adults were visiting the cinema at least once a week.¹⁹ As sound film had become increasingly sophisticated in the course of the 1930s, the British industry now had

¹⁵ Fox emphasises the importance of voice and accent in British film-making of the Second World War. She notes the centrality of film during the period, calling it "the people's medium". See Jo Fox, "Millions Like Us? Accented Language and the 'Ordinary' in British Films of the Second World War", *Journal of British Studies*, 45.4 (2006), 819-845 (pp. 819-820). For further discussion of the media's role in British war propaganda during the Second World War, see, for instance, Jo Fox, *Film Propaganda in Britain and Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Berg, 2007); *Film & Radio Propaganda in World War II*, ed. by Kenneth R. M. Short (London: Croom Helm, 1983); Mark Wollaeger, *Modernism, Media, and Propaganda: British Narrative from 1900 to 1945* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); John Morris, *Culture and Propaganda in World War II: Music, Film, and the Battle for National Identity* (London: Tauris, 2014); Melissa Dinsman, *Modernism at the Microphone: Radio, Propaganda, and Literary Aesthetics during World War II* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015). At Durham University, a new Leverhulme-funded research project headed by James Smith, Patricia Waugh, and Jo Fox on the "Political Warfare Executive" currently investigates covert British propaganda campaigns aimed at psychological warfare and disinformation through various media outlets, such as radio broadcasts, leaflets, and underground publications. See <<https://sites.durham.ac.uk/writersandpropaganda/>> [accessed 6 August 2019].

¹⁶ Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards, *Britain Can Take It: The British Cinema in the Second World War* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 1.

¹⁷ Murphy, *British Cinema*, p. 2. He states that "fewer films were produced in the war years (an average of 42) than in the peak years of the 1930s (around 150 a year between 1933 and 1937)".

¹⁸ James Chapman, "British Cinema and the 'People's War'", in *Millions Like Us?: British Culture in the Second World War*, ed. by Nick Hayes and Jeff Hill (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), pp. 33-61 (p. 40).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

unprecedented technological possibilities to record, control, and convey wartime sound in the cinema.

MoI-sponsored propaganda shorts took advantage of technological advances, for instance through increased on-location recording. In dealing with wartime sound, MoI-supported film, as well as officially sanctioned reports, were interweaving two different approaches: first, a representation of wartime sound as music or orchestra performance which allowed a degree of narrative control over noise and offered civilians an interpretation of wartime sound that they could relate to; and second, an insistence on the authenticity of wartime sound and the reality of the civilian listening experience. This strategy would serve to underscore the severity of the situation, and, by framing the individual as part of a larger community of listeners, to demand of the population to unite unequivocally in support of the war effort. In the remainder of this section, I examine these two strategies through analyses of CFU productions *Listen to Britain* and *London Can Take It!*, William Sansom's written account *The Blitz: Westminster at War*, and the Anglo-American co-production *The True Glory*.

The representation of wartime sound, and specifically of military noise, as music, choir, or orchestra performance stems from narratives, reports, and artistic treatments of earlier military conflicts, most notably of the First World War. Wilfred Owen's "Anthem for Doomed Youth" (1917) speaks of "the shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells" while Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End* (1924-1928) renders an attack on the protagonist Christopher Tietjen's military post as

the orchestra [...] bringing in *all* the brass, *all* the strings, *all* the wood-wind, *all* the percussion instruments [...] It was comic to the extent that an operatic orchestra's crescendo is comic. Crescendo! . . . Crescendo! C R R R R R E S C²⁰

Inspired by military action in Adrianopolis during the Balkan War, F.T. Marinetti's futurist *parole in libertà* contain the famous sound poem "Zang Tumb Tumb" (1914). Here, in the

²⁰ Wilfred Owen, "Anthem for Doomed Youth", in *The Poems of Wilfred Owen*, introduced by Owen Knowles (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), p. 56; Ford Madox Ford, *Parade's End* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 559.

work of Marinetti, but also in the compositions of his contemporary Luigi Russolo, one of the central tropes was the representation of war sound as music or concert performance.²¹ Sara Haslam suggests that the experience of the First World War was so strongly tied to the experience of sound that we need to attend more sensitively to “the ways that the experience of war, and therefore the development of modernism, were mediated through sound”.²² Mary Habeck offers a wide-ranging overview over the ways in which wartime sound features in the “metaphors and signifying practices” of the First World War. She writes that “the element most commented on by men as they entered the front was the noise of artillery, rifle, and machine-gun fire”.²³ As a result, soldiers often used metaphors relating to music, choir, and orchestra performance for conveying their experience of war sound. Such metaphors, Habeck maintains, may have offered combatants a way of connecting the alienating experience of war with “the familiar and everyday”.²⁴ In other words, conceptualising the wartime soundscape as a musical performance normalises and structures a phenomenological experience that would otherwise be unconceivable.²⁵

²¹ Nora Lambrecht discusses why war experience has been so prominently conceived of as listening experience. She suggests that the experience of sound and its representation can work as a means to overcome “combat Gnosticism”. Lambrecht gives several examples for this theory, mainly taken from Siegfried Sassoon’s poetry as well as from the writing of Mary Borden. See Nora Lambrecht, “‘But If You Listen, You Can Hear’: War Experience, Modernist Noise, and the Soundscape of *The Forbidden Zone*”, *Modernism/modernity*, Print Plus, 2.1 (March 2017) < <https://modernismmodernity.org/articles/war-experience-modernist-noise> > [accessed 21 June 2019].

²² Sara Haslam, “The ‘Moaning of the World’ and the ‘Words that Bring Me Peace’: Modernism and the First World War”, in *The Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century British and American War Literature*, ed. by Adam Piette and Mark Rawlinson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp. 47–57 (p. 49).

²³ Mary R. Habeck, “Technology in the First World War: The View from Below”, in *The Great War and the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Jay Winter, Geoffrey Parker, and Mary R. Habeck (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 99–131 (p. 104).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

²⁵ Paul Fussell notably makes a similar suggestion in relation to the theatre and stage presentations of the First World War. He writes that “most people were terrified, and for everyone the dramaturgic provided a dimension within which the unspeakable could to a degree be familiarized and interpreted. After all, just as a play must have an ending, so might the war; just as an actor gets up

It is this capacity to structure and normalise out-of-the-ordinary, life-threatening sonic encounters that MoI-sponsored film and officially sanctioned war accounts translate into their own rendition of the wartime soundscape. The Auxiliary Fire Service (AFS) volunteer, novelist, and short story writer William Sansom produced an official account, *The Blitz: Westminster at War*, which was written during the war and first published in 1947 “with full cooperation from the Home Office”.²⁶ Sansom, who incidentally also starred in Humphrey Jennings’ feature film *Fires were started* (1943), describes the days leading up to 7 September 1940 in this officially endorsed publication: “The ears of London [...] listened for the sounds of Goering’s sweep of the southern airfields [...]. For a while they listened in vain. Then – the first guns. A distant resonance on the warm summer air.”²⁷ The faint vibrations of wartime sound waves quickly turn into a bombastic orchestral performance:

Above, there was gunfire and the sound of the high German invader. These sounds, and the few incidents that had scattered the streets during the week, might be likened to the scattered scraping of bow-strings as the orchestra tuned up; for the night of the seventh of September was on its way, the night when the first great chord of the London Overture smashed its steel music on to the auditorium of streets and houses and people.²⁸

Comparing the sounds of the early Blitz to the tuning of an orchestra whose “steel music” will soon descend on London, the civilian population is framed as an audience and the cityscape of London turned into an “auditorium”. Sansom consistently uses references to music in order to describe the soundscape of the Blitz. He writes of the “full orchestra” of Anti-Aircraft (AA) guns which, during airstrikes in 1943, give a “fortissimo concert”.²⁹ The streets are “echoing alive with noise” and “resound to the crescendo of approaching engines

unhurt after the curtain falls on his apparent murder, so might the soldier. And just as a play has a structure, so might a war conceived as analogous to a play have a structure – and with it, meaning”. See Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 199.

²⁶ Stephen Spender, “Foreword”, in William Sansom, *The Blitz: Westminster at War* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), pp. v-xi (p. v).

²⁷ William Sansom, *The Blitz: Westminster at War* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), p. 23.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

and the bells of ambulances” with the “staccato groan of a hooter, the strangely resonant purr of tyres and the scream of cornering brakes”.³⁰ Conversely, a night without airstrikes, a “siren-free” night, is described as “the close of a week’s diminuendo”.³¹ The vocabulary of musical notation and composition is central to Sansom’s writing, giving a controlled and structured account of the Blitz soundscape that offers readers a relatable experience (namely that of listening to classical music) to make sense of and normalise wartime sound at the Home Front.

Like Sansom’s written account, the MoI’s public information shorts were also framing civilians as a community of auditors and using music and musical metaphors as a structuring device that would allow for narrative control. Considering the increasing numbers of cinema-goers during the war, the MoI could count on large numbers of people watching and listening to public information films, which were screened before or after the main feature and therefore a staple part of the standard wartime cinema programme.³² As such, it was of vital importance to convey appropriate responses to and interpretations of wartime sound to cinema audiences. Working mostly with its own filmmaking unit, the CFU (formerly GPO), as well as with the Army Film and Photographic Unit (AFPU), which were both based at Pinewood Studios in Buckinghamshire, the MoI commissioned several successful public information shorts for both national and international distribution. For example, *London Can Take It!*, one of the first MoI-sponsored productions documenting the Blitz in the capital, was originally intended for distribution in the United States and Canada with the aim to persuade the North American forces to join the war effort.³³ Co-directed by Humphrey Jennings and Harry Watt and featuring sound recordings by Ken Cameron, the

³⁰ Sansom, *The Blitz*, p. 51.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

³² Jennings’ CFU films were particularly successful with British audiences. See Aldgate and Richards, *Britain Can Take It*, pp. 222-223.

³³ *London Can Take It!*, dir. by Humphrey Jennings and Harry Watt (GPO Film Unit, 1940).

film bears the stamp of the GPO's earlier documentary style. In order to appeal to American and Canadian audiences, the film uses a voiceover commentary by the American journalist and correspondent Quentin Reynolds, who at the time also worked as an editor for the American magazine *Collier's Weekly*. Reynold's voice draws audiences into his confidence and reports on the experience of the Blitz in Britain: "I am speaking from London [...]. We haven't had a quiet night for more than five weeks", expressing his own stake in the British community through the use of the personal pronoun "we".

Following from this opening statement, the film combines Reynold's voiceover narration with sound effects to underscore Reynold's message. The sound of a siren begins, and the film shows several medium long shots of empty streets and deserted buildings as soon as Reynolds announces the nightly blackout. The voiceover then begins to use more emphatic and figurative language, drawing on the sound of the air-raid siren and the sense of imminent attack, when Reynolds announces "the wail of the Banshee. The nightly siege of London has begun". Long shots of a cloudy sky follow, the drone of airplanes sets in. There is no background music, drawing the sonic focus to the noise of the air raid. A cut to a completely black screen follows, the sounds of explosions and collapsing buildings dominate whilst the screen only shows flashes of light that illuminate a unit of AA gun operators. Reynold's voiceover continues by asserting that "these are not Hollywood sound effects. This is the music they play every night in London: the symphony of war" (Fig. 20).



Figure 20: AA gun operators in *London Can Take It!* illuminated by flashing lights. Screenshot by the author.

London Can Take It! combines emotionally charged, figurative language (“the wail of the banshee”) and matter-of-fact statements to assert the reality and indexicality of the sound experience. By stressing that the film does not convey “Hollywood sound effects” (although, on the level of production, these are, of course, sound effects), Reynolds insists that the soundscape of the film directly and indexically translates the real experience of sound on the Home Front onto the cinema screen. In designating the air raid as a “symphony of war”, stating that “this is the music they play every night in London”, the film embeds itself in a tradition of representing war sound as musical performance as outlined above. It is a “recursive” representative strategy which normalises and structures the experiences of war sound for audiences.³⁴

Jennings’ *Listen to Britain* famously draws on music to structure war experience at

³⁴ Marina MacKay suggests that “the characteristic aesthetic of the Second World War is recursive”. Her observation draws on poetry and fiction of the period which is “heavily reliant on stylized internal repetition”. Here, the representation of war sound as musical performance appears as a “recursive” representational motif in the sense that it reaches back to literary and cultural idioms established during the First World War and reproduces them in the context of totalitarian warfare. See Marina MacKay, “‘Doing Business with Totalitaria’: British Late Modernism and Politics of Reputation”, *ELH*, 73.3 (2006), 729-753 (p. 735).

the Home Front purely in terms of sound.³⁵ Writing to his wife Cicely on 3 December 1941, Jennings refers to *Listen to Britain* as “the music film”.³⁶ Indeed, Mansell suggests that

Listen to Britain, like *London Can Take It!* before it, used the familiar sound of Big Ben to signify the nation, but cut immediately to scenes of radio broadcast towers and snippets of BBC broadcasts reaching across the Empire in order to point to the synchronized unity of people working for the war effort across the imperial nation. *Listen to Britain* was in one sense an instruction to its audience [...]: the film tells the heroic story of the war effort in Britain through everyday sound.³⁷

In essence, *Listen to Britain* extends the metaphorical representation of the wartime soundscape as musical performance by constructing its whole narrative out of music.³⁸ The film presents a montage of different everyday activities, demonstrating how the civilian population carries on with their daily lives despite living with the reality of aerial bombardment. Jennings relies on cross-cuttings of music for the soundtrack, accompanying the montage of images of daily life (factory workers, pastoral scenery, and leisure time activities) with an acoustic montage of different musical styles and popular songs. He does, for instance, include a performance of music hall stars Flanagan and Allen, performing in a factory, and juxtaposes this sequence with a classical piano performance in the National Gallery by Myra Hess (Fig. 21).

³⁵ *Listen to Britain*, dir. by Humphrey Jennings and Stewart McAllister (CFU, 1942).

³⁶ Humphrey Jennings, “Letter to Cicely Jennings”, 3 December 1941, in *The Humphrey Jennings Film Reader*, ed. by Kevin Jackson (Manchester: Carcanet, 1993), pp. 36-37 (p. 36).

³⁷ Mansell, *Age of Noise*, p. 179.

³⁸ On this point, see also Humphrey Jennings, “Post-production Script: *Listen to Britain*”, in *The Humphrey Jennings Film Reader*, ed. by Kevin Jackson (Manchester: Carcanet, 1993), pp. 33-35. The script shows that the film is structured around sound. The script defines the film as “the music of a people at war – the sound of life in Britain by night and by day” (p. 33).



Figure 21: Myra Hess in *Listen to Britain*. Screenshot by the author.

Murphy rightly notes that such juxtapositions “illustrat[e] the harmony between classes, the common ground shared by high and low culture during the war”.³⁹ While these scenes visualise how different parts of society are equally affected by and united in their wartime experience, the combination of different music performances and their binding together on the soundtrack explicitly renders the promotion of a sense of national community a matter of sound. Indeed, as Birdsall maintains that nations and national identities can be performed through sound, Mansell notes that *Listen to Britain* is one of several CFU film examples that “turned their attention to recording and presenting sounds that contributed to a unifying ideal of Britishness”.⁴⁰ As the film’s narrative construction relies on music, two complementary forces are at work. On the one hand, the evocation of a united nation relayed through its shared listening experience. On the other hand, the insistence on the severity and reality of wartime experience, enforced by the idea that the sounds of bombardment and attack are authentic and not placed for mere effect.

On the importance of the latter point, the sound recording practices of the CFU unit during the Blitz are of particular interest. Ken Cameron, who was responsible for the

³⁹ Murphy, *British Cinema*, p. 145.

⁴⁰ See Birdsall, *Nazi Soundscapes*, p. 103 and Mansell, *Age of Noise*, p. 179.

soundtracks of the CFU's *Listen to Britain* and *Fires were started* (1943), remembered the recording of real sound effects of the Blitz:

It was the night of the big Blitz on London, the first big blitz, and it was about 7 or 8 at night and things obviously were going to get exciting, so just for fun I put a mic on the roof of the studio and recorded about 2,000 feet of the blitz noise – on optical film, mind you, it was long before magnetic film or anything like that – and at about 2 or 3 in the morning we thought, well really this track should be kept and I rang Jack Holmes at home, he was in charge of the unit then, and said 'We have recorded this track, do you think ... dare I send it to the labs for processing?' He said, 'Oh well, might as well, it might be useful sometime.' So [...] we processed it. The track has been used for practically every blitz film ever since. It was a fantastic track, as a bomb fell about 100 yards away from the studio, it went pshheeww bonk.⁴¹

According to Cameron, the CFU subsequently began to do more on-location recording, sometimes going to great lengths to achieve real sound effects. For the narrative documentary *Close Quarters* (1943), Cameron and his sound crew had to repeatedly submerge themselves in a submarine to record the sound of detonating depth charges as they would be heard from inside the vessel:

We took the Western Channel from Rothesay out into a submarine, right out to sea, and they dropped depth charges and then we got this ... it just sounded like 'gonk' [...] so crazy. I mean all these effects can be done now so easily [...] with a couple of tin cans. But ... they were *real* [my emphasis].⁴²

Cameron's account suggests that, while the initial recording of aerial bombardment had been more incidental, the filmmakers were eventually deliberately working towards recording real sound effects, rather than replicating them in the studio or on Army training grounds. As the civilian population experienced the wartime soundscape first-hand, the CFU unit sought to replicate this listening experience directly. Cameron's insistence on the authenticity of the sound effects as they were recorded and used by the CFU for officially sponsored propaganda film also indicates that there was a wider concern with conveying

⁴¹ Ken Cameron, Interview with Bob Allen and John Legard, 14 November 1988. Interview No. 70 for the British Entertainment History Project (previously BECTU). The audio recording and transcript are available online on the website of the British Entertainment History Project: <<https://historyproject.org.uk/interview/ken-cameron>> [accessed 21 June 2019]. Quotation taken from p. 10 of the interview transcript. Hereafter, this source is cited as "Cameron, Interview" followed by the relevant page number(s) of the interview transcript.

⁴² Cameron, Interview, pp. 50-51. See *Close Quarters*, dir. Jack Lee (CFU, 1943).

authentic wartime sound in order to appropriately construct an official narrative of the British war effort against the Axis powers. This point will be explored in the following section on the soundtrack of *The True Glory*.

The True Glory

Politicising sound effectively for a narrative construction of the official history of the British and Allied war effort arguably reached its culmination in the Anglo-American co-production of *The True Glory*, a feature-length film documenting the final year of the Allied war effort.⁴³ The film's soundtrack offers audiences a carefully structured and controlled take on wartime sound which casts its audiences as a united community of listeners. Preparations for the film were well under way in 1944 and prompted a special sound recording mission: in late October 1944, the 53rd Welsh Division liberated the Dutch city of s'Hertogenbosch from the German army. The battle at den Bosch spanned several days and was recorded by Captain Peter Handford and Sergeant John Aldred. Both men were members of the British AFPU. Handford worked as a sound recordist and accredited war photographer while Aldred had been employed as a sound recordist for the AFPU. According to Aldred's account of their sound recording mission, the two men arrived at den Bosch on the last day of fighting and had just set up a microphone when a German 88mm shell hit a building behind them. As smoke and debris rose to the sky, Aldred thought that "this was probably as far as one should go to get authentic sound".⁴⁴

The AFPU had sent the two men to record the sounds of war with the mission considered of such importance that they had received identity cards signed by Allied Commander Dwight D. Eisenhower, giving them special permission to travel freely across

⁴³ *The True Glory*, dir. by Carol Reed and Garson Kanin (Columbia Pictures, 1945).

⁴⁴ John Aldred, "Under Fire with a 630", *AMPS: Newsletter of the Association of Motion Picture Sound*, 29 (Spring 1999), 10-11 (p.10).

the Second Front.⁴⁵ Aldred and Handford went to France, Belgium, and Holland, risking their lives repeatedly in pursuit of authentic war sound. The film, co-produced by the British MoI and the US Office of War Information, was managed by the recently founded Joint Anglo-American Film Planning Committee (JAAFPC). Established in January 1944, the JAAFPC's aims were to boost soldier morale and to counteract the public perception of Allied disunity through joint film projects. This step was considered necessary because Allied rivalry had emerged during previous attempts at joint film projects, such as Frank Capra's *Tunisian Victory* (1944), which reportedly ended in tensions and discord between American and British filmmakers and their respective army production units. The making of *The True Glory*, the last of the war campaign documentaries, was similarly fraught with inter-allied rivalry despite the establishment of the JAAFPC.⁴⁶

Upon its UK release on 27 August 1945 and its US release on 4 October 1945, *The True Glory* became an instant success with audiences. In a review for *The Spectator*, the British director Edgar Anstey wrote that "the individual scenes and comments are so ingeniously chosen and woven together that *The True Glory* does constitute a piece of balanced history".⁴⁷ The *New York Times* stated that it was "a brilliantly composed screen

⁴⁵ John Aldred, Interview with Peter Musgrove, 17 September and 17 December 1989. Interview No. 102 for the British Entertainment History Project (previously BECTU). The audio recordings and a transcript are available on the website of the British Entertainment History Project: <<https://historyproject.org.uk/interview/john-aldred>> [accessed 21 June 2019]. Quotation taken from p. 12 of the transcript. Hereafter, this source is cited as "Aldred, Interview" followed by the relevant page number(s) of the interview transcript.

⁴⁶ Founded in January 1944, the JAAFPC's aims were to boost soldier morale and to counteract the public perception of Allied disunity through joint film projects. This step had become necessary as Allied rivalry had emerged during previous attempts at joint film projects, such as Frank Capra's *Tunisian Victory*, which ended in tensions between American and British filmmakers and their respective production units. Film historians Anthony Aldgate, James Chapman, and Frederic Krome have suggested that the tense relationship between British and American filmmakers during the last two years of WWII tends to reflect the equally tense political relationship between the Allied forces. See Frederic Krome, "The True Glory and the Failure of Anglo-American Film Propaganda in the Second World War", *Journal of Contemporary History*, 33.1 (1998), 21-34; Anthony Aldgate, "Creative Tensions: *Desert Victory*, the Army Film Unit and Anglo-American Rivalry, 1943-5", in *Britain and the Cinema in the Second World War*, ed. by Philip M. Taylor (London: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 144-167.

⁴⁷ Edgar Anstey, "The Cinema", *The Spectator*, 10 August 1945, p. 11.

tribute to the courage and perseverance of our fighting men, as rich in its verbal narration as it is in its visual images".⁴⁸ The film is still widely regarded as one of "the most authentic of the [WWII] campaign documentaries".⁴⁹ This perceived "authenticity" of the film was not least due to Aldred and Handford's sound recording mission, which presents the culmination of a concerted effort to record and use authentic war sound for a national propaganda programme. The drive to obtain authentic sound effects for propaganda films had various reasons. Competition with the enemy was a major driving factor. German propaganda films, for instance, were considered to have better soundtracks whereas sound effects recorded by the British on army training grounds or at Pinewood Studios were considered inferior.⁵⁰ Obtaining recordings of real military confrontations thus became crucial for *The True Glory*. Originally briefed to stay for 12 weeks and to record up to 100,000 ft. of film stock, the men were able to extend their stay when they found some German Agfa film stock in an abandoned bunker and used it for further recordings. The material was sent back to Denham studios for processing.⁵¹ Some of the effects recorded by Handford and Aldred have been digitised and are now available on the website of the

⁴⁸ Bosley Crowther, "The True Glory", *The New York Times*, 9 September 1945, p. 49.

⁴⁹ James Chapman, *The British at War: Cinema, State and Propaganda 1939-1945* (London: Tauris, 2000), p. 151.

⁵⁰ Peter Handford, "Real War", *AMPS: Newsletter of the Association of Motion Picture Sound*, 29 (Spring 1999), 8-9 (p. 8): "Recordings made at army ranges on Salisbury Plain or at battle schools by the Army Film & Photographic Unit sound crew based at Pinewood were not very effective and nothing like the real sounds of battle." See also Aldred, "Under Fire with a 630", p. 10: "The feature film *Desert Victory* relied heavily on synthetic sound effects, such as a thunderflash firework in a dust bin to simulate a 25 pounder gun." However, these simulations were unsatisfactory according to Handford, who asserts that "now at this time everybody was very fed up with the soundtracks of the British War films because they just went out on the range on Salisbury Plain or somewhere like that and recorded a few guns and it was absolutely and completely inferior to the soundtracks of the German Propaganda Films which were really very, very good and much more warlike". See Peter T. Handford, Interview with Bob Allen, 19 November 1988. Interview No. 71 for the British Entertainment History Project (previously BECTU). A hard copy of the interview transcript is available at the BFI. Quotation taken from pp. 6-7 of the interview transcript. This statement is made on Side 1 of the audio recording, which has been digitised and is available online: <<https://historyproject.org.uk/interview/peter-handford>> [accessed 21 June 2019].

⁵¹ Aldred, Interview, pp. 12-13.

Imperial War Museum (IWM).⁵²

The True Glory commences with the invasion of Normandy and ends with the fall of Berlin, presenting itself as a feature-length documentary with a substantial claim to historical truth. The film's co-directors Carol Reed and Garson Kanin had agreed that it would not be a euphemistic, heroic story of war, but a "deglamourised record of a military campaign."⁵³ Reed and Kanin decided that the film would be made of actuality footage shot by combat cameramen, rejecting a restaging of any of the material.⁵⁴ The film's marketing campaign underlined the film's claim to historical authenticity: contemporary posters advertised the film as "the story of your victory, told by your guys who won it!". The poster advertisement, taken together with the film's opening voiceover commentary, which declares the film to be a "testament" of the war, presents *The True Glory* as an authentic document of historical significance to its viewers. A preface to the film, spoken by Eisenhower, lends the film additional political credibility and underlines its claim to presenting the political and historical "truth" of events.

For the soundtrack of *The True Glory*, a selection of Aldred and Handford's recordings were combined with a voiceover commentary, vox pops, and music composed by William Alwyn. Closer analysis of the soundtrack suggests that this feature-length documentary, like Jennings' CFU shorts, structures, interprets, and politicises wartime sound, casting audiences as a unified community of listeners. The soundtrack uses different means to establish a sense of national unity for the British, but it also frames the Allied nations as being united in the war effort. The opening voiceover, spoken by Robert Harris,

⁵² There is, for instance, a recording of German artillery shells landing, S'Hertogenbosch, Netherlands. The recording took place on 26 October 1944. IWM Sound Collection, catalogue number 7616. The recording is available online: <<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80007417>> [accessed 21/06/2019].

⁵³ James Chapman, "'The Yanks are shown to such Advantage': Anglo-American Rivalry in the Production of *The True Glory* (1945)", *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 16.4 (1996), 533-554 (p. 539).

⁵⁴ Chapman, "Anglo-American Rivalry", p. 539.

provides a linking commentary in blank verse. The pseudo-Shakespearean, poetic language constructs an artificial, quasi-mythological preface to the film:

Across the channel aware of our resolve / with cold contempt alerted Germans stood beside/
their guns and reinforcements rambled from the Rhine. / Their generals were prepared,
their might was poised. / They looked across the heaving sea and grinned. / They would reap
harvest of us on the beaches / and even death himself would stand amazed.⁵⁵

The German army is described as a “hydra hundred-headed” while the Allied troops are referred to as “fierce eagles”. The imagery and blank verse form pays homage to its contemporary, the historical costume drama (for instance the successful *Henry V* (1944) by Laurence Olivier). The voiceover commentary’s language and choice of expression portrays the Allied war effort as an undertaking of mythic significance and casts the final year of the war as the definitive battle between good and evil. In addition, the soundtrack contains a range of vox-pops, voices that tell the audience of their war memories. These individual accounts emphasise the human tragedy of war: a nurse remembers her first casualty, an American soldier recalls his experience during the Omaha Beach Landing, and a French resistance fighter recalls the sacrifices made by the French people during the fight against the fascist enemy. There are over ten individual vox pops featured in the film, speaking with clearly identifiable English, Scottish, American, Canadian, and French accents, thereby underscoring the collective endeavour of the war effort that was grounded in Allied unity and community. By listening to these different speakers, audiences bear witness not just to the images of combat, but to the alliance of nations and communities in the fight against fascism. Although multiple voices take part in the soundtrack, they operate in the mode of a “classic” voiceover commentary, which, as Kuhn suggests, “tends to limit the range of readings available from the image: it directs, in other words, the reading of the film”.⁵⁶

In addition to the voiceover commentary, the film makes clever use of sound effects,

⁵⁵ From the voiceover commentary of *The True Glory*, dir. by Carol Reed and Garson Kanin, produced by the US Office of War Information and the Ministry of Information (Columbia Pictures, 1945). The verse commentary is recited by Robert Harris.

⁵⁶ Annette Kuhn, “‘Desert Victory’ and the People’s War”, *Screen*, 22.2 (1981), 45-68 (p. 50).

but these also problematise the film's insistence on its authenticity and documentary value. Aldred and Handford's mission was to record wildtracks, effects that could be used variably in the post-production phase of the film. This led to a disjoint between the insistence on authentic sound and the way these sounds were deployed in post-production. Aldred and Handford recorded the battle of S'Hertogenbosch, however, this battle does not feature in *The True Glory*. The sound effects recorded at den Bosch were selectively used for the presentation of other battles in the film, such as the fights for Saint Lo and Arnhem. Effectively, this meant that audiences would see combat footage of one military confrontation while simultaneously listening to the sound recordings of a different battle. On the one hand, the sound effects enhance the film's claim to historical authenticity and foster an immersive sound experience for audiences. On the other hand, this use of the wildtracks undercuts the film's claim to authenticity by virtue of its editing process which overlays combat footage of one battle with sound effects from a different military confrontation.

Kent Puckett helpfully reminds us that "film is not just a historical record, but a problematic kind of history; a form in which the tensions, pressures, paradoxes of history are at least partially encoded".⁵⁷ Aldred and Handford's sound recording mission enacted, as well as encoded, war experience as a listening experience for cinema audiences. The film forms a historical "record" in a double sense: it insists on its authenticity, constructing a narrative of the fight against fascism as a battle between good and evil that is won through the resilience, sacrifice, and unity of the Allied nations. On the other hand, it literally reproduces the sonic experience of totalitarian warfare and frames its audiences as united in their listening experience.

The sound recording mission by Aldred and Handford, and the soundtracks of MoI-sponsored propaganda films more broadly, demonstrate the extent to which the recording and appropriate framing of wartime sound became a major concern during the Second

⁵⁷ Puckett, *War Pictures*, p. x.

World War. The soundtracks of Humphrey Jennings' CFU films, but also of *The True Glory*, demonstrate acoustically a shared concern with wartime sound and war as a listening experience that could be mobilised in multiple ways to create and enforce a sense of community, national identity, and an image of Allied collaboration. By editing, controlling, and interpreting wartime sound, these films and recordings offer a politicised narrative of the official history of the British and Allied war effort that limits interpretive possibilities for its audiences.

"What does it sound like?"

In contrast to state-sponsored film, late modernist fiction by Bowen, Hamilton, and Orwell refuses to deploy sound as a structuring principle to construct a narrative of the national community at war. Instead, their novels explore the disruptive and dangerous implications of sound, its capacity to impede independent thought. These texts interrogate the misuses of sound in the context of total war, sometimes even without any explicit or prolonged representation of military confrontation or attack.⁵⁸

Orwell's *Coming Up for Air*, published a mere 84 days before Britain declared war on Germany, deconstructs the notion of a shared listening experience that is, for instance, created by MoI-sponsored film. Orwell's narrative explores the phenomenological individuality of sonic experience and maintains that it cannot be reproduced or adequately represented. The novel was written under the premonition of impending catastrophe as a letter from Orwell to Cyril Connolly in December 1938 indicates:

Everything one writes now is overshadowed by this ghastly feeling that we are rushing towards a precipice and, though we shan't actually prevent ourselves or anyone else from

⁵⁸ In *Modernism and World War II*, MacKay suggests that "as a conflict in which the civilian experience was paramount, its literature urges a reshaping of what counts as the literature of war in order to include authors that were not combatants and texts that are not 'about' war in any straightforwardly mimetic way". This revised notion of what we might or might not count as the literature of war allows for a more comprehensive literary stock-taking of the period, which may reasonably include texts in anticipation of war. See Marina MacKay, *Modernism and World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 6.

going over, must put up some sort of fight. I suppose actually we have about two years before the guns begin to shoot.⁵⁹

Partly written as a result of Orwell's experiences in Spain, *Coming Up for Air* reflects this sense of inevitable military conflict. In the novel, the protagonist George Bowling returns to the small town of Lower Binfield in a nostalgic search for the happier days of his youth, but Bowling's yearning for the past is soon displaced by events in the present. An accident during a bombing practice by the British causes a bomb to drop onto a shop in the town centre:

BOOM – BRRRRRR! A noise like the Day of Judgment, and then a noise like a ton of coal falling onto a sheet of tin. That was falling bricks. [...] Even in the echo of that awful, deafening crash, which seemed to freeze me up from top to toe, I had time to think that there's something grand about the bursting of a big projectile. What does it sound like? It's hard to say, because what you hear is mixed up with what you're frightened of.⁶⁰

Even though the incident is the result of a failed military practice by British troops, Bowling and Lower Binfield's population do not know that this is the case: "there'd been a space of time, something between a minute and five minutes, when several thousand people believed we were at war".⁶¹ Hearing the sound of the bomb, Bowling throws himself to the ground. He reacts with "conditioned reflex" to save his own life, stirred into action by a "noise like the Day of Judgment". Although this is only a failed military practice, the sound of the bomb makes the possibility of war a reality that spurs Bowling into action. The sound, Bowling tells the reader,

gives you [the feeling] of being suddenly shoved up against reality. It's like being woken up by somebody shying a bucket of water over you. You're suddenly dragged out of your dreams by a clang of bursting metal, and it's terrible, and it's real.⁶²

⁵⁹ George Orwell, "Letter to Cyril Connolly", 14 December 1938, in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters, Volume 1: An Age Like This, 1920-1940*, ed. by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (Jaffrey, NH: Nonpareil, 2000), pp. 362-363 (p. 362).

⁶⁰ George Orwell, *Coming Up for Air* (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. 232-233.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 233.

Bowling insists that the sound of the falling and detonating bomb “shoves you up against reality” and “drags you out of your dreams”. The sound causes a moment of awakening and shock; it is “terrible” and it is “real”. Bowling does not compare the sound to a musical performance as done, for instance, by Sansom. Rather, he likens the experience to more mundane, but also less poetic or euphemistic experiences: it is like being doused with water, like coal falling on a tin sheet. Comparing the sound and its effect to a number of different situations, rather than sticking to one comparison or metaphor consistently, outlines for readers the impossibility of conveying the sound. Not just because Bowling’s story is made up of words (rather than recordings), but because “what you hear is mixed up with what you’re frightened of”.

The first-person narration gives readers access to Bowling’s mind. He is, in fact, directly addressing the reader: “if you’d happened to be there, you’d have seen an interesting instance of what I believe is conditioned reflex. Because what I’d heard – there wasn’t any question of mistake – was the whistle of a bomb.”⁶³ However, apart from Bowling’s rather chatty report to the reader, there is little concern or fellow feeling for the people of Lower Binfield who experience the detonation of the bomb alongside him. Bowling soberly advises those around him to “lie down”, but there is a remarkable absence of concern for others: the local schoolchildren, wearing their gas masks, appear to him as a “huge flood of pig-faces”, chaperoned by their teacher, “a taller pig who was probably Miss Todgers”.⁶⁴ While the people of Lower Binfield subsequently were “too busy talking about the bomb, what it sounded like and what they thought when they heard it”, George has seen and heard enough: “This finishes me with Lower Binfield, I thought. I’m going home.”⁶⁵ David Dwan reads Bowling’s character as that of a “supreme individualist – a figure skeptical of authority, suspicious of group-think, and deeply solicitous of his own freedom,

⁶³ Orwell, *Air*, p. 232.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

which he often casts as a licence to do as he wants”.⁶⁶ Bowling hates to think of himself as just another face in the crowd or as a “streamlined” citizen.⁶⁷ His assertion of going *against* the crowd also shows in the way he describes his listening experience. There is nothing heroic or stoic in his account. Rather, he focusses on mundane comparisons (a bucket of water, coal on a sheet of tin) and does not hide his disgust and complete disengagement with the rest of Lower Binfield’s population. Bowling is determined to be clear about the emotional and psychological factors involved in the sound of bombardment: “What does it sound like? It’s hard to say, because what you hear is mixed up with what you’re frightened of.”⁶⁸ Bowling’s admission underlines the individuality of this listening experience: an authentic rendition is out of reach, because the phenomenological experience of listening entails the individual’s fears and anxieties. Here, Bowling deconstructs the very possibility of a shared listening experience. The soundscape of aerial bombardment hinges on its phenomenological, experiential individuality which cannot be reproduced.

This incident in *Coming up for Air* anticipates a wider issue that becomes more pronounced in the Home Front fiction of Elizabeth Bowen and Patrick Hamilton. Bowen’s *Heat of the Day* presents the wartime soundscape as a menacing, disruptive, and dangerous thing, which contrasts sharply with the work of sound in government-sponsored film. While, as I have outlined in the introduction to this chapter, the antagonist Harrison “cannot think without sound”, the novel’s protagonist Stella experiences the disruptive nature of wartime sound first-hand. Her first meeting with her lover Robert is described by the narrator as follows:

She returned to Robert – both having caught a breath, they fixed their eyes expectantly on each other’s lips. Both waited, both spoke at once, unheard. Overhead, an enemy plane had been dragging, drumming slowly round in the pool of night, drawing up bursts of gunfire – nosing, pausing, turning, fascinated by the point for its intent. The barrage banged, coughed,

⁶⁶ David Dwan, *Liberty, Equality, and Humbug: Orwell’s Political Ideals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 66.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 69. In the novel, Bowling has a nightmarish vision of being chased by a group of people who want to “streamline” him. See Orwell, *Air*, p. 183.

⁶⁸ Orwell, *Air*, p. 233.

retched; in here the lights in the mirrors rocked. Now down a shaft of anticipating silence the bomb swung whistling. With the shock of detonation, still to be heard, four walls of in here yawped in then bellied out; bottles danced on glass; a distortion ran through the view. The detonation dulled off into the cataracting roar of a split building: direct hit, somewhere else. It was the demolition of an entire moment: he and she stood at attention till the glissade stopped. What they *had* both been saying, or been on the point of saying, neither of them ever now were to know. Most first words have the nature of being trifling; theirs from having been lost began to have the significance of a lost clue.⁶⁹

In this scene, Bowen's narrator focusses on the sounds and the ensuing incident that suspends Stella's and Robert's interaction. The AA guns "bang", "cough", and "retch" while the bomb "whistles" down. The soundscape of the Blitz renders Stella's and Robert's interaction "unheard", even though both characters have anticipated their meeting with mutual interest and attraction. Although the "direct hit" happens elsewhere, the narrator records the incident as "the demolition of an entire moment".

This "demolition" of the moment manifests itself as a disjuncture between the levels of story and discourse, a split caused by sound. Both Stella and Robert have been speaking on the story level ("What they *had* both been saying, or been on the point of saying"). However, neither of them can hear the other due to the sounds of the air raid overhead and the ensuing detonation of a bomb. Their words are lost and "neither of them ever now were to know". While this occurs on the story level, the level of discourse refuses to return to an account of what was spoken, implying that the characters' words, rendered "unheard" by the Blitz sounds, must also be lost to the reader. Sound destroys for the reader a key event, the meeting of lovers. Not only does the text portray how human interaction falls victim to the acoustics of the Home Front, it enacts this process for the reader by erasing a crucial moment of its own narrative progression while foregrounding the sounds of the air raid.

This disjuncture between story and discourse becomes evident, too, by attending to the narration of time in this paragraph: "both *waited*, both *spoke* at once, unheard. Overhead an enemy plane *had been dragging*" [my emphasis]. The momentary reversal in time stretches to the moment of the bomb's detonation which renders the conversation between

⁶⁹ Bowen, *Heat*, p. 104.

Stella and Robert unheard. While this event forms the end of the order of events on the story level, it is taken as the starting point of discourse in this passage. Bowen uses the soundscape of the Blitz not to reinforce a sense of community and belonging, but to record the destructive nature of wartime sound. Although the physical “direct hit” happens elsewhere, the text subtly records its impact on human relationships. Bowen deconstructs the notion that a sense of community and belonging can be created through the experience of wartime sound: instead, the experience of sound here isolates the characters from each other, but also refuses the reader an in-depth knowledge of the event. Indeed, in opposition to Sansom’s account of the Blitz as musical performance, or Jennings’ CFU films which use sound as a structuring principle, Bowen’s text refutes sound as a structuring device and shows how it disrupts, rather than orders, Home Front narrative.

Patrick Hamilton’s *The Slaves of Solitude*, written between 1943 and 1946, equally refuses to deploy wartime sound as a structuring principle, albeit through different means. The novel is set in 1943 and tells the story of Miss Roach, who works as a secretary for a London-based publisher. Bombed out of her Kensington Flat, Miss Roach moves to the fictional town of Thames Lockdon, a 45-minute train commute away from the capital. She stays at the Rosamund Tea Rooms which have been repurposed as a boarding house. The novel explores Miss Roach’s conflict-laden relationships with the other guests of the boarding house, particularly with her German refugee acquaintance Vicki Kugelmann and the abusive Mr Thwaites. When Miss Roach first moved to Thames Lockdon, she found the experience pleasurable, but now, a year later, her feelings have changed:

[Thames Lockdon] had been “heaven”, then, with its dark, still nights, over which the sirens occasionally came yelling triumphantly forth, only to be gradually snubbed by the profound silence of the firmament, undisturbed even by the distant sounds of guns and bombs, which followed. And [Miss Roach] had been made a fuss of, then, a sort of heroine indeed, and given a fortnight’s holiday. And the town was “pretty”, and the food “very good”, and the people “very nice” – even Mr. Thwaites had seemed “very nice”. But now, after more than a year of it, Mr. Thwaites was president in hell.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Patrick Hamilton, *The Slaves of Solitude* (London: Constable, 2006), pp. 9-10.

The text is notable for its refusal to engage with wartime sound. The small town seems heavenly due to its “still nights”, due to the “profound silence [...] undisturbed even by the distant sounds of guns and bombs”. Yet, the place has turned into “hell” for Miss Roach as she is bullied by Vicki Kugelmann and Mr Thwaites. She is friendless, lonely, and stuck in the excruciating routine of the boarding house. Every night, the residents of the Rosamund Tea Rooms

sat in each other’s company until they were giddy – giddy with the heat, the stillness, the desultory conversation, the silent noises – the rattling of re-read newspapers, the page-turning of the book-reader, the clicking of the knitter, the puffing of the pipe-smoker, the indefatigable scratching of the letter-writer, the sounds of breathing, of restless shifting, of yawning – as the chromium-plated clock ticked out the tardy minutes.⁷¹

Contrary to the myth of the People’s War, in which every citizen is purposefully doing their bit in the war effort as a part of the larger community, the people at the boarding house are spending their hours in “desultory conversation”, indicating disengagement and lack of a sense of purpose. Time stretches unbearably in this small microcosm that appears bitterly allegorical of the English wartime population. The “silent noises” convey the subdued, lifeless atmosphere of the boarding house where the soundscape of aerial bombardment is absent, but the small noises people make in their everyday life are menacing. Forced to share the space, the rattling of newspapers, the page-turning of a book, and the sound of the lodgers’ breathing become unbearable. The use of hyphens and the long list of enumerations reflect the uncomfortable sense of routine which infinitely repeats itself. Ultimately, Miss Roach makes her narrow escape back to London, but her stint at the boarding house fundamentally negates the idea of community spirit and a nation united in wartime. As the novel refuses the rendition of war sound that readers might expect from a Home Front text, it turns, instead, to the small sounds and noises people make in confined spaces. MacKay characterises this sense of enforced community by its sense of “compelled communality, diminished privilege, and obligatory stasis”, implemented and reinforced through

⁷¹ Hamilton, *Slaves*, p. 29.

government propaganda campaigns.⁷² Hamilton's text indubitably responds to such conditions, tackling the unbearable soundscape created under these circumstances. The novel's subtle descriptions of the boarding house soundscape suggest that war is not just something one experiences by listening to the sounds of combat and aerial bombardment, but also by listening to the stifling noises of others. In its sustained refusal to engage with the acoustics of bombardment and destruction at the Home Front, the novel undermines official narratives of the civilian population as a community united through its listening experience. In Hamilton's novel, the enemy is not circling overhead, but snoring softly in the room next to you.

The Politics of Wartime Soundscapes

This chapter has discussed how state-sponsored public information filmmaking of the Second World War, such as *London Can Take It!* and *Listen to Britain*, as well as the Anglo-American co-production *The True Glory* structured and politicised wartime sound in order to cast their audiences as a united community of listeners. In these films, sound features in the narrative construction of an official account of the British and Allied war effort. Structuring the sounds of aerial bombardment, military confrontation, and Home Front life as musical performance, officially sanctioned accounts of the war convey an impression of control and communal experience. In contrast, late modernist fiction by Elizabeth Bowen, Patrick Hamilton, and George Orwell refuses to deploy sound as a structuring principle to construct a narrative of the national community at war. Their novels explore the disruptive and dangerous implications of sound.

I began this chapter by thinking about the antagonist in Bowen's novel, who attends a wartime open-air concert and for whom sound "had become a necessary circumstance" which he cannot think without. Bowen's representation of Harrison forms a subtle comment

⁷² Marina MacKay, "Is Your Journey Really Necessary?: Going Nowhere in Late Modernist London", *PMLA* 124.5 (2009), 1600-1613 (p. 1600).

on responses to and experiences of sound at the Home Front. Mellor suggests that “as well as the capture of politics in sound there is also a politics *of* capturing sound – and then, subsequently, of depicting or reproducing it in another medium”.⁷³ Indeed, both these mechanisms are discernible in the films and texts discussed here. While officially sponsored film is working to record political events in and through sound, the novel turns towards an exploration of what Mellor denotes as “the politics of capturing sound”. The texts by Orwell, Bowen, and Hamilton all contain moments in which the experience of sound during wartime (or, in the case of Orwell, the experience of sound in anticipation of war) takes centre stage. Here, the novel demonstrates its capacity to critically reflect upon the rendition of war sound and interrogates how sonic experience can be mobilised to establish a false sense of community. These authors reject the tropes and motifs established for the rendition of war sound and are concerned with deconstructing the listening experience. Orwell and Bowen show how the soundscape of aerial bombardment is an individualistic, even isolating experience that destroys, rather than creates, unity and trust. Hamilton, shows us that sometimes hell does not consist in hearing bombs, but in hearing other people breathe. Rather than subscribing to sound as a structuring principle that encourages processes of meaningful interpretation or narrative ordering, the novelist asks the reader to face the very real possibility of death:

the noise was accidental in that it seemed to bear no relation to either gun flashes, vast quick semicircles silhouetting roofs, or to the bursts, or, more rarely to those long two-second rosy glows made by a high explosive bomb. Only the steady drone, an interrupted drone, overhead made all of it threatening, gave it that meaning which caused every man in this station to laugh and talk louder than he need, as he put on his gear in readiness for the fire call that might now be only a question of minutes.⁷⁴

⁷³ Leo Mellor, “Listening in to the Long 1930s”, *Critical Quarterly*, 58.4 (2016), 113-132 (p. 114).

⁷⁴ Henry Green, “A Rescue”, in *Surviving: The Uncollected Writings of Henry Green*, ed. by Matthew Yorke (London: Harvill, 1993), pp. 77-82 (p. 77). This short story, based on Green’s work with the Auxiliary Fire Service, was submitted to John Lehmann and first published in Penguin’s *New Writing*, 4 (March 1941).

Coda: Sound Fiction

Eventually the sun would set for ever – burn out, *pop*, extinguish – and the universe
would run down like a Fisher Price toy whose spring has unwound to its very end.
Then there'd be no more music, no more loops.
Tom McCarthy, *Remainder*

Tom McCarthy's *Remainder* (2005) traces the steps of an unnamed protagonist who, after a severe accident in which he is hit by an unidentified object falling from the sky, seeks to recreate increasingly violent memories, incidents, and fantasies to feel "real". The protagonist's strange fascination with re-enactments and obsessive-compulsive repetition is first triggered by watching a film. He experiences actors in a film as "perfect", "seamless", and "natural", whereas his own body and actions, after the accident that has left him traumatised and isolated, feel strangely "artificial" and "inauthentic". He enlists the help of a number of "re-enactors" (he abhors the term "performer") to carefully recreate the site of one of his most vivid fantasy-memories, a block of flats inhabited by different people (a pianist, an old lady, a concierge, a motorbike enthusiast, and an elderly couple):

I fell asleep into the building, its surfaces, into the sound of liver sizzling and spitting, piano music wafting up the staircase, birds and milk floats, black cats on red roofs [...] I don't think it was a straight memory. It was more complex: Maybe it was various things all rolled together: memories, imaginings, films, I don't know.¹

Reconstructing this space with minute attention to detail and recreating moments of real or imagined events in this place serves one goal only, namely to attain the "fluent" and "unforced" movements, the "perfect" actions, which the protagonist otherwise only associates with Robert De Niro's performance in Scorsese's *Mean Streets* (1973):

The other thing that struck me as we watched the film was how perfect De Niro was. Every move he made, each gesture was perfect, seamless. Whether it was lighting up a cigarette or opening a fridge door or just walking down the street: he seemed to execute the action perfectly, to live it, to merge with it until he was it and it was him and there was nothing in

¹ Tom McCarthy, *Remainder* (Richmond: Alma Books, 2007), pp. 65, 72.

between. [...] 'He's natural when he does things. Not artificial, like me. He's flaccid. I'm plastic.'²

Like George Harvey Bone in *Hangover Square*, *Remainder*'s unnamed protagonist conceives of the sound film, and of those acting in it, as "real" and "perfect". In the mind of these characters, the sound film has attained what Justus Nieland calls "the degree zero of representation", a complete authenticity.³ The protagonist's attempts to recreate his memory-fantasies are carefully staged in order to acquire the (ultimately unattainable) fluency, perfection, and alleged authenticity he connotes with film. In the re-enactment of these fantasies, sound is vital. The protagonist's memory is intricately bound up with the soundscapes of neighbouring households:

I'd need a pianist too. [...] At night he'd compose, slowly and tentatively. In the day he'd practise, pausing when he made mistakes, running over the same passages again and again, slowing right down into the bits that he'd got wrong. The music would waft up just like the smell of the old woman's liver. In the late afternoons you'd get the skill-less grind of his uninterested pupils, hammering out scales and trivial melodies [...].⁴

When the protagonist finds a pianist who is "just right for the part", he provides detailed instructions on the way in which the musician ought to play and incorporate mistakes into his performance.⁵ The whole building, as the site of re-enactment of the protagonist's memory-fantasy, is subjected to a careful check of its acoustics, undergoing "sound editing" on site as required to get the building and its re-enactors "in sync":

Working out compatibility became our main activity. With the piano, for example: this had been delivered and installed, but we still had to find the right degree of absorbency for its flat's walls. Too much and I wouldn't hear it at all; too little and it wouldn't be muffled enough – it had been slightly muffled when I'd first remembered it. To fine-tune things like this we needed everyone to be in sync: the drillers to stop drilling, hammers hammering, sanders sanding and so on, while the pianist started playing.⁶

² McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 22.

³ Justus Nieland, "Dirty Media: Tom McCarthy and the Afterlife of Modernism", *Modern Fiction Studies*, 58.3 (2012), 569-599 (p. 589).

⁴ McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 63.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

The pianist provides the perfect soundtrack to the protagonist's memory-fantasy; they settle on a piece by Rachmaninov. The narrator is pleased with the music, liking "the way it undulated: how it bent and looped [...] We listened. The pianist paused, then went at it again, slowing right down as he entered the passage that had tripped him up".⁷ Everything is going well, just according to the protagonist's very specific requirements until, one day, he realises that the pianist is tricking him. Instead of providing the live music soundtrack with its mistakes and repetitions as per the protagonist's instructions, the pianist has recorded himself, left the building, and played a tape:⁸

"A recording of me. I made it myself, especially. It's the same thing, more or less. Isn't it?" It was my turn to go white now. There were no mirrors in the building, but I'm sure that if there had been and I'd looked in one I would have seen myself completely white: white with both rage and dizziness. "No!" I shouted. "No, it is not! It is just absolutely not the same thing!" "Why not?" he asked. His voice was still monotonous and flat but was shaking a little. "Because ... It absolutely isn't! It's just not the same because ... It's not the same at all." I was shouting as loud as I could, and yet my voice was coming out broken and faint.⁹

The protagonist is enraged, adamant that the recorded tape cannot replace the live performance he had devised so meticulously and yet he cannot put into words *why*. Through this episode, the novel reproduces some of the modernist anxieties about sound recording that we have observed in this thesis. Or rather, McCarthy's text is a reproduction of the late modernist rehearsal of modernist anxieties about sound and sound recording. The novel circles a problem we first encounter in Joyce, Woolf, and Eliot; then in Rhys, Bowen, and Greene; and finally in McCarthy, namely that sound reproduction is somehow different from the real event – even if, like the protagonist, we might struggle to put our finger on what *exactly* makes this difference. In McCarthy's text, which is so overtly concerned with performing and re-performing the same events and sonic fantasies, it may seem strange that this moment of recognition leads to such a strong emotional reaction. Yet, the point is this: in McCarthy's millennial text, the autodiegetic narrator seeks to compulsively disavow the

⁷ McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 123.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 140-141.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

traumatic realisation that he is merely rehearsing and repeating the stories and literary idioms of both modernist and late modernist fiction. We should note here, too, that the re-enactment of modern sound, the narrativization of its recording processes, do not solely occur in the novel: numerous films since the 1940s have almost compulsively addressed, enacted, narrated, or made tangible the process of sound recording and reproduction.¹⁰

If McCarthy's novel had a soundtrack, it would be, as the text itself suggests, The Propellerheads' 1990s hit *History Repeating*:

He raised his eyebrows and his voice climbed as he half-sang and half-spoke the line that he'd been whistling: "All, just-a, little, bit-of, history re-peat-ing. See?" Then, stepping back, he asked: "How's that?" "It's quite nice," I said. "I've heard it on the radio."¹¹

Given the protagonist's need to re-enact compulsively events and actions, his musical tastes are only too apt, yet "history repeating" is not just the baseline for *Remainder's* story, but also that of McCarthy's wider aesthetic discourse. Justus Nieland describes McCarthy's writing as the obsessive-compulsive re-enactment of modernism in both *Remainder* and *C* (2010):

McCarthy's work stands not as the empty resuscitation of an avant-garde idiom, but as its crypt, as a way of presiding over modernism's death by reenacting it traumatically, by lingering in the remains of its most fecund catastrophes, which were also those of the twentieth-century itself.¹²

Nieland rightly asks, "Why all the modernist necrophilia?"¹³ Why, indeed. He proposes that we ought to interpret McCarthy's "understanding of modernism not as a repertoire of forms [...] but as a series of mediations between the noble subjectivity of the human and inhuman

¹⁰ Consider, for instance, *Singing in the Rain*, dir. by Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, starring Debbie Reynolds and Gene Kelly (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1952); *The Conversation*, dir. by Francis Ford Coppola, starring Gene Hackman (Paramount Pictures, 1974); *Blow Out*, dir. by Brian de Palma, starring John Travolta and Nancy Allen (Filmways Pictures, 1981); and *The Lives of Others*, dir. by Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, starring Ulrich Mühe, Martina Gedeck, and Ulrich Tukur (Buena Vista International, 2006).

¹¹ McCarthy, *Remainder*, p. 116.

¹² Nieland, "Dirty Media", p. 570.

¹³ *Ibid.*

media. [A] picture of modernism [...] embedded in specific media environments, or ecologies, built fragiley over traumatic voids".¹⁴

However, this understanding is not new to McCarthy's post-postmodern vantage point. A first wave of "modernist necrophilia" arguably pervades the 1930s and 1940s novel and features explicitly in Evelyn Waugh's *The Loved One* (1948). Here, Waugh plots the Hollywood Film Industry and the American funerary industry alongside each other. Portraying members of a British expatriate community in Hollywood, the novel hones in on British expats who work as scriptwriters in Hollywood, their writing conceived solely as and for film. In the novel, Sir Francis Hinley, "the only knight in Hollywood", muses on his emigration from London:

I've never regretted coming away. The climate suits me. They are a very decent generous lot of people out here and *they don't expect you to listen*. [...] It's the secret of social ease in this country. They talk entirely for their own pleasure. Nothing they say is designed to be heard.¹⁵

Waugh's text does not merely align commercial film production with death, but also uses the novel to meditate on an emerging post-war media ecology that presents us with talk for talk's sake, a social inability to really listen, and the fact that sound is not designed to be heard. Indeed, we might read this comment alongside the development and consolidation of a classical style in film sound which effaces its own presence: it is devised and designed not to be heard.¹⁶ Although *The Loved One* has usually been read as Waugh's acerbic critique of Hollywood that was based on his experiences in the US when negotiating a film adaptation of *Brideshead Revisited*,¹⁷ it would be naïve to assume that Waugh's text targets

¹⁴ Nieland, "Dirty Media", p. 570.

¹⁵ Evelyn Waugh, *The Loved One: An Anglo-American Tragedy* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 8.

¹⁶ See for instance Rick Altman, "The Evolution of Sound Technology", in *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, ed. by Elisabeth Weis and John Belton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 45-53 (p. 47) and Mary Ann Doane, "Ideology and the Practice of Sound Editing and Mixing", in *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, ed. by Elisabeth Weis and John Belton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 54-62 (pp. 54-55).

¹⁷ See Ian Scott Todd, "Editing Corpses in Evelyn Waugh's Hollywood", *Twentieth Century Literature*, 59.3 (2013), 414-440 (pp. 414-415).

Hollywood exclusively. In a media ecology that was becoming more globalised by the minute, Waugh tells his readers that *The Loved One* is indeed an “Anglo-American Tragedy” (the novel’s subtitle), a text which, despite its setting in the US, tackles both nations’ media systems and the people mindlessly moving within them.

The novel returns to themes we first encountered in the discussion of *Vile Bodies*: the modern soundscape as noisy but devoid of meaning and the human inability to listen. Yet, while *Vile Bodies* approaches a coming-to-terms with the emergent interwar media system by translating revue’s soundscapes onto the page, thereby asserting the novel’s capacity to be a key player in its own right in this new mediascape, the stance in *The Loved One* has shifted. Instead of playful adaptation of other media and entertainment forms, the novel now plots the film industry in the age of audio-vision as akin to doing business with death. This, too, is not a new trope, but one we have encountered before in the modernist preoccupation with recorded sound as the incessant return of voices from the dead and the late modernist reconfiguration of recorded sound as symbolic of trauma and violence as exemplified in the works of Rhys, Greene, and Hamilton. If McCarthy’s fiction outlines a new “path for the novel”, as argued by Zadie Smith,¹⁸ and if it does so by “presiding over modernism’s death” through “traumatic re-enactments”, then McCarthy, in fact, presents us with a continuation of the late modernist preoccupation with mixed modes, transferences of forms and genres, and hybrid idioms, which seek to ground literary fiction in its media contexts and negotiate literature’s place within them. It is precisely this complex and polyphonic negotiation of media relationships that has emerged as a central theme of this thesis. By reading for sound, we have explored a number of issues that map the parallel development of and shared preoccupation with the sonic dimension of both late modernist fiction and film.

I began this thesis by considering Patrick Hamilton’s novel *Hangover Square* and its

¹⁸ Zadie Smith, “Two Paths for the Novel”, Review of *Netherland* by Joseph O’Neill and *Remainder* by Tom McCarthy, *The New York Review of Books*, 20 November 2008, pp. 89-94.

mobilisation of the shift from silent to sound film for constructing new strategies of literary representation. From the initial example of Hamilton's novel, I inferred some important questions pertaining to the novel of the 1930s and 1940s, its contemporary mediascape, and the novel's relationship with the rise of synchronised sound film. I started to explore how Hamilton uses the shift from silent to sound film to portray a character's mental illness and why this particular development of the media system was deployed to generate a new literary idiom. Extrapolating from Hamilton's novel, I also queried if *Hangover Square* might be indicative of a broader cultural concern with sound, and specifically film sound, which interacts not just with the late modernist novel's strategies of representation, but which also brings to the fore some of its key concerns vis-à-vis an emergent media system. Addressing some of the most popular and also some of the most widely studied genres of the period, I have considered sound, and its implications, in core case studies ranging from commercial cinema, in the form of both musical revue and film noir, to state-sponsored documentary and public relations filmmaking, as well as Second World War propaganda. I have argued throughout that a reading for sound enhances our understanding of the shared concerns of films and novels in the interwar years and during the Second World War.

The first chapter, "The Coming of Sound to Britain", situated my case studies more firmly within the technological and socio-cultural context of the rise of synchronised sound film in Britain and gave a partial overview of the film industry and the literary marketplace in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Here, I argued that one strategy of coming-to-terms with the changes brought about by the introduction of synchronised sound came from combining stylistic features reminiscent of silent film with the new opportunities offered by sound. The successful combination of sound and silence in Hitchcock's *Blackmail* marks something of a turning point that established sound film more firmly as a key player in the British media system of 1929. Hitchcock's play with sound and silence in the film presents a first indication of early sound film's shared preoccupations with the novel: *Blackmail* is simultaneously looking back to the era of silent movies and also forward-looking in its

experimental and sophisticated use of sound, seeking to negotiate sound film's new role and asserting its status in a cinematic trajectory reaching back to the late nineteenth century. In a parallel development, the late modernist novel of the 1930s and 1940s, as Miller says, is marked by an "apparent admixture of decadent and forward-looking elements",¹⁹ a distinctive response to the aesthetic, historical, and political pressures of its time. As I stated in my introduction, this is not to argue that the late modernist novel is *like* a sound film but rather to maintain that both media are co-existing and developing in parallel in the media ecology of the 1930s and 1940s.

My second chapter on sonic translations of revue entertainment addressed how early sound film derived much of its success from a clever and increasingly sophisticated appropriation of theatrical forms, such as the musical revue, to market synchronised sound to audiences. I explored this idea through a discussion of *Elstree Calling* and *Evergreen*. In parallel, I discussed how Evelyn Waugh's *Vile Bodies* provides a critical response to the introduction of sound film and sound film's appropriation of revue. I argued that Waugh emulates and parodies the musical revue in his novel to demonstrate the novel's own capacity to capitalise on stage entertainment. In this chapter, sound emerges as a matter of contention and competition between the novel and sound film, with both media asserting their ability to translate dramatic forms into different media outlets for their own commercial benefit.

The third chapter explored sound's role in public relations and documentary films *Housing Problems*, *Coal Face*, and *Night Mail* alongside Orwell's early novels *A Clergyman's Daughter* and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, Greenwood's *Love on the Dole*, and Grassie Gibbon's *Sunset Song*. The chapter argued that sound notably participates in the period's drive to

¹⁹ Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts between the World Wars* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), p. 7. As I have suggested at the end of chapter one, Miller's definition of late modernism shows some interesting parallels to Said's writing on late style in music and literature. "Lateness", Said writes, "is being at the end, fully conscious, full of memory, and also very (even preternaturally) aware of the present". See Edward W. Said, *On Late Style: Music and Literature against the Grain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), p. 14.

observe, report, and record everyday life and that a reading for sound uncovers the ties between social realism and modernist experimentation, giving rise to what I have called a characteristically late modernist “hybrid idiom”, which resolves standard narratives of divide that present social realism as fundamentally antagonistic to modernism in the 1930s.

Chapter four then presented a parallel discussion of film noir and selected late modernist novels of the late 1930s, reading Greene’s *Brighton Rock*, Rhys’ *Good Morning, Midnight*, and Hamilton’s *Hangover Square* in conjunction with the sound style of Dickinson’s *Gaslight*, Hitchcock’s *Shadow of a Doubt*, Wilder’s *Double Indemnity*, and Reed’s *The Third Man*. The chapter discussed how sound features in late modernist writing of anxiety and in film noir’s exploration of instability, trauma, and violence. I argued that this specific use of sound is characterised by patterns of difference and non-conformity: while Greene, Rhys, and Hamilton draw on, modify, and reconfigure modernist tropes and idioms while also affirming their embeddedness in an audio-visual mediascape, film noir’s sound style fundamentally breaks with scoring practices of the classical Hollywood film. As both film and the novel are grappling with the question of how to respond to their socio-cultural and political circumstances, they seek out ways of positioning themselves within a wider literary and cinematic trajectory.

The fifth chapter discussed sound in MoI-sponsored propaganda films and in the Anglo-American co-production *The True Glory* alongside Bowen’s *The Heat of the Day*, Hamilton’s *The Slaves of Solitude*, and Orwell’s *Coming Up for Air*. I argued that officially sponsored film politicised wartime sound in order to cast its audiences as a united community of listeners. By, for instance, structuring the sounds of aerial bombardment, military confrontation, and Home Front life as musical performance, officially sanctioned accounts of the war convey an impression of control and shared, communal experience. In contrast, late modernist Home Front fiction by Bowen, Hamilton, and Orwell refuses to deploy sound as a structuring principle to construct a narrative of the national community at war. Their novels explore the disruptive and dangerous implications of sound, rejecting

officially established tropes and motifs and, instead, focus on a deconstruction of the listening experience.

In my introduction, I stated the two aims of this thesis: first, to show how a methodological commitment to reading for sound can be productively mobilised to conduct a comparative analysis of two media forms in a historically specific context; and second, for the test case of synchronised sound film and the late modernist novel, to show that the “lateness” of the late modernist novel is not diametrically opposed to the “beginning” of sound film, but that these two media forms develop in parallel throughout the 1930s and 1940s. I have maintained that the late modernist novel and synchronised sound film share a concern for the following key questions: what is their status, their present and future, in an expanding media system? How do they define themselves as part of, but also against, a wider literary and cinematic trajectory? How do they negotiate some of the aesthetic, social, political, and economic pressures of their time? Finally, how do they deal with sound in an increasingly audio-visual mediascape? My chapters have explored the core issues of how sound features in the *translation* of entertainment from one media form into another; of how both the novel and film generate *hybrid idioms* between realist and modernist forms of representation; of how they rely on *patterns of difference* to construct their status within wider literary and cinematic trajectories; and of how they explore the *politics of recording and representing sound*.

Ranging widely, the case studies simultaneously form the strength but also the limitation of this thesis. They offer a broad view of the 1930s and 1940s media system and literature’s place within this system. In each individual case, the material suggests rich opportunities for future projects. The first case study lays the ground for a wider project on the relationship between early twentieth-century dramatic forms such as revue, vaudeville, and cabaret, and how they feed into both early sound film and the novel of the 1920s and 1930s. The second case study, on sound in documentary and auto-ethnographic fiction, offers a strong starting point for a more detailed analysis of how sound recording and sound

media came to feature in the period's documentary impulse. There is also more to be said on Orwell, Grassic Gibbon, and other writers of the 1930s and their engagement with both modernist and social realist styles and literary idioms. The third case study on film noir lays the foundations for developing a new take on the genesis of noir style through British late modernist fiction. Such a study would complement the standard narrative that attributes noir's origins predominantly to American hard-boiled fiction. There is also more to be said on noir as a sound style and the sound worlds of the noir thriller. The fourth case study invites a wider historical and cultural analysis on the ties between war and sound across literature, music, and visual culture.

In addition, the material discussed in this thesis also forms the basis for developing a number of single-author studies which could address the questions of how Evelyn Waugh's fiction mobilises and borrows from dramatic forms; of how Graham Greene uses sound to construct the nightmare worlds of *Greenland*; and of how Alfred Hitchcock develops a particular sound style that begins with his work in *Blackmail* and continues to evolve throughout his career. Regarding sound film, my case studies invite further in-depth analysis of the sound strategies and practices deployed in different film forms and genres and of how these develop and change over time. New projects could also emerge through refining and applying the methodology of reading for sound to the literature of other periods and to take such a reading as a new opportunity for thinking about the novel's relationship with other media and its position within changing media ecologies from the eighteenth century to the present day. The number of opportunities for future research emerging from my approach indicate the productivity of reading sound both as an object of study and as a methodological commitment across different media forms.

For the test case of late modernist fiction, my reading for sound has demonstrated the ways in which we can understand the late modernist novel as exploring the idea of "sound fiction" in an increasingly competitive and multi-layered media system. On the one hand, the notion of writing "sound" fiction articulates the late modernist writer's attempt to

devise a response to the changing media system of the period and to negotiate the novel's place within this new media ecology. On the other hand, the idea of "sound fiction" articulates the concern of writing sound into fiction, of assembling and integrating the new and old soundscapes of the media ecology into the late modernist novel's strategies of literary representation. Such a move reflects the late modernist novel's debt to its literary predecessors, but it also uniquely articulates the late modernist novel's embeddedness in its culturally and technologically specific media context. In parallel, the sound film of the 1930s and 1940s negotiates and experiments with the possibilities and constraints that emerge from the introduction and consolidation of synchronised sound technology. My reading for sound has simultaneously tested a new methodological approach for the comparative analysis of different media forms *and* presented a new way of reading the late modernist novel and sound film as two media developing in parallel in the 1930s and 1940s. In this way, the thesis has also contributed to a contextualising effort of late modernist literature that is primarily concerned with the mediascape, thus complementing the social, political, and aesthetic historicisation of late modernism in the works of Miller, MacKay, Esty, and Davis amongst others.²⁰

Through the sonic loops of both film and the late modernist novel, readers and audiences can listen to a distinctive period of transition and transformation. The 1930s and 1940s mark a period of negotiation and reconfiguration of cinematic and literary strategies of representation, a repositioning of film and the novel vis-à-vis a media ecology increasingly filled with sound and sound media. There is also a growing mixture of cultural modes and forms and a bridging of modernist and realist styles to which we can attune ourselves by attending more closely to the treatment of sound in film and the novel. These processes of transition and transformation are unearthed again in McCarthy's millennial

²⁰ See the discussion of late modernism in my introduction. Key works include (but are by no means limited to) the following: Miller, *Late Modernism*; MacKay, *Modernism and World War II*; Jed Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Thomas S. Davis, *The Extinct Scene: Late Modernism and Everyday Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

text, which appears late modernist in character. *Remainder* spins an intricate analogy between “wind-up musical toys, Fisher Price ones” and the novel’s way of rehearsing and replaying the sonic loop of both modernism and late modernism: “How they slow down as their mechanism unwinds right out to its end, until it seems that no more music will come from them – but then if you nudge them just a little, they always give one last half-chime.”²¹ Even though we may think that we have reached modernism’s end point and that there is nothing more to be said, nothing more to be heard, we can always give a little nudge to both film and the novel, always extracting another half-chime from them.

²¹ McCarthy, *Remainder*, pp. 147-148.

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Filmography

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Blade Runner, dir. by Ridley Scott, starring Harrison Ford and Rutger Hauer (Warner Bros., 1982)

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Broadway Melody, dir. Harry Beaumont, starring Charles King and Anita Page (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1929)

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Coal Face, dir. by Alberto Cavalcanti, produced by John Grierson (GPO Film Unit, 1935)

The Conversation, dir. by Francis Ford Coppola, starring Gene Hackman (Paramount Pictures, 1974)

Drive, dir. by Nicolas Winding Refn, starring Ryan Gosling and Carey Mulligan (FilmDistrict, 2011)

Double Indemnity, dir. by Billy Wilder, starring Fred MacMurray and Barbara Stanwyck (Paramount Pictures, 1944)

Elstree Calling, dir. by Adrian Brunel and Alfred Hitchcock, starring Will Fyffe, Cicely Courtneidge, and Tommy Handley (British International Pictures/ Wardour Films, 1930)

Enough to Eat? The Nutrition Film, dir. Edgar Anstey, sponsored by the Gas, Light and Coke Company (1936)

Evergreen, dir. by Victor Saville, starring Jessie Matthews and Sonnie Hale (Gaumont-British, 1934)

Gaslight, dir. by Thorold Dickinson, starring Diana Wynyard and Anton Walbrook (Anglo-American Film Corp., 1940)

Gone with the Wind, dir. by Victor Fleming, starring Clark Gable and Vivien Leigh (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1939)

Goodnight, Vienna, dir. by Herbert Wilcox, starring Anna Neagle and Jack Buchanan (United Artists, 1932)

Hangover Square, dir. by John Brahm, starring Laird Cregar and Linda Darnell (20th Century Fox, 1945)

The Hollywood Revue of 1929, dir. Charles Reisner, starring Conrad Nagel, Buster Keaton, Bessie Love, and Joan Crawford (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1929)

Housing Problems, dir. by Arthur Elton and Edgar Anstey, produced for the British Commercial Gas Association (1935)

The Lady Vanishes, dir. Alfred Hitchcock, starring Margaret Lockwood and Michael Redgrave (United Artists, 1938)

Laura, dir. by Otto Preminger, starring Gene Tierney and Dana Andrews (20th Century Fox, 1944)

Listen to Britain, dir. by Humphrey Jennings and Stewart McAllister (CFU, 1942)

The Lives of Others, dir. by Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, starring Ulrich Mühe, Martina Gedek, and Ulrich Tukur (Buena Vista International, 2006)

London Can Take It!, dir. by Humphrey Jennings and Harry Watt (GPO Film Unit, 1940)

The Lost Weekend, dir. by Billy Wilder, starring Ray Milland and Jane Wyman (Paramount Pictures, 1945)

The Maltese Falcon, dir. by John Houston, starring Humphrey Bogart and Mary Astor (Warner Bros, 1941)

Mulholland Drive, dir. by David Lynch, starring Naomi Watts and Justin Theroux (Universal Pictures, 2001)

Murder, My Sweet, dir. by Edward Dmytryk, starring Dick Powell and Claire Trevor (RKO Pictures, 1944)

Night Mail, dir. by Basil Wright and Harry Watt (GPO Film Unit, 1936)

Pursued, dir. by Raoul Walsh, starring Teresa Wright and Robert Mitchum (United States Pictures and Warner Bros., 1947)

Rebecca, dir. by Alfred Hitchcock, starring Laurence Olivier and Joan Fontaine (United Artists, 1940)

Sally in our Alley, dir. Maurice Elvey, starring Gracie Fields and Ian Hunter (RKO Pictures, 1931)

The Sea Hawk, dir. by Michael Curtiz, starring Errol Flynn and Brenda Marshall (Warner Bros., 1940)

Shadow of a Doubt, dir. by Alfred Hitchcock, starring Teresa Wright and Joseph Cotten (Universal Pictures, 1943)

Sin City, dir. by Robert Rodriguez and Frank Miller, starring Benicio del Toro and Bruce Willis (Miramax, 2005)

Sing As We Go!, dir. by Basil Dean, starring Gracie Fields and John Loder (Associated British Film Distributors, 1934)

Singing in the Rain, dir. by Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, starring Debbie Reynolds and Gene Kelly (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1952)

Soylent Green, dir. by Richard Fleischer, starring Charlton Heston and Leigh Taylor-Young (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1973)

Spellbound, dir. by Alfred Hitchcock, starring Ingrid Bergman and Gregory Peck (United Artists, 1945)

Station West, dir. by Sidney Lanfield, starring Dick Powell and Jane Greer (RKO Pictures, 1948)

The Third Man, dir. by Carol Reed, starring Joseph Cotten, Orson Welles, and Alida Valli (British Lion Film Corporation/ StudioCanal, 1949)

The True Glory, dir. by Carol Reed and Garson Kanin (Columbia Pictures, 1945)

Waltzes from Vienna, dir. Alfred Hitchcock, starring Jessie Matthews and Esmond Knight (Gaumont-British, 1934)