

Conclusion

One aspect of Cyril Connolly's vision for his magazine that remained intact throughout its wartime run was its function as a cultural ark; for Connolly, preserving culture was the same as preserving civilisation. In order to perform this role, he insisted on accepting only the best writing available. His ideal of the 'Ivory Shelter' was a part of this principle, but it was not meant to keep the outside world at bay. Instead, it opened up the magazine to a range of forms and subjects that would have been difficult to include in a magazine that did not consciously adopt an inclusive aesthetic agenda. As a result, *Horizon* demonstrated a remarkable degree of variety. Despite the intellectually oppressive British experience of the Second World War, *Horizon*'s wartime pages were characterised by innovative discourse, new critical trends and literary experimentation that might not otherwise have been published. The war itself was a constant theme in the magazine, and many writers trying to render creatively their varied experiences of the conflict found in *Horizon* an outlet that reached discerning readers. Thanks to Connolly's firm editorial hand and distinctive aesthetic sensibility, subscribers had access to writing about the war and many other topics, work of exemplary depth and impressive breadth written by many of the best writers of the period. Little magazines are deemed successful not if they earn a profit, but if they bring attentive readers to imaginative writers, and vice versa. *Horizon* did this, and in the years considered in this thesis managed to do so in the face of constant criticism, paper rations, aerial bombardment, and watchful censors.

Several criticisms levelled at *Horizon* since its first appearance endure into the present, particularly the highbrow label. Connolly could point to the inclusion of middlebrow writers like J. B. Priestley, and to articles like those penned by George Orwell that engaged in thoughtful analysis of lowbrow culture, as an immediate refutation of this charge. Yet the

idea that *Horizon* was a snobbish, inaccessible periodical has persisted. A simple explanation for this would be that there has never been a sustained investigation of the magazine of sufficient depth to dispel the traditional view of the magazine based in often repeated, wilfully decontextualised quotations about art as a refuge and pure aesthetic principles. Connolly's tendency to write his 'Comments' on a whim, and to change his mind from month to month, making contrasting and even contradictory pronouncements on a variety of subjects and themes, has not helped matters. He justified his inconsistency by noting that the search for the truth involved a fair amount of discursive exploration. Intentionally or otherwise, this explanation applies to *Horizon* as a whole, as its contributors' many concerns come together in the magazine to form a coherent image of art and culture in wartime. Connolly's 'Comments' are entertaining and insightful, but judging the magazine based only on his written contributions, rather than his editorial choices, substitutes one voice for what was actually a chorus. Many later critics ignore *Horizon*'s contents in favour of a handful of Connolly quotations and quips taken out of context. This enduring view of *Horizon* has undoubtedly kept the magazine from receiving the attention it deserves.

The rectification of these misconceptions is part of the the aim of this thesis. Connolly's 'Comments' are important, as well as more timely and politically astute than they are usually given credit for. But Orwell's essays, Elizabeth Bowen's stories, Dylan Thomas's verse, and all the other diverse voices that filled *Horizon* month after month throughout the war must be given equal consideration if a more complete understanding of *Horizon* is to be had. *Horizon* is made up of many authors' words, and many peoples' experiences, but it operates as a single entity in its ability to produce new meaning from the contrasts and connections between constituent parts. *Horizon* should be understood as a unified literary product, and in-depth analysis of the myriad pieces of writing and art that it consists of is the only way to achieve this understanding. The present thesis is the work of one person working

within the strictures of a postgraduate project, and as a consequence must limit its scope. But as attitudes about the value of Second World War literature slowly change, and as periodicals (and their editorship) begin to be considered as creative undertakings, hopefully scholarly consideration of *Horizon* as one of the conflict's most rewardingly dense cultural products will continue to grow.

Concentrating the focus of this thesis on the war years is not simply a matter of convenience. The period of 1940-1945 marked the ascent of the magazine towards the summit of its achievement; in the Phony Peace of post-war Britain the magazine's artistic decline paralleled Connolly's own loss of interest in it. By dealing with the years in which the periodical was established and quickly reached maturity, the present study considers *Horizon* in its most vigorous state. More generally, but just as importantly, this historically demarcated analysis of *Horizon* shows that the scholarly neglect of, and even critical derision towards British literature in the Second World War needs substantial revision. Disparaging comparisons with the literature of the Great War do not constitute a sufficient argument; the single dimension of Great War experience and the resulting limited poetic expression is in no way superior to the multiplicity of themes, perspectives and experiences expressed in Second World War poetry. And, as the creative works of *Horizon* distinctively demonstrate, Second World War experience entailed civilians having as much of a stake in the conflict as military personnel. The Second World War was never a silent war. Part of the reason its literature was ignored for much of the twentieth century was due to a belief that 'real' war poetry only comes from the battlefield. The battlefield of the Second World War had no limits, and neither did its poetry. Likewise, the characterisation of the entire decade as neo-romantic or apocalyptic is disproved by the variety of voices and styles that *Horizon* printed. *Horizon* did not limit itself to new poets, nor did it leave out the old, and while it is true that certain names

appear more often than chance allows for, the magazine's poetry offerings exhibit a diverse range of writers and writing.

Horizon's essays and short stories dispel similar myths about the journal itself and about Second World War literature generally. Rather than being a stagnant holdover from previous decades, the cultural debate that took place in critical essays emphasised revolutionary approaches and ideas on war and culture (elite and popular) that found few other outlets. And, while Connolly's 'politics in abeyance' quotation is most often misused to diminish the magazine's relevance, the political discourse that filled *Horizon's* pages demonstrates the degree of engagement the magazine had with its world, and particularly with the concurrent conflict. The short stories published in its pages flesh out the depiction of that war, collectively providing a diverse body of work that records changing circumstances, diverse experiences, distinct perspectives, and any number of hopes, fears and speculations. If the poetry *Horizon* published extends and deepens the definition of war poetry itself, the short stories exhibit a complementary breadth. Taken together with the essays, this output constitutes an amazingly rich body of work, much of which might never have been published but for *Horizon* and Connolly. Because of its inclusive attitude towards ideas and its exclusive bias towards quality writing, *Horizon* performed an important role in wartime British intellectual and artistic life. It provided an open and dynamic space for established and emerging creative writers as well political and cultural commentators. Rather than being an ark of static culture in stormy seas, *Horizon* was a crucible for controversial topics and for literary efforts to enrich and change society. By concentrating on selected work published during the war years, this thesis attempts not only to provide the most substantial account to date of *Horizon* in its formative period, but also to contribute in a small way to future studies of a journal that deserves, and will reward, continued scholarly attention.