

Art and the Masses

Even before the Second World War began to wreak havoc on a variety of social systems as well as cultural norms, literature had been through the mill of High Modernism, as well as the politically charged thirties. The cultivation of a healthy disregard for traditional forms and structure was already well established. Ideas concerning the nature of quality and value in art were still in the chaotic flux that characterised previous decades. These ideas and their malleability were part of what might be called the maturation of industrialised society, including the relatively recent coincidence of near-total literacy and inexpensive published material. The privileged few were no longer the only segment of society in a position to appreciate literature; that the vast majority of citizens now also had the means and the time to consume art led to the creation of a division between low and high art, especially by those believing themselves to be defenders of the integrity of the latter. Artistic value in the age of burgeoning commercial culture has been an area of interest explored in numerous critical works. Specifically regarding periodicals, Ezra Pound, in his 1930 essay 'Small Magazines,' argues that private journals with limited readership perform a far more valuable service than normal magazines, because of their willingness to print what the popular press would not: 'Honest literary experiment, however inclusive, however dismally it fail, is of infinitely more value to the intellectual life of a nation than exploitation (however glittering) of mental mush and otiose habit'.¹ These periodicals' roles as forums for experiment and as places largely protected from the whims of publishers and the masses have been the primary focus of many investigations of the

‘little magazine’ phenomenon. As Ian Hamilton explains, they were valued for ‘making points, supporting gifts, promoting tendencies which would otherwise have been fatally neglected,’ and ‘nurturing literary growth at a level subtler and more crucial than could ever be imagined by the commercial or “established” press’.² That these periodicals served as agents of artistic edification in opposition to commercialised culture has been treated as a given in critical studies of the medium for much of the previous century, in works ranging from Denys Val Baker’s 1943 *Little Reviews: 1914 to 1943*³ to Jayne E. Marek’s 1995 *Women Editing Modernism: ‘Little Magazines’ and Literary History*⁴. The idea that these periodicals were actually attempts to engage society in artistic discourse, and as much products of mass communication as the larger periodicals they are usually set in opposition to, has been a more recent development. This forms the argument for Mark S. Morrisson’s *The Public Face of Modernism*, which focuses on the phenomenon of ‘little magazines,’ arguing that rather than merely being the efforts of a group ‘publishing for coteries’ and serving primarily as the printed defence against the hordes of philistines and their popular print culture, the modernists, in many cases, put out their magazines in order to engage the public, and to ‘forge a more significant public function for’ art.⁵ The idea that these publications were also meant to engage with society at large, in an effort to create a real artistic dialogue with the masses and expand the appeal of artistic experiment, as Morrisson suggests, allows for a complete revaluation of the public role of art in the first half of the twentieth century, and the nature of modernism in general.

Morrisson’s argument is supported by the radical politicisation of art in the 1930’s. Fissures in the Ivory Tower reading of Modernism began to widen as a large part

of the artistic intelligentsia began to adopt socialistic political ideals and to concentrate on partly identifying with and defending the working class, often despite a lack of comprehension of what the working class was or what its major concerns were. This is not to say that politicized modernist literature did not pre-date the Thirties. As Marina Mackay points out, the idea of the 'Ivory Tower' itself is somewhat false:

A characteristic tag used in the 1930s of the 1920s, the 'Ivory tower' is, most impartially, an attack on literary specialization. But there's a very real sense in which the ivory tower was, to swap metaphors, a straw man. The narrow class and metropolitan base of literary and political culture in interwar England made it impossible for writers not to have social and familial connections with the political establishment.⁶

In the ongoing literary discussions, the idea of literary quality could no longer be reliably pegged to classical ideals, innovative structure, political bent, or any other single measurement. Even so, the discussion of the division of art into high and low camps at the end of the 1930s was unresolved and contested. Mass culture was an undeniable fact. That it was deemed worthy of consideration by *Horizon's* readers and writers, as was the role high art had for the masses, is surprising given the enduring label of snobbishness applied to the magazine by numerous critics.

This chapter deals with the ways in which *Horizon's* pages acted as a stage from which a variety of commentators proclaimed the validity or debased nature of mass culture. Of these commentators, George Orwell offered the most advanced treatments of

art and popular culture. Connolly's decision to print the lengthy 'Boy's Weeklies' in the third issue of *Horizon* is evidence of his regard for Orwell's precocious investigations of this relationship.⁷ But Orwell was not the only novice commentator to find a place in *Horizon*. The art critic Clement Greenberg, at the time relatively unknown participated early in the discussion, argued for the dismissal of popular forms of art, while Harry Rée and Michael Rothenstein advocated, like Orwell, the necessity of engagement. Jean-Paul Sartre, also little known in Britain before and during the war, provided his existentialist prospective, noting that art and artists cannot exist outside of time and place. As one might expect of such powerful, if still emerging, intellectual figures, their opinions did not necessarily coincide. But the acuity and challenge of their various arguments proclaimed *Horizon*'s ability to encourage and broadcast forceful and penetrating critical perspectives.

Connolly's own observations and beliefs concerning the effects of war, and cynicism about traditional literary concerns, which he welcomes as a cleansing of the outmoded, are clearly set out in his January 1941 'Comment.'⁸ His ideas, as espoused here, are a shift away from the principles he sets out in 'The Ivory Shelter' in *New Statesman* on 7 October 1939, and are coloured by a year at war and a rethinking, shared with many other literary professionals, about what types of art are worthy of encouragement.⁹ Connolly's dismissive assertion that Sayers, Ellington, and the rest were 'artists in spite of themselves' who often worked with 'inartistic material' is meant to characterise the age these personalities represent as degraded and ill-suited for innovative, fully-formed artistic achievement. His inclusion of jazz, travel writing and mystery novels indicates a low regard for these forms, undeniably due to their status as

popular entertainment (III:13 6). Thus the rethinking he calls for is probably limited to traditional, highbrow artistry, and any worthy new art would necessarily be difficult to approach. Such an indictment of popular art shows that the divide between high and low art remained a powerful aspect of Connolly's literary perspective, as it did for both the contributors to and readers of *Horizon*. But rather than merely disparaging the lowbrow, *Horizon* chronicles a new, emergent curiosity in the popular art of the masses, which was far more widely read, appreciated, and influential on society at large than the literature appearing in the magazine itself.

Orwell's 'Boy's Weeklies' appeared in the March 1940 issue of *Horizon*, and would have been a curious inclusion from the standpoint of most subscribers, as his topic was not Hardy, Goethe or Flaubert, but 'vilely printed twopenny papers,' specifically the ones aimed at school-age boys.¹⁰ These would generally garner derision, if notice at all, from *Horizon*'s readership. They could be found, along with other cheap periodicals that covered other specific interests, in the 'small news-agent's' shops that were frequently encountered in 'any poor quarter in any big town;' Orwell explains that his thesis arises from the mass consumption of these weeklies:

Probably the contents of these shops is the best available indication of what the mass of the English people really feels and thinks. Certainly nothing half so revealing exists in documentary form. Best-seller novels, for instance, tell one a great deal, but the novel is aimed almost exclusively at people above the £4-a-week level. The movies are probably a very unsafe guide to popular taste, because the film industry is virtually

a monopoly, which means that it is not obliged to study its public at all closely. The same applies to some extent to the daily papers, and most of all to the radio. But it does not apply to the weekly paper with a smallish circulation and specialized subject-matter. Papers like the *Exchange and Mart*, for instance, or *Cage-birds*, or the *Oracle*, or the *Prediction*, or the *Matrimonial Times*, only exist because there is a definite demand for them, and they reflect the minds of their readers as a great national daily with a circulation of millions cannot possibly do.¹¹

The inferences that can be made from the contents of these countless periodicals are important, according to Orwell: 'All [author's emphasis] fiction from the novels in the mushroom libraries downwards is censored in the interests of the ruling class,' and that this is particularly evident in those two-penny weeklies aimed at schoolboys.¹² Orwell's main focus is the older, traditional periodical in this genre, namely *The Gem* and *The Magnet*, because, despite the observation that 'a good many boys now regard them as old fashioned and "slow",' 'they are more interesting psychologically than the [newer boy's weeklies], and also because the mere survival of such papers into the nineteen-forties is a rather startling phenomenon'.¹³ The interests they represent, he suggests, would seem hopelessly anachronistic to many, but their continued popularity is evident: 'It is quite clear that there are tens and scores of thousands of people to whom every detail of life at a 'posh' public school is wildly thrilling and romantic. They happen to be outside that mystic world of quadrangles and house-colours, but they can yearn after it, day-dream about it, live mentally in it for hours at a stretch' (I:3 153). Orwell believes the important

question surrounds what segment of the population these weeklies have such appeal:

All I can say from my own observation is this. Boys who are likely to go to public schools themselves generally read the *Gem* and *Magnet*, but they nearly always stop reading them when they are about twelve; they may continue for another year from force of habit, but by that time they have ceased to take them seriously. On the other hand, the boys at very cheap private schools, the schools that are designed for people who can't afford a public school but consider the Council schools 'common', continue reading the *Gem* and *Magnet* for several years longer [...] These boys were the sons of shopkeepers, office employees and small business and professional men, and obviously it is this class that the *Gem* and *Magnet* are aimed at. But they are certainly read by working-class boys as well. They are generally on sale in the poorest quarters of big towns, and I have known them to be read by boys whom one might expect to be completely immune from public-school 'glamour'.¹⁴

Orwell also notes that 'Admiralty advertisements' calling 'for youths between seventeen and twenty-two' appear alongside those for 'milk chocolate, postage stamps, water pistols,' and others specifically aimed at boys around fourteen, and that this, along with letters to the editor from fans who 'say they have read every number of the *Gem* or *Magnet* for the past thirty years,' indicates that these magazines appealed to a much wider demographic than one might expect.¹⁵ Orwell judges that the English school

system provides a clear encapsulation of class differences, and the exploits of public school boy characters, carefully constructed to be identified with easily by any reader, offered a 'wealth-fantasy' that had the ability to draw in large numbers of readers who would have little or no regard for the political or psychological import these subjects necessarily carry.¹⁶ 'Naturally the politics of the *Gem* and *Magnet* are Conservative, but in a completely pre-1914 style, with no Fascist tinge,' he comments.¹⁷ Their message is not intentionally subversive, or meant to reinforce a narrow ideology, only general English nationalism and sentimentality, as he explains: 'In reality their basic political assumptions are two: nothing ever changes, and foreigners are funny'.¹⁸

Orwell believes that these periodicals, in the values they consistently espouse and in their wide readership, particularly among classes they do not meaningfully portray, offer an interesting insight into popular sentiment, particularly in regard to the war, which had yet to begin when the essay was written:

The working classes only enter into the *Gem* and *Magnet* as comics or semi-villains (race-course touts, etc.). As for class-friction, trade unionism, strikes, slumps, unemployment, Fascism and civil war—not a mention. Somewhere or other in the thirty years' issue of the two papers you might perhaps find the word 'Socialism', but you would have to look a long time for it. If the Russian Revolution is anywhere referred to, it will be indirectly, in the word 'Bolshy' (meaning a person of violent disagreeable habits). Hitler and the Nazis are just beginning to make their appearance.¹⁹

The lack of obvious political themes in these magazines would seem at odds with the highly charged political scene of the 1930s, but it is understandable, according to Orwell, if one takes into account the persistence of political apathy in the great majority of the population, of which the readership of these magazines is a valid representation. Ideological struggles and questions of geo-politics are disregarded by the majority because they have seemingly no direct impact on daily life, and these magazines epitomise this thinking. While these papers might seem cursorily apolitical, they are anything but, according to Orwell:

That does not mean that these papers are unpatriotic—quite the contrary! Throughout the Great War the *Gem* and *Magnet* were perhaps the most consistently and cheerfully patriotic papers in England [...] But their patriotism has nothing whatever to do with power-politics or ‘ideological’ warfare [...] After all, England is always in the right and England always wins, so why worry? It is an attitude that has been shaken during the past twenty years, but not so deeply as is sometimes supposed. Failure to understand it is one of the reasons why Left Wing political parties are seldom able to produce an acceptable foreign policy.²⁰

Orwell’s belief is that it is precisely because of the superficially apolitical nature of this medium that makes it insidious. These periodicals, in creating and maintaining a world based on Victorian and Georgian mores, encourage nationalism, militarism, and an

unhealthy disregard for current events and complex geo-politics, all of which are decidedly pro-establishment and helpful to the right-wing cause. Left-wing foreign policy in Britain up to the war was proactive, as evidenced by the activities of adherents during the Spanish Civil War, and the lack of general public support for such assistance to the republicans demonstrated the political indifference of the majority of Britons, not just intent on the part of the conservatives in power. This indifference is both cultivated by and reflected in such media as boy's weeklies.

The understanding that close reading of this type of periodical offers regarding popular sentiment, both politically and socially, is precisely why, Orwell argues, this and other popular media deserve thoughtful, critical attention. Giving them short shrift due to their escapism, large popularity, mass-produced style or inferior writing quality misses the point; these magazines offer a glimpse at the attitudes, beliefs and desires of a large segment of the population that is often overlooked. Orwell goes on to look at more current weeklies aimed at school-age boys, noting the movement away from groups towards heroic individual achievement, and the advent of science fiction, tales of adventure, and other more popular escapist forms. These newer stories may be superficially different, in that they include more sex and violence, but they, along with similar genres aimed at young women, still represent a surprisingly cohesive set of values. These are not only reflections of the consumers' beliefs, but are also the reinforcement of, and even the foundation for, these beliefs:

Personally I believe that most people are influenced far more than they would care to admit by novels, serial stories, films and so forth, and that

from this point of view the worst books are often the most important, because they are usually the ones that are read earliest in life. It is probable that many people who would consider themselves extremely sophisticated and ‘advanced’ are actually carrying through life an imaginative background which they acquired in childhood from (for instance) Sapper and Ian Hay. If that is so, the boys’ twopenny weeklies are of the deepest importance. Here is the stuff that is read somewhere between the ages of twelve and eighteen by a very large proportion, perhaps an actual majority, of English boys, including many who will never read anything else except newspapers; and along with it they are absorbing a set of beliefs which would be regarded as hopelessly out of date in the Central Office of the Conservative Party [...] Considering who owns these papers, it is difficult to believe that this is un-intentional. [...] The *Gem* and *Magnet* [...] are closely linked up with the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Financial Times*.²¹

Orwell’s theory that what is read early affects readers more strongly than they might imagine might have been hard to swallow for many *Horizon* subscribers. The idea of becoming increasingly cultured through reading quality works would supposedly be a lifelong endeavour, and biases and opinions would be continually shaped as more works were read, regardless of the reader’s age. If Orwell is correct, then no matter how intellectually stimulating or philosophically challenging the writing one read later in life, their mindset would still have the indelible mark of their first reading experiences, and

would be shaped by the biases those first works imposed. He takes this a step further, stating that far from being an unintended effect of seemingly apolitical, nostalgic literature, writing such as is found in boy's weeklies is intentionally shaped to foster reactionary and nationalist views. Their publishers hope to maintain the status quo precisely because of these surreptitious effects.

Orwell goes on to examine the idea of publishing in the genre works that might demonstrate left-wing ideals rather than a conservative bias. He is hesitant to propose that such an endeavour would be successful, its having never really been considered before, but he finds precedents in the left-wing literature that circulated before the Spanish Civil War and in a Russian Revolutionary era Communist film, both of which are biased left, but to the same acceptable extent that the conservative boy's weeklies are. In any case, he believes it would be a mistake not to explore the matter further; 'I am merely pointing to the fact that, in England, popular imaginative literature is a field that left-wing thought has never begun to enter,' claims Orwell, 'and boys' fiction above all, the blood-and-thunder stuff which nearly every boy devours at some time or other, is sodden in the worst illusions of 1910'.²² Orwell obviously believes that these stories do leave an impression, and that to overlook this is a perilous error, hence the necessity of careful appraisal and, if necessary, a balanced reaction.

The inclusion of this essay in *Horizon*, despite the usual perception of boy's weeklies as unworthy fare, is assuredly due to Orwell's political explication and the sweeping extrapolation of nostalgic writing as right-wing subversion that he is able to demonstrate. Orwell's criticism is necessarily political; otherwise, in his view, boy's weeklies wouldn't deserve the attention. But the political elements which he brings into

play, along with the sociological ideas he utilises, are as new to serious literary analysis as is the subject matter. Connolly's decision to publish such a radically different type of critical essay in *Horizon* indicates that he found this take fresh and interesting, at least after reading what Orwell had to say, and that he felt that Orwell's explication, and possibly his call for a suitable counter-offensive as well, were things that the magazine's readers needed to be confronted with. Orwell's treatment does show a degree of contempt for the popular entertainment he examines, but his main message is that the power of such popular art cannot be dismissed without substantial consequences. In the charged circumstances of the Second World War class differences began to break down, at least temporarily. In the volatile environment of the 'people's war,' Orwell's essay was an early recognition of the value of understanding significant but often critically neglected literature that cut across class barriers and both influenced and reflected an underlying mindset. 'Boys' Weeklies' was a signal both of his cultural awareness and of *Horizon's* function as an analysis of culture, not simply as a purveyor of its highbrow version.

This is not to say that *Horizon* neglected other areas of culture or approaches to it. An article in the following month's issue also addresses popular media, comparing it with more high-brow pursuits, but rather than imploring the reader to recognize the serious power such widely read material possesses, it actually recommends complete dismissal as a remedy. Clement Greenberg's 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch' explores popular culture but finds little of use in the study of 'mass-produced' art, and decides that its only political implication is that it might be easily suited to propaganda. He does not see this, however, as something that has already occurred, as does Orwell.²³ Greenberg's sympathies were

decidedly Marxist, as his later essay in the September 1940 issue, 'An American View', makes clear. Connolly labels him a 'Trotskyite' in the 'Comment' of the same issue in response to the letter's indictment of British war efforts.²⁴ Despite the elevation of the working class at the heart of his beliefs, however, Greenberg believes the favourite entertainments of that class are suitable only for destruction. He hopes to inculcate an appreciation of quality, and thus to create an egalitarian world of art-lovers. Greenberg writes that the decay of art is a problem all societies face, due largely to the eventual tendency towards 'academicism,' where 'the really important issues are left untouched because they involve controversy,' and where 'creative activity dwindles to virtuosity in the small details of form, all larger questions being decided by the precedent of the old masters'.²⁵ This degradation is symptomatic of most societies, according to him, because societies 'become less and less able, in the course of [their] development, to justify the inevitability of [their] particular forms,' and thus break up 'the accepted notions upon which artists and writers must depend in large part for communication with their audiences'.²⁶ Because of these inevitable changes, 'All the verities involved by religion, authority, tradition, style, are thrown into question, and the writer or artist is no longer able to estimate the response of his audience to the symbols and references with which he works'.²⁷ Thus 'it becomes difficult to assume anything'.²⁸ This paralysis forces most artists to forgo meaningful discourse in their work, and encourages their reliance, even obsession, with rules and form that Greenberg regards as the genesis of work with popular appeal, but with very little or no artistic value.

Greenberg believes that 'popular, commercial art and literature with their chromeotypes, magazine covers, illustrations, ads, slick and pulp fiction, comics, Tin Pan

Alley music, tap dancing, Hollywood movies, etc., etc.,’ for which he uses the term kitsch, to be ‘a product of the industrial revolution, which urbanized the masses of Western Europe and America and established what is called universal literacy’.²⁹

‘Previous to this,’ he considers, ‘the only market for formal culture, as distinguished from folk culture, had been among those who[...]could command the leisure and comfort that always goes hand in hand with cultivation of some sort,’ which, until the industrial revolution, ‘had been inextricably associated with literacy,’ an ability that was limited before to those with ‘refined tastes’.³⁰ Mass literacy, the move to cities, the resultant loss of interest in traditional folk art, and the desire for artistic diversion juxtaposed with the lack of sensibility for ‘the values of genuine culture,’ all gave rise to ‘kitsch,’ according to Greenberg, which is often itself the result of mechanised processes and uses ‘for raw material the debased and academicized simulacra of genuine culture’.³¹ He denigrates kitsch, stating that it ‘welcomes and cultivates this insensibility[...]it is the source of profits[...]it is mechanical and operates by formulas[...]it is vicarious experience and faked sensations[...]and it] is the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our times’.³²

Greenberg stresses the lack of quality inherent in kitsch, and believes this enough to further diminish what little power it has, unlike Orwell, who recognises that the power of popular, commercially driven art is immense, and deserving of analysis in its own right. Neither writer fully debates the lack of intrinsic quality in such works. But Greenberg’s recommendation that all such low art be dismissed out of hand contradicts Orwell’s thesis that it deserves attention because of the great power it possesses due to its wide readership and inherent political agenda. Connolly, as editor, may have been in agreement with both writers to varying extents, because both essays were printed, but his

often professed plan for *Horizon* was to concentrate solely on quality writing, whatever the source, with less credence paid to political concerns. This position would seemingly place him in Greenberg's camp, favouring dismissal of popular culture. But as Connolly's previous discussed 'Comments' demonstrate, politics and literature, particularly in wartime, were often inseparable, and the appearance of Henry Rée's article 'Kitsch, Culture and Adolescence',³³ later in the year, amongst others dealing with the lack of and/or need for education towards art appreciation in the masses, seems to demonstrate that Connolly's concerns were similar to those professed by Orwell in 'Boy's Weeklies'.

The 'avant-garde' is also a movement without historical precedent, according to Greenberg. He believes it has been made possible by 'a superior consciousness of history—more precisely, the appearance of a new kind of criticism of society, an historical criticism,' and that 'it was no accident[...]that the birth of the avant-garde coincided chronologically—and geographically too—with the first bold development of scientific revolutionary thought in Europe'.³⁴ Greenberg admits that avant-garde participants never fully separated from the bourgeois order from which they originated, because they 'needed its money,' and that many of them recoiled from revolutionary political thought as they did traditional middle-class values, but he maintains that, 'without the circulation of revolutionary ideas in the air about them, they would never have been able to isolate their concept of the "bourgeois" in order to define what they were *not*[author's emphasis]'.³⁵ Avant-garde practice, Greenberg argues, thus becomes "Art for art's sake" and "pure poetry," an attempt to retire 'from public altogether' and 'to maintain the high level of[...]art by both narrowing and raising it to the expression of

an absolute in which all relativities and contradictions[...are]either resolved or beside the point'.³⁶ This abstinence from 'the ideological struggle which art and poetry find so unpropitious' is precisely why the avant-garde can perform its most important function, suggests Greenberg, which is 'not to "experiment," but to find a path along which it would be possible to keep culture *moving* [author's emphasis] in the midst of ideological confusion and violence'.³⁷ 'Avant-garde imitates the processes of art,' he writes, while 'kitsch,' which he views as the 'rear-guard,' is only concerned with imitating art's 'effects'.³⁸ Orwell's 'Boy's Weeklies', in comparison, stresses that the effects of what Greenberg calls 'kitsch' are much more profound and disturbing, and that any imitation they utilise is to further deeper ambitions, rather than merely to make popular art more sellable.

Another view again is proposed in Harry Rée's 'Kitsch, Culture, and Adolescence' which appeared in the August 1940 issue of *Horizon*. This is a review of *What Do Boys and Girls Read?* by A. J. Jenkinson, a 'lecturer in Education,' and, like that book, also serves, according to Rée, as a response to Clement Greenberg's 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch' and to a lesser extent to Orwell's 'Boy's Weeklies'.³⁹ Rée writes that 'the recent articles of Orwell, [Frank] Richards, and Greenberg in *Horizon* suggest that the Avant-Garde was using the lull created by the war to send back scouts to take a peep at the Rear Guard, and report how they were getting on'.⁴⁰ He believes that there are two groups of readers for whom these articles have appeal: 'Those above the battle, who found their interest titivated by this personal introduction to a new acquaintance, and those who come across the Rear Guard continually in their daily life, who are genuinely interested in it, probably because they have a direct or indirect interest in education'.⁴¹

Rée believes this second group will find Jenkinson's book appealing. Rée's purpose, and that of the author of the book he reviews, is to question the traditional methodology associated with literature education and appreciation in younger students, and to challenge educators to think of new ways, and possibly different texts, to use in order to interest young people in reading. Neither Rée nor Jenkinson subscribe to the idea that the popular, pulp material that such students enjoy should be eradicated based on their cultural worthlessness, as Greenberg advises. Even though these types of writing may be dangerous in their intended formation of political ideals, as Orwell suggests, neither the author nor reviewer deem it sufficiently subversive that it must be kept out of the classroom. Rée believes, however, that Orwell's proposal for leftish popular magazines has merit, and the possibility that in-class discussions of such material could conceivably subvert the biases contained in such writing is mentioned. Addressing such texts in the classroom at all would have been unprecedented at the time, and no doubt scandalous to those of Greenberg's mindset, but Rée and Jenkinson suggest that educators should accept that they have little control over what students choose to read outside of class, and that they use whatever material works best. Rée acknowledges that this is a radical approach to the classroom treatment of literature for the period.

Jenkinson's book is based upon a questionnaire he used with 'boys and girls of twelve to fifteen years,' which Rée believes 'important,' because 'in more ways than one this is the 'difficult' age, so that when teachers, in their impatience to lead children to the appreciation of good literature, force it down their unwilling throats, they are publicly sick, for that is not the pabulum they want'.⁴² Rée quotes Jenkinson's discussion of the

emotional states of young people, and how these states affect their attitudes towards what teachers and others see as appropriate literature:

Boys become intensely aware of themselves in relation to and in comparison with others. They are full of uncertainties, doubts, suspicions, which they seek to hide by many widely differing devices: by abject conformity, by aggressiveness, by a fearful reluctance to let themselves go. . . .[author's ellipsis] In the throes of an emotional development which may be tempestuous, and is certainly obscure and devious, they suspect all expressions of emotion. The very stuff and fabric of much, of the bulk, of our finest literature is emotion. To the Middle School boy lyric poetry is "sloppy"; analyses of the "grande passion" are "daft". This is equally the age of action—of delight in games, devotion to practical hobbies. Descriptions bore him, reflections, contemplations, musings are "dry". "Sloppy", "daft", "boring", "dry": such are his unprompted reactions to the appeals of literature.⁴³

According to Rée, adventure stories, whether they be 'school' or 'detective', hold predominance for boys in the age group studied, while 'love stories' have a similar position for girls; 'All this reading,' according to both reviewer and author, 'fulfils a necessary function for the adolescent, providing him with wishful fantasy, with a justifiable escape from a world to which he is attempting to adjust himself'.⁴⁴ Thus these popular forms of culture, without quality, according to Greenberg, and of dangerous

intent, according to Orwell, are here recommended, due to another element they share: fantasy, and the escape it provides, which is deemed healthy. That is not to say that more highly regarded literature can not provide a similar escape, but, according to Rée: ‘School reading[...]seems to be so designed that it has no function, unless it be the unconscious one of turning children away from good literature in disgust’.⁴⁵ Thus Rée implies that what literature is chosen, and the manner in which it is presented, is the problem. Rée does add another caveat: this turning away can also be ‘because it is presented too soon’.⁴⁶ He concludes with this observation:

School teachers are in a peculiar position with regard to Kitsch. They have had leisure and education enough to enable them to see through it, and with the best intentions they try to force their pupils to see through it, without realizing that they will never succeed if their pupils don’t want to. Some of them are even so blind as not to realize that their pupils don’t want to. The result is that the pupils revolt, employing that most effective method of revolt, passive resistance, and that they turn with relief, out of school, to the culture which they can understand, and which is provided for them in abundance.⁴⁷

Orwell, like Rée, sees the draw of such popular culture, appreciates that it cannot be gotten rid of, and goes a step further by proposing that boy’s weeklies and ‘bloods’, as Rée calls adventure magazines, be written from a different, leftish viewpoint to balance what is being so voraciously imbibed during these susceptible years. Greenberg’s view

seems a great deal like the blind schoolteachers Rée describes, or even like the ‘crusted conservative schoolmasters’ he says are those without hope, and on whose deaf ears his review, and Jenkinson’s book, will fall.⁴⁸ Like those of ‘Boys Weeklies’, these views seem ostensibly at odds with *Horizon*’s own purpose and the attitudes generally held by its readers, but its inclusion, along with Orwell’s essay, indicates that Connolly, as editor, felt that the serious analysis of the power of popular media, despite its usual lack of quality writing, was something that needed to be brought to the attention of *Horizon* subscribers. The periodical, by highlighting thoughtful but provocative material, could educate and stimulate its readers, not merely provide them with comfort during the war years.

Other essays in *Horizon* further illustrate the seriousness with which Connolly viewed the attempt at understanding the role art plays for the great majority of people who lacked what was seen as the proper education to appreciate quality. Michael Rothenstein’s ‘Can We be Educated Up to Art: Notes on Lecturing to the Army,’ which appears in the April 1943 issue of *Horizon*, is another examination in this trend, concentrating on the response of the ‘common man’ to art as demonstrated by the author’s experiences lecturing on painting and applied art to enlisted men. Despite occasions of ‘tremendously full-blooded discussion,’ Rothenstein notes, ‘when the men are interested, the vigour and spontaneity of their interest is refreshing,’ he admits that ‘talking about painting to the army makes you realize with new force how big the gap is which separates your own work from anything which seems important in ordinary life’.⁴⁹ This perspective falls in line with the observations Orwell makes on the popularity, and power, of boy’s weeklies in comparison to high-brow writing.

Rothenstein believes the distance between the artist and the ordinary person to be a relatively new construct, as is the resulting isolation of the artist as creator. This is a radical supposition for the period. Like Greenberg, Rothenstein sees the Industrial Revolution as the primary cause of this dichotomy, but for a very different reason:

This is the outstanding problem and it always confronts you: it is hard to discover in the men themselves any common basis for discussion and gives the measure of the distance which separates art, even in its simplest forms, from the life of the community. In throwing out the craftsman the Industrial Revolution created a barrier of machines between the artist and the people and destroyed the foundation upon which the magnificent pyramid of creative endeavour had rested. Until society achieves a sensitive adaptation of the machine to its creative ends, using it as it once used the craftsman's hands, the artist will continue up the crooked footpaths of extreme individualism, alone.⁵⁰

In holding the industrial revolution responsible for the gulf between art and ordinary people, Rothenstein agrees with some of Greenberg's points in 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch.' But Rothenstein does not comment on the resulting mass literacy as part of his observation; rather, he sees the craftsman as the integral link between art and ordinary life. His downfall, the result of increasing dependence on machines and mass production, is the reason why the separation occurred. Rothenstein also implies here that a lack of

education is also a key culprit in the separation, and speculates near the end of the piece that his pupils' own children will be in a much better position to appreciate art:

You have to remember that [...] you are dealing with men who have missed many educational advantages which their children enjoy. In the long run education may do much and a beginning has been made. Teachers are at last realizing that children possess great imaginative gifts which, in a number of schools, they are no longer discouraged from using.⁵¹

Rothenstein's conclusions on the purpose of education are thus also similar to those offered in Rée's review of Jenkinson. So too is his observation that, despite the 'usual misconception of the relation between function and design,' some men were able to begin to appreciate the artistry inherent in forms when they are presented in more commonly encountered environments, like house and furniture design, and the organisation of machines.⁵² This awareness agrees with the notion of using the familiar to discuss artistic concepts as espoused in Rée's review of Jenkinson. One conclusion Rothenstein comes to is that most artists do not appreciate how little impact their work has on the great majority of people, unless they find themselves in a situation like his own, where he often hears their viewpoints concerning art. He, too, is dismissive of much of what the men themselves find appealing and of value, so still demonstrates the pervasiveness of attitudes such as Greenberg's. Again, though, the inclusion of this article in *Horizon* must be seen not as an attempt to remind its readership of their self-congratulatory

membership in the higher echelons of artistic appreciation, but to draw their attention to the very different aesthetic held by the vast majority, as well as the difficulty of bridging the gulf between supposedly high- and lowbrow art. The essay's theme reinforces the idea that it would be perilous to dismiss the persuasive power of popular culture.

George Orwell's 'The Art of Donald McGill,' a sort of companion piece to 'Boys Weeklies' in its exploration of popular culture in the form of bawdy picture postcards, appeared in the September 1941 issue of *Horizon*. It has as its central argument something very akin to what Rothenstein's discussion in 'Can We be Educated Up to Art' touches on: the separation of art and artists from common culture that has been growing since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. These 'penny or twopenny coloured postcards with their endless succession of fat women in tight bathing dresses, and their crude drawing and unbearable colours,' as Orwell describes them, are 'on sale everywhere,' despite the fact that 'many people seem to be unaware of the existence of these things, or else to have a vague notion that they are something to be found only at the seaside'.⁵³ These 'comic' postcards, which Orwell describes as 'simply an illustration to a joke, invariably a low joke...[which] stands or falls by its ability to raise a laugh,' are best epitomized by the work of Donald McGill because 'he is not only the most prolific and by far the best of contemporary postcard artists, but also the most representative, the most perfectly in the tradition'.⁵⁴ The cards 'are not to be confused with the various other types of comic illustrated postcard,' claims Orwell, 'such as the sentimental ones dealing with puppies and kittens or the Wendyish, sub-pornographic ones which exploit the love affairs of children[...]They are a genre of their own, specializing in very 'low' humour, the mother-in-law, baby's nappy, policemen's boots type of joke, and distinguishable

from all the other kinds by having no artistic pretensions'.⁵⁵ McGill's postcards 'represent, as it were, the norm of the comic postcard,' because, 'without being in the least imitative, they are exactly what comic postcards have been any time these last forty years;' thus, Orwell claims they serve as a decent example, because 'from them the meaning and purpose of the whole genre can be inferred'.⁵⁶

Orwell states that the 'first impression' of the cards 'is of overpowering vulgarity,' which is 'quite apart from the ever-present obscenity, and also apart from the hideousness of colours[...]they have an utter lowness of mental atmosphere which comes out not only in the nature of the jokes but, even more, in the grotesque, staring, blatant quality of the drawings,' which are 'deliberately ugly' with 'faces grinning and vacuous' and 'the women monstrously parodied, with bottoms like Hottentots'.⁵⁷ But the second impression is what is surprising, according to Orwell, because it 'is of indefinable familiarity,' which in part comes from the postcards' omnipresence: 'they remind you of the barely different postcards which you probably gazed at in your childhood'.⁵⁸ 'But more than this,' he writes, 'what you are really looking at is something as traditional as Greek tragedy, a sort of sub-world of smacked bottoms and scrawny mothers-in-law which is a part of western European consciousness,' and this observation, along with that of the fact that this level of humour and 'obscenity' can hardly be found in any other British print medium, forms the crux of Orwell's argument.⁵⁹

'At least half of McGill's postcards are sex jokes,' he judges, 'and a proportion, perhaps ten percent, are far more obscene than anything else that is now printed in England'.⁶⁰ Their obscenity is of such a level that even 'newsagents are occasionally prosecuted for selling them, and there would be many more prosecutions if the broadest

jokes were not invariably protected by double meanings'.⁶¹ While such humour is rare elsewhere in print, due to obscenity laws, 'jokes exactly like McGill's are the ordinary small change of the revue and music-hall stage, and are also to be heard on the radio, at moments when the censor happens to be nodding[...]' in England the gap between what can be said and what can be printed is rather exceptionally wide,' and 'the comic postcards are the only existing exception to this rule, the only medium in which really "low" humour is considered to be printable'.⁶² According to Orwell, the 'function these postcards, in their humble way, are performing' is to

Give expression to the Sancho Panza view of life, the attitude to life that Miss Rebecca West once summed up as 'extracting as much fun as possible from smacking behinds in basement kitchens.' The Don Quixote-Sancho Panza combination, which of course is simply the ancient dualism of body and soul in fiction form, recurs more frequently in the literature of the last four hundred years than can be explained by mere imitation[...] evidently it corresponds to something enduring in our civilization, not in the sense that either character is to be found in a 'pure' state in real life, but in the sense that the two principles, noble folly and base wisdom, exist side by side in nearly every human being.⁶³

He considers it necessary in modern civilizations to encourage the Quixote-like ideals of 'faultless discipline and self-sacrifice'.⁶⁴ The other half of cultural and artistic duality, by contrast, the 'base wisdom' of 'cowardice, laziness, dishonesty,' and primitive sexuality

Orwell identifies with Sancho Panza's character in the Spanish classic and for which McGill's postcards are an outlet, is discouraged to the point of print expressions becoming illegal.⁶⁵ This process has been ongoing since the beginning of the 19th Century, writes Orwell. Before this time, the substance of McGill's postcards 'could enter into the central stream of literature, and jokes barely different from McGill's could be casually uttered between the murders in Shakespeare's tragedies'.⁶⁶ This 'is no longer possible,' Orwell says, 'and a whole category of humour [...]has dwindled down to these ill-drawn postcards, leading a barely legal existence in cheap stationers' windows'.⁶⁷

'The corner of the human heart that [McGill's postcards] speak for might easily manifest itself in worse forms,' Orwell states, and claims that he 'for one should be sorry to see them vanish'.⁶⁸ 'The Art of Donald McGill' attempts to demonstrate the necessity of expressing this 'base' side of the human condition, and is a recognition of the important part it has played in cultural and artistic expression, at least in the past. Orwell also acknowledges that English cultural trends during the previous 150 years or so have had the effect of stigmatizing and limiting this expression, and his interest in these postcards, along with his admitted belief that they perform a valuable function, indicates that on some level he counts this disconnection of low and high culture as a negative development. This belief that such a disconnect is negative can only be inferred from Orwell's essay, yet this belief that something has been lost since the more permissive periods of literature in previous centuries is pervasive in Orwell's statements concerning the nature of "base" wisdom'.⁶⁹ If taken in conjunction with his argument in 'Boy's Weeklies' that the upper echelons of society, literary or political, ignore popular art at their own peril, this acknowledgment of the ongoing persecution of something that had

before been a valuable aspect of art and culture, and a link to human weakness and common experience, indicts the hijacking of the idea of art by highbrow literary coteries. Thus, the same danger Orwell mentions in 'Boys' Weeklies' must apply to the suppressed obscenity for which McGill's postcards are one of the few outlets left. The inclusion of 'The Art of Donald McGill' in *Horizon*, albeit more than a year after 'Boys' Weeklies' appeared, demonstrates Connolly's belief that Orwell's studies in cultural phenomena are valid and important, particularly in light of the great social upheavals that the war was in the process of catalysing.

The last of Orwell's major essays concerning popular culture published in *Horizon* during wartime is 'Raffles and Miss Blandish,' which appeared in the October 1944 issue. Orwell believed in a basic connection between art and society, and 'Boys' Weeklies' in particular had already begun to explore the idea that not only were social mores represented in art, whatever its calibre, but that art also had a powerful ability to shape society. 'Raffles and Miss Blandish' continues this exploration, focusing primarily on crime fiction. But rather than concentrating on the political ramifications in this popular cultural product, Orwell describes a more ominous set of implications. The danger arises from modern, American-style crime stories, Orwell argues, and in order to demonstrate the danger these stories pose, he compares a recently popular novel, James Hadley Chase's *No Orchids for Miss Blandish*, with older examples of British crime fiction, the *Raffles* trilogy by E W Hornung. Orwell states that these can be compared 'for sociological reasons' because they 'have the common quality of being crime stories which play the limelight on the criminal rather than the policeman'.⁷⁰ The first part of

the essay deals with the older set of novels, finding in their eponymous main character a powerful reflection of British social traditions:

The truly dramatic thing about Raffles, the thing that makes him a sort of by-word even to this day[...]is the fact that he is a *gentleman* [author's italics]. Raffles is presented to us—and this is rubbed home in countless scraps of dialogue and casual remarks—not as an honest man who has gone astray, but as a public-school man who has gone astray. His remorse, when he feels any is almost purely social: he has disgraced 'the old school,' he has lost his right to enter 'decent society', he has forfeited his amateur status and become a cad.⁷¹

This aspect of Raffles' character, explains Orwell, has made him popular and kept the books in print for almost half a century.⁷² Even the values, or lack thereof, the character displays are representative of the majority of the novels' readers: 'The moral code of most of us is still so close to Raffles's own that we do feel his situation to be an especially ironical one,' because the character and his girlfriend 'think of themselves as renegades, or simply as outcasts,' rather than common thieves.⁷³ However, the reader's identification with Raffles is subject to an important limitation: he is a gentleman, whereas they are almost certainly not. Again, Orwell stresses that this is part of the character's appeal: 'A West End clubman who is really a burglar! That is almost a story in itself, is it not?'.⁷⁴

As a gentleman, continues Orwell, 'Raffles, of course, is good at all games, but it is peculiarly fitting that his chosen game should be cricket'.⁷⁵ Not only does this give the author the chance to make 'endless analogies' of Raffles' 'cunning as a slow bowler and his cunning as a burglar,' says Orwell: it also serves 'to define the exact nature of his crime'.⁷⁶ This, explains Orwell, is due to the nature of cricket as a sport, for despite the fact that it 'is not in reality a very popular game in England,' it is defined by its 'value' of 'form' and 'style' over simply winning.⁷⁷ The sense of cricket as a gentleman's game is due partly to the fact that it 'takes up a lot of time and is rather expensive to play,' says Orwell, but its status as a gentleman's game is more firmly based in its nature as a contest that has 'rules so ill-defined that their interpretation is partly an ethical business,' and as the common use of the phrase 'not cricket' makes clear, the sport in the public mind is 'bound up with such concepts as "good form", "playing the game", etc.'. ⁷⁸ He states that just as the sport has declined, so to have these principles: 'It is not a twentieth-century game, and nearly all modern-minded people dislike it'.⁷⁹ Thus: 'In making Raffles a cricketer as well as a burglar, Hornung was not merely providing him with a plausible disguise; he was also drawing the sharpest moral contrast that he was able to imagine'.⁸⁰ As Orwell explains, the author, by connecting Raffles and cricket, is able to both identify the character of Raffles as a gentleman with this value set and to intensify the distinction between his status as a well-heeled 'man about town' with his criminal activities. His prowess as a cricketer is, in fact, what gets him asked 'about,' and elevates him from 'upper-middle class' origins.⁸¹ This also serves to emphasise how tenuous his position is, giving his criminal activities added drama, for, as Orwell explains: 'A duke who has served a prison sentence is still a duke, whereas a mere man-about-town, if once

disgraced, ceases to be 'about town' for evermore'.⁸² Raffles is also firmly located in the late Victorian era: at the Diamond Jubilee, he exclaims that 'for sixty years[...]we've been ruled over by absolutely the finest sovereign the world has ever seen,' and celebrates by returning by post an item stolen from the British Museum.⁸³ In this way another aspect of his code, his intense patriotism, is also demonstrated; this and the time period serve to further identify the code to which he is beholden. Orwell is quick to point out, however, that despite the establishment of Raffles as a Victorian gentleman and cricketer, he is 'devoid of religious belief' and has 'no real ethical code;' rather, he has 'merely certain rules of behaviour' that he follows 'semi-instinctively'.⁸⁴

Despite Raffles' lack of ethics, this adherence to a strict code of behaviour is exactly what sets this book apart from the more recent *No Orchids for Miss Blandish*, because 'such standards as' Raffles does 'have are not to be violated'.⁸⁵ This includes respecting hospitality by not robbing the host, only the guests, and a preference 'to carry out his robberies unarmed' in avoidance of unnecessary violence.⁸⁶ He is seen to 'take extra risks in the name of "sportsmanship," and sometimes even for aesthetic reasons,' but these still fall into the parameters of his code.⁸⁷

No Orchids for Miss Blandish, on the other hand, has no boundaries to speak of, and, in Orwell's view, part of a growing body of evidence that 'the crime story [...] has greatly increased in bloodthirstiness during the past twenty years'.⁸⁸ 'The Raffles stories,' he continues, 'written from the angle of the criminal, are much less anti-social than many modern stories'.⁸⁹ The text shows a 'very marked resemblance to William Faulkner's novel, *Sanctuary*,' Orwell judges:

Miss Blandish, the daughter of a millionaire, is kidnapped by some gangsters who [...] hold her to ransom [...] Their original plan had been to kill her as soon as the ransom was received, but [...] one of the gang is a young man named Slim whose sole pleasure in life consists in driving knives into other people's bellies. In childhood he graduated by cutting up living animals with a pair of rusty scissors [...] [he] is sexually impotent, but takes a kind of fancy to Miss Blandish. Slim's mother [...] sees [...] the chance of curing [his] impotence, and decides to keep Miss Blandish in custody till Slim shall have succeeded in raping her.⁹⁰

Slim eventually succeeds, with the help of the sadistic use of a 'rubber hosepipe,' before Miss Blandish is eventually rescued and Slim is killed.⁹¹ But Miss Blandish has somehow developed 'a taste for Slim's caresses,' and commits suicide.⁹² Orwell states that his brief synopsis does not do justice to the 'sordid and brutal' details of the book, which include 'eight full-dress murders, an unassessable number of casual killings and woundings, an exhumation (with a careful reminder of the stench), the flogging of Miss Blandish [...] and much else of the same kind'.⁹³

No Orchids for Miss Blandish is of a archetypal America style, according to Orwell, but, surprisingly, the author, James Hadley Chase, is British: he merely adopts the jargon, pace and setting, in this case Chicago, of American books in the same vein.⁹⁴ The implication is that both the author and his readers inhabit a fantasyland, and 'who are partly Americanized in language and [...] moral outlook,' or lack thereof.⁹⁵ This is the point of departure that requires analysis: 'This [...]new departure for English sensational

fiction [...] [is that] until recently there has always been a sharp distinction between right and wrong, and a general agreement that virtue must triumph in the last chapter'.⁹⁶ While Raffles 'must be expiated sooner or later,' there is no such tradition in American crime writing, where a biography of 'Al Capone [is] hardly different in tone from books written about Henry Ford [or] Napoleon' and even Mark Twain is guilty of 'adopting much the same attitude towards the disgusting bandit Slade, hero of twenty-eight murders'.⁹⁷ Orwell's point is that this admiration for criminality is very much an American phenomenon, only recently imported to Britain, and forms the crux of his analysis:

To take merely the first example that comes to mind, I believe no one has ever pointed out the sadistic and masochistic element in Bernard Shaw's work, still less suggested that this probably has some connection with Shaw's admiration for dictators. Fascism is often loosely equated with sadism, but nearly always by people who see nothing wrong in the most slavish worship of Stalin [...] All of them are worshipping power and successful cruelty [...] A tyrant is all the more admired if he happens to be a bloodstained crook as well.⁹⁸

The reason this type of story, to which he applies the label 'realism,' has begun to take hold of the public imagination is that it is representative of its time: 'Several people, after reading *No Orchids*, have remarked to me, "It's pure Fascism" [...] this is a correct description, although the book has not the smallest connection with politics [...] it has

merely the same relation to Fascism as, say, Trollope's novels have to nineteenth-century capitalism [in that it is] a daydream appropriate to a totalitarian age'.⁹⁹

No Orchards for Miss Blandish, although published in 1939, 'seems to have enjoyed its greatest popularity in 1940, during the Battle of Britain and the blitz,' indicating that escapist, imaginative literature is not always necessarily pleasant. Orwell later illustrates this mentality further with an example provided by a New Yorker cartoon 'early in the war,' which depicts 'a little man approaching a news-stall littered with papers with such headlines as GREAT TANK BATTLES IN NORTHERN FRANCE, BIG NAVAL BATTLE IN THE NORTH SEA, HUGE AIR BATTLES OVER THE CHANNEL [author's emphasis], etc. etc.[...] The little man is saying, "*Action Stories*, please'".¹⁰⁰ This 'little man,' states Orwell, 'stood for all the drugged millions to whom the world of the gangsters and the prize-ring is more "real", more "tough" than such things as wars, revolutions, earthquakes, famines and pestilences,' just as does the 'soldier [who] sprawls in the muddy trench, with the machine-gun bullets crackling a foot or two overhead, and whiles away his intolerable boredom by reading an American gangster story'.¹⁰¹ For this new type of reader, 'it is taken for granted that an imaginary bullet is more thrilling than a real one'.¹⁰² Although it is to be hoped 'that it is an isolated phenomenon, brought about by the mingled boredom and brutality of war,' Orwell believes that they may 'acclimatize themselves to England,' which 'would be good grounds for dismay'.¹⁰³ Orwell describes the phenomenon of the 'popular writer,' of which 'there are many such in America,' as a rarity in Britain, but the implication is that this book may well take hold. Although it is to be hoped 'that it is an isolated phenomenon, brought about by the mingled boredom and brutality of war,' Orwell

believes that they may ‘acclimatize themselves to England,’ which ‘would be good grounds for dismay’.¹⁰⁴ Thus this essay, like the others by Orwell previously discussed, finds a powerful, hidden meaning in the success of a popular culture medium, and in this case the meaning he attaches to the rise of ‘realistic’ crime fiction is the breakdown of traditional social mores, which is itself, he argues, a unconscious response to the political radicalism of the period.

In dealing with three instances of popular culture in his separate *Horizon* essays, Orwell asserts the importance of understanding the influence of these works, but also how they provide powerful if varied insights into cultural foundations in Britain, and to emerging developments that slip below the radar of those who judge a nation’s culture only by its highbrow art. He also argues implicitly that the producers of art themselves have a critical function, even if they do not fully recognise the impact their work has. Writers and artists at all cultural levels are responsible in the sense that art has an impact on social and cultural ideas, and reflects and often predicts changing social formations and cultural awareness.

A more direct argument for the responsibility of the artist comes from Jean-Paul Sartre, whose ‘The Case for Responsible Literature’ appeared in the May 1945 issue of *Horizon*. The later years of the war saw the return of French writings to Britain, and with them came different perspectives that had been shaped by four years of isolation. Sartre’s essay is one of these, and it analyses a different aspect of the relationship of art with all of society, concentrating on the author’s role in reflecting his era and experiences. Sartre’s initial proposal is interesting in its contrast with the others discussed above in that he

finds the writer himself at fault for the distance between his existence, along with his works, and ordinary life:

All writers of bourgeois origin have known the temptation of irresponsibility: for a century this has been traditional in a literary career. An author seldom establishes any connection between his works and their cash returns. On the one hand, he writes, sings, and laments: on the other, he is given money [...] He feels himself to be in the position of a student with a scholarship rather than in that of the worker who receives the price of his labour.¹⁰⁵

Sartre goes on to accuse the modernist and realist movements of being artistically poisonous as well, because they encourage this separation of art and life:

The theorists of Art-for-Art and Realism have helped to confirm him in this opinion. Has it been noticed that they have the same object and the same origin? The principal aim of the author who follows the precepts of the former is to produce works which are of no use: they seem beautiful to him almost by virtue of their complete gratuitousness and lack of foundation. Thus he places himself on the fringe of society, or, rather consents to figure in it exclusively as a consumer [...] The realist is also a willing consumer [...] he has been told that science is not concerned with utility, and he aspires to the sterile impartiality of a scientist. We have

been told that he 'leans over' the class of society which he wishes to describe [...] The truth is that, uncertain of his social position, too timorous to revolt against the bourgeoisie which pays him, too lucid to accept it unreservedly, he chooses to pass judgement on his time, and so is persuaded that he remain outside it.¹⁰⁶

The beliefs that a writer's work should either come from a perspective somehow outside society, or to produce works that have no real-world foundation at all, are treated by Sartre with derision. He believes that both attitudes are of the same origin, and are grotesquely mistaken interpretations of the value of the written word and what makes a good writer. The idea that writing must be grounded in the real, no matter what fantastic course it takes from that point, and that there is no real escape from society in order to judge it from on high, are refutations of many decades worth of literary trends, impugning both realism and much of the modern movement. This perspective seemingly falls foul of the 'Ivory Shelter' principle espoused in *Horizon's* early days, but it is in line with the magazine's development over the course of the war years, particularly a re-examination of what role art plays in worldview, and the undeniable interrelatedness of text and context. Sartre's comments also mirror much of the sentiment of the 'Pinkish' writing of the Thirties, but his conclusions are much more far-reaching than mere ideological stances or writing for political ends.

That this separation, no matter how hard it is worked at, can never actually be successful, serves as evidence for Sartre's argument. To make such a claim for any piece of writing is nonsense, he observes, because:

All that is written has meaning, even if the meaning is far from that which the author wished to imply. For us, the writer is neither a Vestal nor an Ariel: he is 'in it up to his neck', whatever he writes, branded, committed, even in the most distant withdrawal. If at certain times he uses his art to fabricate knick-knacks of sonorous nonsense, even that is a sign: it means that the ruling classes have goaded him into frivolous activities without his knowledge, for fear lest he should escape to swell the ranks of the revolutionaries.¹⁰⁷

Thus Sartre observes that whatever the author writes, it demonstrates something of the author's time and place, and the idea that this can somehow be avoided or escaped by making oneself a virginal 'Vestal' and apart, or an angelic 'Ariel' and above, is ludicrous. This is made apparent in how writers are remembered: they are inextricably linked to the world they inhabit, whatever their artistic intent, and should be analysed based on this connection:

Flaubert, who railed so bitterly against the bourgeoisie, and who imagined that he had withdrawn completely from the social machine—what is he to us but a talented property-owner? And does not the meticulous art of Croisset suggest comfort, the solicitude of a mother or a niece, a well-ordered existence, a prosperous business and cheques regularly drawn? It requires but a few years for a book to become a social fact which is

consulted as in institution and which is admitted as a matter for statistics; only a short while needs to elapse before it merges with the furnishings of a period, with its clothes, its hats, its means of transport and its food.¹⁰⁸

Because this fate is inescapable, says Sartre, it should be embraced; indeed, it is the sole reason the author will be eventually read.

Sartre's essay is one of the first French existentialist tracts, and formed the introduction of his *Les Temps Modernes* months later which was dedicated to this new movement. The essay's inclusion in *Horizon* was a coup for the magazine, and for Connolly as editor.¹⁰⁹ It registers *Horizon*'s internationalist aspirations, as well as its promotion of provocative and cutting edge thoughts on literature and its place in society. The appearance of Sartre's piece also reinforces the idea that Connolly remained committed to dismantling the notion that literature, and art in general, should have as its purpose indoctrination, explicit didacticism, or the separateness forced by writing for a coterie. Sartre's injunctions against attempting to write from 'above' or 'apart,' as well as being part of his argument that an artist's only real purpose is to reflect his age, and is better off acknowledging this and abstaining from other, more fleeting purposes, is also an acknowledgement that artists in general are better off realising that they are a part of society, not above it or part of a privileged few. Attempts to separate themselves can only be detrimental to their art. This belief necessarily includes a respect for their culture, including that which might be considered common. The artistic representation of these as well as all parts of society become critical to producing worthwhile art.

All of the essays discussed in this chapter share a concern with the nature of art and its public role. In Orwell's contributions, he argues that close analysis of cultural products of popular appeal, traditionally regarded as low brow, is a necessity if artists and thinkers are to succeed in reaching wider audiences; the corollary is that it is perilous to dismiss the cultural and societal import of such works. Rée and Rothenstein convey similar viewpoints, but they emphasise the educational opportunities inherent in understanding, and using, these sorts of cultural products to bridge the gap between the intelligentsia and the masses, a gap Rothenstein, at least, argues is a artificial, recent construct. Greenberg agrees that this gap has widened only relatively recently, but his argument includes the idea that it has always existed, in the difference between the literate lords and the illiterate peasants before the Industrial Revolution, and that the current state is a magnification of this gap due to mass production and high literacy levels. It can be assumed that critical trends in the last three decades have proven the others right just as they have rendered inapplicable Greenberg's argument that popular art should be dismissed. Sartre's argument for the necessity of an artist to recognise his or her role as a representative of their age also involves a realisation that elements of the modernist and realist movements have been mistaken in trying to separate the artist from his time. This can be taken, by extension, to demonstrate the folly in divorcing artists from the society of their time as well. *Horizon's* inclusion of these essays, and the ways in which they were placed as well as the dates when they appeared, reveal an active attempt to emphasise the discussion taking place between their respective viewpoints. Such a discussion was novel, particularly for a literary magazine with such a high-brow

reputation, and it demonstrates the intellectual veracity and critical quality of the magazine as a whole.

¹ Ezra Pound, 'Small Magazines,' *The English Journal*, 19, No. 9 (November 1930) 699.

² Ian Hamilton, *The Little Magazines: A Study of Six Editors* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976) 7.

³ London: Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1943.

⁴ Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1995.

⁵ Mark S. Morrisson, *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception 1905-1920* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 2001) 5-7.

⁶ Marina Mackay, "'Doing Business with Totalitarianism: British Late Modernism and the Politics of Reputation,' *ELH*, 73, No. 3 (August 2006) 731.

⁷ George Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies,' *Horizon*, 1, No. 3 (March 1940) 174.

⁸ Chapter 2 provides a more extensive analysis of this 'Comment' from the January 1941 issue (3, No. 13).

⁹ Cyril Connolly, 'The Ivory Shelter,' *The Selected Works of Cyril Connolly*, edited by Matthew Connolly, 2 vols. (London: Picador, 2002) 1:315.

¹⁰ George Orwell, 'Boy's Weeklies,' *Horizon*, 1, No. 3 (March 1940) 174.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 174-75.

¹² *Ibid.* 200.

¹³ *Ibid.* 175-76.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 182.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 182-83.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 181.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 186.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 186.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 187.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 187-88.

²¹ *Ibid.* 198-99.

²² *Ibid.* 200.

²³ Clement Greenberg, 'Avant Garde and Kitsch,' *Horizon*, 1, No. 4 (April 1940) 271.

²⁴ Cyril Connolly, 'Comment,' *Horizon*, 2, No. 9 (September 1940) 83.

²⁵ Clement Greenberg, 'Avant Garde and Kitsch,' *Horizon*, 1, No. 4 (April 1940) 256.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 255.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 255-56.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 256.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 261.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 261-62.

³¹ *Ibid.* 262.

³² *Ibid.* 262.

³³ Harry Rée, 'Kitsch, Culture and Adolescence,' *Horizon*, 2, No. 8 (August 1940) 65.

³⁴ Clement Greenberg, 'Avant Garde and Kitsch,' *Horizon*, 1, No. 4 (April 1940) 256.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 256-57.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 257.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 257.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 261, 267.

³⁹ Harry Rée, 'Kitsch, Culture and Adolescence,' *Horizon*, 2, No. 8 (August 1940) 65.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 65. Rée mentions Frank Richards, the author who, unbeknownst to Orwell, penned much of the material analysed in 'Boy's Weeklies' (Orwell thought such a long run of the same characters in similar situations would demand multiple authors due to sheer boredom). Richards wrote a rebuttal to Orwell's essay, entitled 'Richards Replies to Orwell,' which appears in the May 1940 issue of *Horizon* (1, No. 5, 346-55).

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- ⁴¹ Ibid. 65.
⁴² Ibid. 65.
⁴³ Ibid. 65-66.
⁴⁴ Ibid. 66.
⁴⁵ Ibid. 66.
⁴⁶ Ibid. 66.
⁴⁷ Ibid. 67.
⁴⁸ Ibid. 67.
⁴⁹ Michael Rothenstein, 'Can We be Educated Up to Art?,' *Horizon*, 7, No. 40 (April 1943) 271.
⁵⁰ Ibid. 272.
⁵¹ Ibid. 276.
⁵² Ibid. 275-76.
⁵³ George Orwell, 'The Art of Donald McGill,' *Horizon*, 4, No. 21 (September 1941) 153.
⁵⁴ Ibid. 153-54.
⁵⁵ Ibid. 153.
⁵⁶ Ibid. 154.
⁵⁷ Ibid. 154.
⁵⁸ Ibid. 154.
⁵⁹ Ibid. 154.
⁶⁰ Ibid. 159.
⁶¹ Ibid. 159.
⁶² Ibid. 159-60.
⁶³ Ibid. 160.
⁶⁴ Ibid. 161.
⁶⁵ Ibid. 161.
⁶⁶ Ibid. 162.
⁶⁷ Ibid. 162.
⁶⁸ Ibid. 162.
⁶⁹ Ibid. 160.
⁷⁰ George Orwell, 'Raffles and Miss Blandish,' *Horizon*, 10, No. 58 (October 1944) 232.
⁷¹ Ibid. 232-33.
⁷² Ibid. 232.
⁷³ Ibid. 233.
⁷⁴ Ibid. 233.
⁷⁵ Ibid. 233.
⁷⁶ Ibid. 233.
⁷⁷ Ibid. 233.
⁷⁸ Ibid. 233.
⁷⁹ Ibid. 233-34.
⁸⁰ Ibid. 234.
⁸¹ Ibid. 234.
⁸² Ibid. 234.
⁸³ Ibid. 235.
⁸⁴ Ibid. 234.
⁸⁵ Ibid. 235.
⁸⁶ Ibid. 235.
⁸⁷ Ibid. 235.
⁸⁸ Ibid. 235.
⁸⁹ Ibid. 236.
⁹⁰ Ibid. 236.
⁹¹ Ibid. 236.
⁹² Ibid. 236.
⁹³ Ibid. 236.
⁹⁴ Ibid. 239.
⁹⁵ Ibid. 239.

⁹⁶ Ibid. 240.

⁹⁷ Ibid. 240.

⁹⁸ Ibid. 242.

⁹⁹ Ibid. 242-43.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 238.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 238-39.

¹⁰² Ibid. 239.

¹⁰³ Ibid. 244.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 244.

¹⁰⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, 'The Case for Responsible Literature,' *Horizon*, 11, No. 65 (May 1945) 307.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 307.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 309.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 309.

¹⁰⁹ Michael Shelden, *Friends of Promise: Cyril Connolly and the World of Horizon* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1989) 124.