

Introduction: Understanding the past, facing the future

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Brexit means Brexit

Brexit brings out the worst in people. The interminable fight over what Brexit actually means, beyond (former) Prime Minister May's mesmerising tautology, has produced, and revealed, multiple faultlines in an increasingly dis-United Kingdom, on the level of nations, regions, political parties and social classes, down to the most intimate levels of families, friends and relationships. To a certain extent, this was caused by the stark binarism of the choice that the British people were given – yes or no, in or out. Woefully inadequate to the complexity of the situation, such binarisms erase all subtlety and are thus guaranteed to make people act more narrow-mindedly than they would under normal circumstances, to become partisan, even to risk re-awakening the ghosts of violent Irish sectarianism. While Brexit was sold to the British people as a way out of an impasse, several years into the process, it has become glaringly obvious that this move in itself will solve neither economic and social problems, nor those related to an English identity crisis. This collection of essays seeks to contribute to the Brexit debate, not being concerned, however, with the day-to-day political process and the technical difficulties of 'getting Brexit done', as Boris Johnson liked to put it. Rather, we are interested in the origins, the logic behind and the longer-term consequences of the developments that culminated on 23 June 2016, when a majority of British people voted to leave the European Union. In other words, we seek to help trace the road to Brexit.

We argue that in order to address the Brexit situation adequately, we need to understand British attitudes to Europe more deeply. As has often been pointed out, the Brexit vote represents a kind of category error – ordinary people wishing to punish the political class for their callousness

and inability to develop policies that will allow people to deal with the consequences of austerity politics and the global challenges of the twenty-first century (see McGarvey, 2017). While this is most probably true, we suggest that it is not accidental that it was possible to re-direct people's anger, which should, according to this line of argument, have focused on the class system and rampant neo-liberal global capitalism. Even though the immediate critical target was the EU as a supranational political and economic organisation, many people's anger was in fact re-directed to Europe as a cultural, political and historical entity. The question is how this particular type of scapegoating could be so successful. The main reason is, we claim, that many people in Britain are in denial about the strength of the country's ties to continental Europe – ties that are in fact geographic, ethnic, historical, cultural, political, economic and often personal. This denial may take the form of open hostility, as it has in debates about immigration and political sovereignty, but even more frequently, it surfaces as a lack of interest in Europe or things European, fostered perhaps by the increasingly monolingual culture and dwindling grasp on history caused in Britain by 'stripped-down' curricula in schools and universities. There may come a time when people will not know any more that Queen Victoria's mother tongue was German. At its worst, this historical and cultural amnesia leads to a parochialism Britain can ill afford, especially if it wishes to 'stand alone' again in the winds of global change. It does make a difference after all whether or not the navel at which one gazes also happens to be the navel of the world, as in the days of the British Empire to which many look back with nostalgia – times up to the early twentieth century where, in Jan Morris's words, 'the British travelled all the world like the children of rich parents. Not for a moment did I think of myself as European. I was a privileged transient from another kind of country, an oceanic country whose frontiers extended from Tasmania to Newfoundland' (Morris, 2006: 4).

If we are to understand British attitudes to Europe, we need to pay close attention to cultural memory and the cultural imaginary. Many attempts at explaining the Leave victory and current British (and particularly English) 'Euroscepticism' (Spiering, 2015) focus quite narrowly on economic, legal and political factors, underestimating more 'fuzzy' phenomena such as cultural myths, narratives and images which circulate in literature, travel writing, films and other media, influencing people on a visceral level, sometimes even against their better judgement. There is now a growing public awareness of this, but it took about two years after the referendum to emerge. As Robert Eaglestone stated in a collection published in late 2018, 'Brexit is not only political, economic and administrative: perhaps most significantly it is an event in culture, too. Brexit

grew from cultural beliefs, real or imaginary, about Europe and the UK; the arguments before, during and after the referendum were – and are – arguments about culture; its impact on the cultural life of these islands may last for generations’ (Eaglestone, 2018: 1). Looking at the build-up to the referendum, it is striking that Leave campaigners were very good at exploiting myths and stereotypes for their own ends, tapping into the reservoirs of cultural memory in search of narratives and images that would have an impact, while Remainers did not manage, or did not care, to offer powerful narratives in favour of European integration. For example, the UKIP poster that shows three huge escalators cutting into the white cliffs of Dover, prime symbol of British Exceptionalism and the ‘island myth’ (see chapter 10), says more than a thousand words; its impact cannot be countered with a considered and bland argument about change, cultural hybridity and the ultimately beneficial effects of immigration. In recent years, the British ‘island story’ (see Christinidis, 2015) has been foregrounded again, and if international ties are acknowledged, the emphasis is on the Commonwealth and the United States, downplaying the ways in which Britain is historically, culturally and economically entangled with Europe. John Robert Seeley famously suggested in 1883 that the British had acquired their empire in a ‘fit of absence of mind’, and it sometimes appears as if they had also embarked on their exit from Europe in this half-conscious state. If anything, the need for a candid debate about British and English identity and the nature of the country’s relations to Europe is even more obvious now, three years into the Brexit negotiations. As this book goes to press, three projected exit dates, 29 March, 12 April and 31 October 2019, have come and gone, and there is still a conspicuous lack of values and visions that could guide the political negotiations. If Britannia once ruled the waves, she is now adrift, and we argue that Britain will have to face Europe, *really* to engage with it and to take an interest, if it is to make informed decisions about the future.

More kin than kind

For many centuries, England/Britain has had a close, difficult and often violent relationship with continental Europe. In order to understand this particular entanglement and its role in the Brexit decision in 2016, one has to take a close look at the historical situation in conjunction with the debates about Britishness and Englishness that emerged in the last twenty years. After the demise of the British Empire and during decolonisation, Britain had to come to terms, in the context of post-war austerity and Cold War politics, with the loss of its imperial status. As Jodi

Burkett shows in *Constructing Post-Imperial Britain* (Burkett, 2013), attempts were made by organisations such as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament to replace Britain's geopolitical and economic dominance with a moral claim to leadership. In parallel, as Dominic Sandbrook argues in *The Great British Dream Factory* (2016), Britain transformed itself into a 'cultural superpower', exporting lifestyles, fashion, literature, films and music. Despite these developments, the British public had to accept Britain's diminished role in the world and to suffer the effects of their country's weak economy, at the same time facing a (Western) continental Europe that was recovering fast and building supra-national organisations. As Benjamin Grob-Fitzgibbon observes in *Continental Drift* (2016), Britons thus developed a Euroscepticism that became inseparable from post-imperial nostalgia (see Paul Gilroy on postcolonial melancholia, 2004), not least in view of the excruciating structural changes of the Thatcherite 1980s. While 'Cool Britannia' seemed the way forward for a while in the relatively prosperous 1990s under New Labour, the end of the Cold War and the devolution process put the interrogation of Englishness on the agenda with increasing urgency, and in the years leading up to the referendum, the volume was turned up on arguments against un-English influences. The notion of the 'Norman Yoke' was resurrected (Kingsnorth, 2014; see chapter 8), and with the dismissal of 'Hanoverian thinking' (Gardiner, 2018: 106) and postcolonial multiculturalism (UKIP and the Conservative government's 'hostile environment', see chapters 10 and 12), Englishness has time and again emerged as an antler-shaking, folksy version of Anglo-Saxonism (see, for example, the production of D.C. Moore's *Common* at the National Theatre in London in 2017). Ironically, of course, the Anglo-Saxons were migrants from what is today Denmark and northern Germany. Such is the nature of national identity that peeling away the layers of perceived foreignness, one is ultimately left with nothing. The ubiquitous metaphor of 'roots' has tended to mislead people here, since movement rather than stasis has always been the default condition. This is a truism which the powers that be choose to deny, thus attempting to cement the status quo.

Even though Britain did join the European Economic Community in 1973 in a time of economic crisis, it failed to acknowledge the strength of its relations to continental Europe, considering itself separate and aloof to such an extent that when Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union was triggered in March 2017, the British government forgot to make adequate provisions for its continental European territory, Gibraltar (see Habermann, 2018), as well as for Ireland. Europe is 'the Other', both for Conservatives and those on the left (see MacShane, 2015, 2016, 2017), often cast in the role of a tedious relative who will persistently pop up at

family parties, displaying irritatingly familiar personality traits and getting in the way of the much more interesting American and Commonwealth crowds. While Britain had a ‘multicultural moment’ in the 1990s and into the very early years of the new millennium, after the financial crisis in 2008–9 there was a marked return to English heritage and nostalgia, country houses, the royal family, snobbish TV productions such as *Downton Abbey* (2010–15), and of course to that ‘finest hour’ when the ‘island nation’ purportedly stood alone. As regards recent popular culture and the media, films such as Jonathan Teplitzky’s *Churchill* (2017), Joe Wright’s *Darkest Hour* (2017) and Christopher Nolan’s *Dunkirk* (2017) cannot but be interpreted now in the light of Brexit, invested as they are in the heroic success story that re-signifies a chaotic retreat from mainland Europe into a moral victory. Taking a relational perspective, this collection explores the British-European entanglement in the face of British Exceptionalism, the ‘island myth’ shadowed by the invasion scare narrative, and dys-EUtopia.

British-European entanglements

No attempt will of course be made here to revisit the long history of British–European relations from the time of the Roman occupation, and through the various waves of migration to the present day, trying to cover aspects of commerce, warfare, exile, custom, language and dynastic relation (see Simms, 2017). Rather, I will touch upon a selection of issues that had, or have, a particular impact on the British cultural memory and imagination. Countering the notion of the ‘island fortress’, in his book *Blue Water Empire* Robert Holland gives a detailed account of the important place of the Mediterranean in British history and the British imagination. In a large-scale historical survey, he shows how strongly the Mediterranean was shaped by British influence. Inquiring into the ‘British experience of the Mediterranean, and the Mediterranean experience of the British’ (Holland, 2013: 6) since 1800, he argues that if ‘there has in modern times been a predominant instrument for integrating the Mediterranean as a single theatre it was the British ... It was the British presence in the Mediterranean, and the stability it provided, which made the region what an eminent historian writing in 1904 incapsulated as the “keyboard of Europe”: if that was shaken, everything else would shake too’ (Holland, 2013: 6).¹

While, given the cultural and political importance of the Mediterranean, Britain has thus crucially shaped Europe, the same holds true the other way round, as Holland shows in his study *The Warm South: How the*

Mediterranean Shaped the British Imagination. Offering an extended discussion of the Romantic infatuation with the Mediterranean, Holland moves on to the twentieth century, where he singles out Peter Mayle's best-selling memoir *A Year in Provence* (1989), turned into a TV mini-series in 1993, as an important landmark. This was 'the story of a fifty-something couple moving to the south of France and their travails with dodgy builders and other eccentric locals while converting a derelict farmhouse into their idealized escape' (Holland, 2018: 259). Before long, 'a whole flood of British retirees were on the move southwards, creating de facto communities, transforming corners of Tuscany into Chiantishire, the somewhat less affluent making do with cramped apartments on Spanish coasts' (Holland, 2018: 259). He concludes: 'Nothing could replicate the warm South as a benchmark and inspiration, because of the relentless pull exerted from the Graeco-Roman past, and the range and power of its more modern manifestations' (Holland, 2018: 259). This continues to be reflected in a sizable amount of more or less middlebrow works for light holiday reading as well as in mainstream literature by British authors based abroad, such as Tim Parks or Adam Thorpe, whose memoir *Notes from the Cévennes: Half a Lifetime in Provincial France* was published in 2018, or the Francophile Julian Barnes, whose collection of stories *Cross Channel* (1996) offers a literary exploration of the English Channel as a contact zone. Identity is always relational: as any historical inquiry will show, Europe would not be what it is without Britain, and Britain as we know it would not exist without Europe.

The road to Brexit

Our analysis of the road to Brexit is subdivided into three parts: the chapters in part I, 'Britain and Europe: political entanglements', take stock of the political status quo and its historical causes, addressing the process of European integration and British party politics, and paying attention to Britain's internal faultlines. Robert Holland opens the collection with a wide-ranging chapter on Britain's oblique relation to Europe, exploring the 'tendency for British influence to drape itself around Europe's outer rims' and reviewing the chequered history of negotiations with the EU and its predecessors. Ironically, Holland emphasises, those in Britain who do not like to negotiate with the EU will have to face the fact that the need for negotiation will increase after Brexit. In chapter 2, Lara Feigel and Alisa Miller focus on the twentieth century, and particularly the period after the Second World War. The chapter addresses visions for a unified Europe in the aftermath of war, debates about British leadership

and the contributions of writers such as Stephen Spender and T.S. Eliot. Feigel and Miller argue that the European project needs to be kept alive as a cultural vision. Chapter 3 by Marlene Herrschaft-Iden offers an in-depth analysis of the Conservative Party's discourse on Europe between 1997 and 2015. It emerges that when in opposition, the Conservatives did nothing to criticise Labour's policy of free movement after the 2004 EU enlargement, and that the hostile rhetoric signalling the rise of immigration to the top of the political agenda only crept in after 2011 as part of an argumentative U-turn. It is therefore demonstrably disingenuous to blame Labour exclusively for the consequences of Britain's open policy in the early 2000s. Chapter 4 by Klaus Stolz discusses Britain's internal divisions, tracing the ways in which Europe was used in domestic constitutional debates and showing that European discourses always first and foremost served domestic purposes.

Studying the discourses of national identity in Britain, one cannot help but notice the crucial role that literature plays in them, from early modern authors such as Spenser, Shakespeare, Bunyan and Milton via the eighteenth-century novel and the Gothic novel, the Romanticism of Scott, Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley and Blake, the condition-of-England novel, the fin-de-siècle spy and invasion scare fiction as well as the projections of a dangerous Europe evoked by E.M. Forster and Henry James, to twentieth-century counterfactual and dystopian literature and travel writing. This may be so, as Michael Gardiner argues, because 'in the absence of a codified constitution ... English Literature continued to act as an informal or anti-formal constitution' (Gardiner, 2013: 1; see also Gardiner, 2004 and Westhall and Gardiner, 2013). Over centuries, literature effected a flexible and dialogic debate about identity, structurally able to negotiate otherness as it defined Englishness and Britishness, rhetorically beating the bounds, and shaping the contours of the nation in a geographical and social imaginary epitomised in John of Gaunt's (aka Jean de Gant) vision of the 'sceptred isle' as dramatised in Shakespeare's *Richard II* (see chapter 10). According to Gardiner, this system has come under pressure in the new millennium in a post-colonial paradigm: 'If the informal constitution was indeed cultural, could English Literature really retain the civilizing and universalizing shape it had had during imperial and consensual times?' (2013: 5). Gardiner concludes that the 'long-accepted universalism that ties together British state and English Literature ... can and should be historicized' (2013: 9), especially now that English Literature is increasingly turned into expensive heritage through exorbitant study fees. Possibly, 'BrexLit' projects such as Ali Smith's writing to the moment in her Seasonal Quartet (*Autumn*, 2016; *Winter*, 2017; *Spring*, 2019) or the Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy's communal drama *My Country: A*

Work in Progress (2017) seek to recapture literature's role as a space for constitutional debate.² This reading would seem to be endorsed by the fact that each of Smith's novels abounds with literary echoes and is linked to a Shakespeare play. In *Spring*, in line with its refugee theme, this is *Pericles*, a play that charts its characters' wanderings across the Eastern Mediterranean, effecting miraculous reunions.

Given this crucial importance of literature in the context of British discourses of identity, the second and third parts of the collection will deal mainly with literature. While our approach is necessarily selective, we emphasise some particularly resonant themes such as the role of Germany (chapters 2, 5 and 7) and British Exceptionalism and isolationism underpinned by the topographical narrative of the island nation (chapters 1, 4, 6, 10, 11 and 12). This narrative is related in turn to the tropes of immigration scare stories, which have been used to great advantage by Leave campaigners and the Europhobe press, to stereotypes of Eastern Europe and fears of mass immigration from the East (chapters 6 and 11).

In detail, part II, 'British discourses of Europe in film and literature', is devoted to exemplary case studies in film, dystopian and historical fiction. Understandably, after the Second World War, the British found it particularly difficult to come to terms with Germany (see Rau, 2013). As Judith Vonberg shows in chapter 5, the 1960 film *Sink the Bismarck!* establishes images of Britishness and Germanness congruent with the dominant wartime stereotypes. Vonberg proceeds to contrast this with the 1957 box office hit *The One That Got Away*, whose likeable protagonist, played by the dashing German actor Hardy Krüger, elicited ambivalent responses in Britain. Was it really acceptable to side with an escaped German prisoner? Menno Spiering, in chapter 6, revisits the concept of British Exceptionalism, intrinsically connected to the conspicuous negative projections of the European in anti-Catholic and anti-European novels. Chapter 7 by Lisa Bischoff continues the discussion of Eurosceptic novels with an in-depth analysis of Andrew Roberts' influential novel *The Aachen Memorandum*, originally published in 1995 and re-issued in 2012 by Biteback Publishing. The subsequent two chapters address historical fiction: In chapter 8, Christian Schmitt-Kilb reads Paul Kingsnorth's *The Wake* (2014) as a Brexit novel. Set at the time of the Norman invasion and focused on resistance to the 'Norman yoke', the novel constructs an authentic Anglo-Saxon Englishness obliterated through invasion. Schmitt-Kilb links this to Fintan O'Toole's argument about the structures of feeling that led to Brexit: in *Heroic Failure: Brexit and the Politics of Pain*, O'Toole diagnoses an English 'desire to *have actually been invaded* so that one could – gloriously – resist' (O'Toole, 2018: 44; emphasis in

original). A similar dynamic is at work in the popular, best-selling fictions set in the Tudor period. In chapter 9, Siobhan O'Connor analyses Philippa Gregory's *The King's Curse* (2014) and *The Taming of the Queen* (2015) in terms of expressions of 'postcolonial melancholia' (Gilroy, 2004). In these novels, 'native' Plantagenet culture is seen as threatened by Tudor tyranny – a foreign usurpation that also brings contagion through the sweating sickness, the 'Tudor disease'. Schmitt-Kilb's and O'Connor's case studies throw into relief the arbitrary nature of prelapsarian visions of England. Ironically, in the Tudor novels, the invaders of earlier times are cast as people with a native birth right, proponents of a class-inflected, indigenous culture. Despite their dominant political message, these novels thus undermine their own claims of origin with their failure to imagine a Britain, or England, prior to, and 'untainted' by, European migration.

Part III, 'Negotiating borders in British travel writing and memoir', deals with constructions of identity in non-fictional literature. In chapter 10, Melanie Küng focuses on the English Channel as a liminal space, analysing the significance of the white cliffs of Dover as a prime symbol of British Exceptionalism. The symbol, creating white cliffs of the mind as ostensible geographical proof of insular separatism, becomes so strong as to obliterate the reality of constant exchange. If this is considered properly, it becomes less surprising, if still deplorable, that the Conservative politician Dominic Raab admitted publicly, a few days before he stepped down as Brexit minister in November 2018, that he had had no idea of the cross-Channel volume of trade. Chapter 11 by Blanka Blagojevic continues the discussion of borders and boundaries, analysing the trope of the 'Iron Curtain' in British travel writing pre- and post-1989. In readings of David Shears' *The Ugly Frontier* (1970), Anthony Bailey's *Along the Edge of the Forest: An Iron Curtain Journey* (1983) and Tim Moore's *The Cyclist Who Went Out in the Cold: Adventures along the Iron Curtain Trail* (2016), she traces the trajectory of British conceptions of Eastern Europe. Again, it emerges that seemingly natural boundaries are surprisingly mobile. Finally, one of the crucial British-European entanglements that was forgotten when Britain triggered Article 50 to begin the Brexit process, along with the issue of Ireland,³ was British Gibraltar. Unsurprisingly, although pre-Brexit Gibraltar was almost invisible to large parts of the British population, the post-Brexit status of Gibraltar has become a bone of contention. Acknowledging this, the collection finishes with a brief memoir by the British-Gibraltarian writer M.G. Sanchez, who says that, given his experiences in Britain over the years, and the nature of his encounters, in Gibraltar and elsewhere, with people from 'mainland Britain', he was surprised to see Leave win only by such a narrow margin.

The Aftermath

To conclude this brief introduction, I want to focus on one example that puts in a nutshell what I mean when I speak about British, and especially English, denial, rejection and oblivion with regard to Europe. In 2013, Rhidian Brook published *The Aftermath*, a novel set in the ruins of Hamburg after the Second World War and based on his own family history. His grandfather, Colonel Walter Brook, was 'governor of the Kreis (county) district of Pinneberg, immediately to the west of Hamburg, and responsible for its reconstruction and the feeding, rehousing and de-Nazification of thousands of displaced people' (Brook, 2014). When Colonel Brook requisitioned a villa to live in, he took the unusual decision to allow the previous owners to stay, so that Rhidian Brook's father grew up between 1946 and 1951 in close contact with the Ladige family, ignoring the injunction not to 'fraternize' with the defeated enemy, and a friendship developed between the Brook and Ladige children. When Rhidian Brook heard about this history, as late as 2001, he decided to go on a trip down memory lane and to learn about his grandfather, bonding with his own father in the process. As they travelled to Hamburg together, met Theo and Heike Ladige and rekindled memories, it turned out that Brook's father can actually still speak German.

Flying home, my father expressed relief. Theo and Heike remembered that time with gratitude and fondness. How curious that my grandfather's simple act of kindness had led to his son and grandson making this trip together 60 years later.

I asked what influence Walter's action had had on Dad's own life. He liked to think he'd inherited his father's tendency to question 'the expected patterns of behaviour' and that he'd continued his 'always open door' policy in his own home. But the most telling legacy for him was to be found in Theo's and Heike's responses. He'd always had an idea of what his father was like but their memories made him more real.

The distance between Hamburg and London is surprisingly small. (Brook, 2014)

Brook also recounts that the Germans were punning on Walter Brook's name, praising him as a builder of bridges, given that the name Brook sounds similar to the German *Brücke* (bridge). So this is a story of reconciliation after a cataclysmic historical event, where Colonel Walter Brook displayed the (British) decency and graciousness that won over so many people on the Continent after the war. I consider it unfortunate, but also quite typical, that this contact was not sustained and the

episode fell into oblivion. It is equally unfortunate and typical that, to a certain extent, Rhidian Brook betrays the story by romanticising it, adding sexual interest and focusing on an adulterous affair between the wife of the British Army officer and the German occupant of the house. There seems to be a need, almost a compulsion, to re-imagine the British–European encounter in terms of an illicit love affair. Thus distorted into cliché, the potentially uplifting episode is overwhelmed by the dynamics of British Europhobia: since the narrative takes its frisson and interest from transgressive sexual desire, it casts all contact with the European ‘Other’ as dangerous. (A blueprint for this can be found in Henry James’ novels.) This almost automatic plot device is in fact both acknowledged and questioned in E.M. Forster’s novel *A Passage to India* (1924), where the young Englishwoman Adela Quested misreads the disturbing impact that India’s otherness has on her as sexual assault. This leads initially to a charge against the Indian Doctor Aziz which Adela then has the courage to withdraw when she realises that she has made a mistake, thus alienating the British colonial community. Significantly, the problem is noticed with regard to India rather than Europe. Postcolonial literary studies have done much for a critique of the British Empire, showing that there is no British identity outside an imperial paradigm, which is of crucial importance, given the quasi-constitutional role of literature. We need a Euro-British literary studies to do the same for the relationship between Britain and continental Europe, recapturing and highlighting all that disavowed Europeanness. What does it mean that Will Ladislav in George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* has Polish ancestry? How to interpret all those European settings in British fiction and the immense bulk of travel writing?⁴

The film *The Aftermath*, based on Brook’s novel and released in late 2018, amplifies the novel’s romantic frisson, reducing bombed Hamburg to a picturesque backdrop for rather bland English period drama.⁵ So far, the film has mainly been discussed, and dismissed, in terms of old-school romance and soapy period drama, as reviews and social media commentary focused on the choice of actors, Keira Knightley’s period appeal, her dresses, the morals of a film that asks spectators to countenance ‘cheating’ on one’s husband. Moreover, producers apparently could not find it in their hearts to cast an actual German as the male love interest, who is played by Alexander Skarsgård. Unfortunately, then, in terms of the relationship between Britain and the Continent, in this case the particularly riddled one with Germany, *The Aftermath* is not even a ‘brief encounter’, to recall the title of the famous Second World War film melodrama; it is more like two ships passing in the night. In the case of the Brook family, in contrast, contact was made through the children who were thrown together by destiny, doing what comes naturally to children – talking, playing, making a

new beginning.⁶ But in order for this healing power to emerge, there must be contact and dialogue, there must be curiosity, respect, openness and goodwill. These qualities, amply displayed by Colonel Walter Brook, are severely under pressure in our age of renewed borders and walls.

Speaking about borders and walls – I promised myself that I would leave my personal stake in the matter out of this academic inquiry, but in questions such as these it seems there is no neutral ground. I grew up during the Cold War as an anglophile in the Western part of a divided (and occupied) Germany fostered by American help, but also crucially shaped by the cultural ‘projection of Britain’, for many years promoted institutionally by the British Council. Having studied Englishness, English literature, history and culture, and British–European relations over years and in some depth, I am convinced that, in its own best interest as for the benefit of the Continent, Britain must acknowledge its inextricable entanglement with Europe, and continue to play its part, as it has always done in the past, so that together we can face the challenges of the future. If Brexit brought that home to a significant number of people in Britain, and if it forced both Britain and the EU to face some home truths about Europe’s increasingly marginal role in the world, that would not be entirely a bad thing.

Notes

- 1 The ‘eminent historian’ in question was Julian Corbett (in Corbett, 1904: 314).
- 2 The term ‘BrexLit’ was coined by Kristian Shaw, whose book *BrexLit* will be published by Bloomsbury in 2020. For the emerging BrexLit phenomenon see also Shaw (2018).
- 3 For an excellent discussion of Brexit and Ireland, see Connelly (2018).
- 4 For an important discussion of the European dimension in British interwar travel and travel writing see Fussell (1980).
- 5 *The Aftermath* (UK, Germany, USA, dir. James Kent, prod. Ridley Scott *et al.*, Fox Searchlight Pictures).
- 6 For detailed historical accounts of the situation in post-war Germany and Europe see Judt (2005), Hitchcock (2008) and Buruma (2013).

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