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Paper:

Ellmann, M. (2016). 'Vaccies Go Home!': Evacuation, Psychoanalysis and Fiction in World War II Britain. *Oxford Literary Review*, 38(2), 240-261.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.3366/olr.2016.0194>

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‘Vaccies Go Home!’: Evacuation, Psychoanalysis and Fiction in World War II Britain

Maud Ellmann

On September 1st 1939, the day that Hitler’s troops invaded Poland, the British government launched a program ominously code-named Operation Pied Piper, whereby millions of children, together with their mothers, were to be evacuated from the cities to the countryside. Of the expected three million evacuees, however, less than half actually showed up at the railway stations; many parents who had signed up their children during the Munich crisis had changed their minds in the intervening year. But instead of easing the pressure on transportation, this low turnout threw the system into disarray. Many trains were cancelled, while those that ran were overcrowded, frequently delayed, and ill-equipped with lavatories.¹ Herded into the carriages, the children were whisked off to unknown destinations and offloaded onto railway platforms, where the most appealing would be cherry-picked by local residents. As one evacuated schoolteacher remembered: ‘the scene which ensued was more akin to a cattle- or slave-market than anything else. The prospective foster-mothers . . . just invaded us and walked about the field picking out what they considered to be the most presentable specimens . . . those that felt that they were going to be left behind dissolved into tears . . .’² Some children returned home within days; others trickled back over the seven months before the bombing raids began, the period that Evelyn Waugh, reviving a popular joke, describes as ‘the great Bore War’.³

In an introduction to the Fabian Society’s *Evacuation Survey* of 1940, Margaret Cole claims that the program foundered ‘because it was drawn up by minds that were military, male and middle-class’. Focusing on the logistics of transportation, these minds neglected

The Oxford Literary Review 38.2 (2016): 240–261

DOI: 10.3366/olr.2016.0194

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to consider what would happen when the trains disgorged their bewildered cargo. Besides, only middle-class parents, 'accustomed to shoo their children out of sight and reach at the earliest possible age, could have been so astonished to find that working-class parents were violently unwilling to part with theirs'.⁴ In the interwar years, British working-class mothers rarely worked outside the home, a custom encouraged by priests and politicians who joined forces to promote the cohesion of the family. Direct assistance to children, in the form of school dinners, for example, was frowned upon because such measures might encourage fathers to neglect their duties. Across the Channel, by contrast, French working-class children were regularly sent away to *colonies de vacance* or summer camps. Far from traumatic, such excursions were seen as 'essential to becoming a well-socialized citizen of the Republic'.⁵ Thus the evacuation of children, which has come to epitomize the trauma of civilian war experience in Britain, made little mark on public memory in France, where hunger, deportation, military occupation, and civilian casualties left deeper scars.

This essay examines the impact of evacuation on psychoanalysis and fiction in World War II Britain. I begin with the evacuees themselves, whose stories bring class conflict into the foreground, revealing drastic divisions between rich and poor, the country and the city. But evacuation also offered unprecedented opportunities for British psychoanalysts to study the infant mind, as well as to bring their theories of child development to public attention. In the previous World War, the shell shock episode had promoted the dissemination of Freudian ideas throughout British intellectual life. In World War II, by contrast, the predicted epidemic of civilian shell shock failed to materialize, and it was the plight of the evacuated child that boosted the prominence of psychoanalysis. Thus the 'child analysts had a good war', as Adam Phillips has observed; especially good for such crusaders as John Bowlby and Donald Winnicott, whose campaigns to reinforce the mother-child bond continued to influence family life and public policy long after the war.⁶

Although the British Psychoanalytical Society (BPAS) was torn apart by infighting during the war, its members were united in their quest to understand the sources of aggression in infantile phantasy.⁷ The second part of my essay considers how the infant psyche came to be regarded as a 'war inside', to borrow the title of Michal Shapira's recent study of

British psychoanalysis during World War II.⁸ Crucial to this theoretical development is Melanie Klein's case history of a ten-year-old evacuee, in her monumental *Narrative of Child Analysis* (1961), arguably the longest case history in the psychoanalytic repertoire.⁹ In the last part of this paper I compare the Kleinian conception of the infant to the depiction of children in British wartime fiction, as exemplified in two short stories by Elizabeth Taylor and Sylvia Townsend Warner.

Jimmy Benton, who was evacuated with his siblings to Stafford during World War II, later remembered the locals' cool reception. 'As evacuees in Stafford my brothers, sisters and I knew we were unwelcome. We came from Margate and our southern accents marked us as strangers. I remember seeing 'Vaccies Go Home' scrawled on the side of a static water tank. I added, "We Want To!"' Eventually Jimmie formed a friendship with a local boy that shielded him from some of this hostility, but his sister Mary-Rose was less fortunate. Billeted with a family that expected city children to be scruffy, louse-ridden, and out of control, Mary-Rose disappointed her hosts with her quiet good manners and was subjected to a violent beating for her efforts.¹⁰ Her case was not unusual: an estimated ten to fifteen per cent of young evacuees were physically or psychologically abused by their foster families — although others enjoyed some respite from abuse at home.¹¹ As Tara Zahra comments, the 'myth of British wartime solidarity seemed to evaporate the first time a "dirty evacuee" soiled the sheets or failed to display middle-class table manners.'¹² But the same could be said of clean evacuees like Mary-Rose, punished for failing to conform to stereotype.

That nasty graffiti, 'Vaccies Go Home', rhymes ominously with 'Pakis Go Home', a common jibe in 1970s and 80s Britain. It's not just the syllables that rhyme, however, but the prejudice: evidently you don't have to cross a national border to be stigmatized as a stranger and intruder. Nor is this xenophobia softened by pity for the innocents; in World War II, any sentimentality about children — even about British children — is swept away by the fear of being 'overrun', a trope that still reverberates in racist rhetoric today. To the paranoid inhabitants of

Stafford, evacuees are not only beset by vermin; they *are* vermin, just as Jews and gypsies were demonized as vermin by the Nazis. Accordingly Mary-Rose Benson's foster family taunted her with stories about city children sleeping in their boots for fear that rats would bite their toes, thus demonstrating both their filthy habits (boots in bed) and their habitual proximity to vermin.¹³

These myths and slanders indicate that 'vaccies' came to represent the excremental underside of British civilization. Undoubtedly some urban children were filthy, ragged, ill-fed, foul-mouthed, delinquent, louse-ridden bedwetters, but far more were dragooned into this stereotype. Arriving *en masse* in the countryside, these children obliged their rural and suburban hosts to face up to the deplorable conditions of the slums, formerly masked by denial or indifference. As one Mass Observer reported, 'the utter destitution of some children evokes horror among the middle class.'¹⁴ In this crisis the British tradition of moralizing at the poor came to the rescue of the disconcerted gentry, who condemned these marauding urchins as products of poor training and loose morals, rather than victims of social injustice. This verdict drew on longstanding associations of the city with moral and physical degeneration, whereby the urban poor were regarded as evolutionary throwbacks, akin to the primitive natives of the colonies.¹⁵

Amidst all this finger-wagging, psychoanalysis did evacuees a great service by attributing bedwetting to separation-anxiety rather than depravity. If this diagnosis seems obvious today, it came as a surprise in a culture where the customary remedy for bedwetting was to cane or beat offenders with a leather strap, to rub their faces in wet sheets or force them to scrub pyjamas and bed linen as a punishment; there was even a report of a Liverpool child chained up outside in a dog kennel all night to cure her of the vice. Under this regime it's no wonder that some children proved chronically incontinent. Even so, the alleged epidemic of bed-wetting dramatically subsided when the government withdrew its weekly subsidy for extra laundry.¹⁶

These phobias about evacuees are brilliantly exploited by Waugh in his comic masterpiece *Put Out More Flags* (1942). Barbara Sothill, sister of the infamous Basil Seal and mistress of a country estate at Malfrey, finds herself in charge of billeting arrangements for fifty families evacuated from Birmingham. Among these refugees are the Connolly orphans, 'one leering, one lowering, and one drooling' (81),

whose so-called 'Auntie' (80) has disappeared without trace after dumping her unlovely charges on a railway platform. Doris Connolly, the eldest of these charges, is an overripe nymphomaniac aged by her own varying accounts between ten and eighteen years. Billeted with her atrocious siblings to a local farming family, Doris terrorizes the male members of the household with relentless lascivious advances. Micky, 'her junior by the length of a rather stiff sentence for house-breaking' (80), is a scrawny, scowling, foul-mouthed guttersnipe, who beheads the farmers' family cat, along with half a dozen hapless ducks. The third child, Marlene, is an imbecile with a taste for dogfood and a chronic tendency to sick it up. 'She's a dirty girl, begging your pardon, mum,' grumbles the beleaguered farmer to Barbara Sothill. 'It's not only her wetting the bed; she've wetted everywhere, chairs, floor, and not only wetting, mum. Never seem to have been taught to be in a house where she comes from' (81–2).

Basil Seal, fresh from his cannibal escapade in Waugh's *Black Mischief* (1932) and always on the lookout for a scam, pounces on these monstrous children as an opportunity for blackmail. Masquerading as a billeting officer, he unloads the Connollys onto one unlucky household after another, where they proceed to demolish the premises, enabling Basil to extort huge bribes to remove the vandals from the wreckage. Thus Waugh's satire endorses contemporary stereotypes about evacuees, but he also makes fun of their panic-stricken hosts. We soon learn that the Connollys are not just mindless slobs but disciplined stormtroopers, wreaking havoc only on signal from their leader Doris. 'Behave, or I'll tan yer arses for yer,' Doris barks (102). 'Mayn't I be sick here, Doris? Just once?' Marlene pleads. 'Not here, ducky,' admonishes her sister (141). Endowed with 'the wisdom of the slums', Doris sees through her patrons' pretensions, including those of Basil and his sister, whose nursery banter smacks of incest: 'you fancy him, don't you? I saw,' Doris mocks (88). With her keen eye and military cunning, Doris has learned how to manipulate the prejudices of the middle-class against themselves, which makes her something more than a cardboard 'vaccee'.

In reality, the evacuation program produced more mixed results than Waugh's satire implies. If some evacuees were scruffy and unclean, most were dressed and groomed as well as their parents could afford. And if some evacuees were abused and molested, others were treated

kindly, forming lifelong attachments to their foster families; some, like the charwoman's daughter in Barbara Noble's 1946 novel *Doreen*, suffered from split loyalties between their humble urban parents and their affluent guardians in the countryside.¹⁷ Many enjoyed the much-touted benefits of country air after the noxious fog of London and other industrial cities. But others, defying propaganda for the moral, patriotic and hygienic virtues of the English countryside, missed the fog and noise of city life.¹⁸ In the *Cambridge Evacuation Survey* of 1941, edited by psychoanalyst Susan Isaacs, one youngster from Tottenham reports, 'What I miss most in Cambridge is the thick fogs and fish and chips.'¹⁹ Another misses 'the buses and the heavy lorries which go passed [sic] my house at home'; a further child misses 'the thunder of the tube' (Isaacs, 78). An orthographically-challenged eight-year-old misses his tortoise, a distinctly unbucolic pet whose oral sadism may reflect his owner's Kleinian phantasies: 'I miss my tortoise in lanDon [London] he is Robert taylor he bit me once he bit me. And I tod [told] him he wac [was] a note [naughty] boy and I fod [fed] him a los [lots] of tam [times]' (Isaacs, 71). This devouring tortoise presumably owes his name to Robert Taylor, a leading Hollywood heartthrob of the day, who had starred in recent hits like *Waterloo Bridge* in 1940. On a sobering note, a reflective fourteen-year-old boy deploras 'the present "hate propaganda" which has invaded a once sane country. This propaganda is shouted at us from all quarters. The Press roars its encouragement, and the preachers from the pulpit glorify these things. And we are expected to attend church and sing war-like psalms' (Isaacs, 73). *Plus ça change*; apart from the obsolescence of the church, this boy could be describing the cultural atmosphere of Brexit Britain.

While Susan Isaacs, John Bowlby and other psychoanalysts looked after evacuees in Cambridge during the war, Donald Winnicott and his future wife, the social worker Claire Brittain, worked with disturbed and delinquent evacuees in Oxford. In London Anna Freud teamed up with Dorothy Burlington to establish the Hampstead Therapy Clinic for 'infants without families', to borrow the title of their joint report on refugee children from the Continent.²⁰ Anna Freud's

arch-rival Melanie Klein took refuge from the air raids, as well as from the turf wars in the BPaS, by relocating to Pitlochry, Scotland, where she conducted her four-month analysis of 'Richard', a ten-year-old evacuee from London. Scattered across the island, these analysts and their displaced patients fostered the development of a distinctively British form of psychoanalysis based on closely observed children, which dovetailed with the nation's empiricist tradition of thought.

As Shapira has argued, this second generation of psychoanalysts after Freud 'forged a new project of thinking about the place of aggression in democratic societies'.²¹ If the infant is a Hitler in the making, as Kleinian theory implies, how can its paranoid and schizoid impulses be redirected for the common good? Shortly after Hitler became leader of the Nazi party in 1921, the psychoanalyst Edward Glover, addressing women magistrates at Oxford on the subject of juvenile crime, insisted that babies were innately 'egocentric, greedy, dirty, violent in temper, destructive in habit, and profoundly sexual in purpose. 'Judged by adult standards, Glover claimed, 'the normal baby is for all practical purposes a born criminal'. Against this indictment one magistrate protested, 'But, doctor, the dear babies! How could you say such awful things about them!' Glover's psychoanalytic explanation of stealing also enraged Lord Olivier, a Fabian socialist, who objected that 'the motivation for offenses against property is economic', not psychopathic.²² Just as psychoanalysts tended to downplay the objective strains of war in accounting for anxiety, which they attributed to the resurgence of infantile phantasies, so they disregarded economic inequality in seeking out unconscious motives for criminality.

In her *Narrative of a Child Analysis*, Klein doggedly converts the objective circumstances of the war into the psychodrama of the family. Her charming, intelligent patient 'Richard' arrives with symptoms of anxiety, depression and hypochondria, exacerbated by a phobia towards other children that prevents him from going to school. Obsessed with the war news, Richard reads three newspapers a day and closely follows the latest updates on the radio: 'he was particularly frightened of air-raids and bombs'.²³ He had good reason to be frightened of such things, considering that his family home was bombed in London, a fact

that Klein omits from her account. A symptomatic omission, given her methodology in this case history, which is described by Bill Brown as 'her most aggressive act of vaporizing context from her analytical work'.²⁴ Substituted for this context is Richard's alleged 'inner world', peopled by the introjected doubles of his family circle: mother, father, brother, dog, grandmother and other cameo performers.

This inner world is also a war zone, judging by Richard's seventy-four extraordinary drawings that form the centrepiece of this case history. According to Klein's interpretations, Richard's drawings of submarines stand for the maternal body torpedoed by the Hitler-penis, or besieged by swarms of toothy starfish that represent rapacious babies. These interpretations are themselves rapacious, demonstrating what Lyndsey Stonebridge has described as 'the capacity of psychoanalysis to swallow the landscape of war into its own interior'.²⁵ The entire arsenal of war, along with every feature of the analytic setting—a musty playroom in Pitlochry town hall, decorated with maps and sentimental photographs of pets and wildlife, which commands an enchanting view of Scottish countryside—all this is corralled into the theory of internal objects warring in the mind. While the playroom represents 'the inside of the mother's body and its population',²⁶ the beautiful countryside, which Richard often pauses to admire, stands for the restoration of the mother's body after the injuries inflicted on it by vengeful penises and greedy babies.²⁷

World leaders are also enlisted into this morality play, with Churchill the good father pitched against Hitler the bad father, along with their respective allies and betrayers: Matsuoka, Darlan, Goebbels, Ribbentrop. Meanwhile 'huge' voracious Germany, like a monstrous Kleinian baby, threatens to devour all the smaller nations of Europe, personified by Richard as 'lonely Rumania' (36), 'little Latvia' (52) and 'brave little Switzerland' (24). In Richard's phantasies nations become 'infants without families', persecuted or forsaken by their guardians, but persons also become nations: Mrs Klein comes to stand for Austria, her native land, which has been invaded by the Austrian Hitler and engorged into his greedy empire. For Richard, the *Anschluss* implies that the good Austria has been occupied by the bad Austria, that is, the murderous Hitler-penis that cannot be attacked without destroying its maternal container. Given this rampant metaphoric *Anschluss* between

persons and nations, it is telling that Richard, when praising Klein's therapy to his visiting parents, claims that he feels like 'a new country' (234).

With relentless insistence, Klein transforms the theatre of war into the theatre of the mind. As Bill Brown comments, 'Klein's acts of transcoding approach the level of caricature, with Hitler symbolizing the father, bombs symbolizing faeces, the city of Brest representing the breast.'²⁸ If bombs symbolize faeces, however, faeces also symbolize bombs, thus complicating the relation between tenor and vehicle. Although Klein subordinates reality to phantasy, ruthlessly 'vaporizing context', she also depends on the discourse of war to call the demons from the deep, transforming wordless affect into bombs and warships, Hitlers and Ribbentrops. Her *Narrative* therefore confirms Adam Phillips's claim that 'psychoanalysis was partly made out of the materials of war, its casualties and its language'²⁹: a language of conflict, invasion and *Besetzung*, a German term for military occupation.³⁰

Beyond these metaphors, Kleinian psychoanalysis searches for the causal connections between aggressivity and war, yet without reaching any firm conclusions. Which causes which? Is the war outside a projection of the war inside? Or does the violence without elicit the violence within? By externalizing aggression, does the real war alleviate the inner battle of attrition that can never be won, because the warring parties are fragments of the same divided self? As Klein puts it in her characteristically contorted prose: 'If the feeling that external war is really going on inside — that an internal Hitler is fought inside by a Hitler-like subject — predominates, then despair results. It is impossible to fight this war, because in the internal situation catastrophe is bound to be the end of it.'³¹ If the war inside brings only despair, as Klein implies, the war outside actually made people feel better, judging by a marked decline of neurotic disorders that threatened to put psychoanalysts out of business.³² It is as if the dangers of real bombs had defused the anxiety attached to their faecal and phantastic doubles. 'When fate inflicts suffering,' Ernest Jones argues, 'there is less need for the self-punishing functions of the neurosis.'³³

In Kleinian theory, the infant, war and the unconscious are treated as virtually synonymous. 'The infant is the unconscious *live*', in Adam Phillips's words; this infant, moreover, is 'always in a Blitz', bombarded by avenging part-objects and fighting back with fusillades

of shit and piss.³⁴ This besieged and besieging child provides wartime psychoanalysis with 'a model of a situation in which the world is unmanageable.'³⁵ Meanwhile wartime fiction, which is equally fascinated by the child-mind, presents this mind as constantly assaulted by an adult world whose rationale remains unfathomable; a plight that corresponds to the civilian experience of air raids. In a 1950 British Council pamphlet on the fiction of the preceding five years, the novelist P.H. Newby notes the prevalence of children in this fiction, and speculates that writers, bewildered by the unassimilated trauma of war, find in the minds of children 'a curiously similar bewilderment'. Whereas nineteenth-century writers thought of childhood 'as suitable material for the opening chapters of long biographical novels ... today the depicting of childhood has become an artistic end in itself, thus transforming early life into 'a symbol of existence at large'.³⁶ Newby criticizes this fiction for sentimentalizing innocence, but he overlooks such writers as Taylor and Warner whose fictional children resemble the Kleinian infant, blitzed by its own destructive impulses. In particular, the little girls in Warner's story 'Apprentice' and Taylor's 'A Sad Garden' find themselves caught up in the oscillations of compulsive repetition that Freud attributes to the death drive.

To explore these oscillations, it is useful to revisit Donald Winnicott's classic wartime essay on 'Primitive Emotional Development' (1945), which calls attention to a significant change in infants' behaviour with objects between the ages of five and six months. 'Whereas many five months' infants grasp an object and put it to the mouth, it is not till six months that the average infant starts to follow this up by deliberately dropping the object as part of his play with it.'³⁷ This play with objects resembles the famous game of 'gone' and 'here', the *fort-da* game that alerts Freud to the workings of the death-drive in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.³⁸ Here he interprets his grandson's spool-game as a symbolic means of controlling the mother's presence and absence, throwing her away (*fort* = gone) and yanking her back (*da* = there). Freud claims that more pleasure is attached to the second act — the restoration of the toy — than to the first act of violent expulsion, but he admits that as a

rule 'one only witnessed [the] first act, which was repeated untiringly as a game in itself. . .'.³⁹ Whatever the satisfactions of retrieval, little Ernst is evidently more addicted to throwing things away — and down.

Dropping the toy could be seen as the infant's first bomb, its first projectile cast down from above. According to Winnicott, this game with objects demonstrates the infant's awareness that 'he has an inside, and that things come from outside';⁴⁰ things that can be captured in the mouth or banished to the outer world. But this game of dropping objects also marks a dawning understanding of the difference between up and down, above and below. Above is the world of adults, who 'look down' on the child in every sense, making its smallness even smaller with their looks and blows inflicted from on high. Below is the prostrate infant — 'a heterogeneous mannequin . . . a trophy of limbs', in Lacan's words⁴¹ — too floppy even to stand up, let alone defend itself against an onslaught from the heights. For the infant, the sky is always falling down. But the same could be said of the civilian population under threat of aerial bombardment, a point made by Klein's daughter Melitta Schmideberg in a 1942 article about the emotional effects of air raids, which claims that the 'situation of being attacked from above and of being unable to retaliate resembles that of a small child whom an adult can strike from above. . .'.⁴²

Elizabeth Taylor's 1945 story 'A Sad Garden', which focuses on a small child, highlights this antagonism between above and below. The title refers to the autumnal garden where the action takes place, but also to the blasted landscape of Britain with its smouldering ruins: 'A question-mark of white smoke rose from the quenched bonfire beside the rubbish-heap' (92). Sybil, the story's focalizer, has 'lost everything — husband and son', presumably to the war (90).⁴³ But her blighted garden, sagging with uneaten fruit, is haunted by her son in the form of his incised initials: 'She had smacked him for that, for always cutting his name into other people's property, had taken away his chisel. When she did that, he had stared at her in hatred, wild, beautiful, a stain on his mouth from the blackberries or some purple fruit, and a stain of anger on his cheeks' (91). Sybil, enduring a charitable visit from her prissy niece and vapid sister-in-law, secretly gropes for the grooves of these initials on the garden bench. Unlike her wild son Adam, with his carnal mouth and vandalizing signature, Sybil's niece Audrey is a 'good girl' (91) who likes school and never

plays truant. Exasperated with the child's docility, Sybil urges Audrey to play on the swing, the seat of which is also carved with Adam's initials. Eager to obey, the little girl timidly agrees, while enjoying a 'pleasurable guilt' in usurping Adam's place: she knows 'it had been his swing; she remembered him refusing to allow her to sit on it' (92). When Sybil spies the child primly rocking to and fro, she seizes the seat and hurls it into the treetops where the birds scatter in panic. 'That's how Adam used to go,' she cries. 'Right up into the leaves. He used to kick the pears down with his feet' (92) — like falling bombs.

As Neil Reeve has pointed out in a subtle reading of this story, Sybil is playing *fort-da* 'with a vengeance'.⁴⁴ Just as Freud's grandson Ernst drops his toys as a way of casting out his mother, so Sybil pushes the little girl away in lieu of her dead son. 'There you go' (92), she screams with every shove, in the same way that little Ernst compulsively repeats his murderous 'o-o-o-o', which is interpreted by Freud as '*fort*' or gone.⁴⁵ Murderous, because the expulsion of the substitute — the dropped toy, the catapulted child — expresses a desire to get rid of the original. Thus Sybil 'went on pushing without thinking of Audrey' (92); it is Adam she is trying to get rid of. Whereas little Ernst throws his toys onto the ground, however, Sybil hurls the swing into the sky, sending the child flying 'up again in a wild agony' (92). Although the story never tells how Adam and his father died, Sybil's pantomime suggests a reenactment of a bombing raid, but one that she is trying to replay in reverse by launching the missile back into the sky.

What goes up must come down, however, and the 'pendulum' motion of the swing fulfils the wish of retrieving the lost object, together with the contrary desire to pitch it out.⁴⁶ Taylor is probably thinking of Fragonard's famous painting of a pretty lady on a swing, whose slipper is suspended in a narrow patch of sky menaced by snaky vegetation, while a young man hidden below gazes up her skirt.⁴⁷ This allusion reinforces the sexual connotations of Taylor's story — the coital rhythm of the swing, driven by Sybil's frenzied thrusting; it is intriguing that Klein's *Narrative* also links Richard's toy swings to the primal scene of parental intercourse.⁴⁸ And Taylor hints that Audrey gains 'something' out of this traumatic episode that shatters her carapace of innocence: 'She sensed that *something* was terribly wrong and yet *something* which was inevitable and not surprising' (92, my italics). Something like the primal scene,

perhaps, that Richard obsessively restages with his miniature swings. Or something like Jean Laplanche's conception of the 'enigmatic signifier', the unconscious message of adult sexuality delivered by the parent to the infant in the course of caring for its bodily needs. Through this 'primal seduction', the infant is initiated into the desire of the other yet without understanding what this message means. Laplanche uses the term *primal seduction* to describe 'a fundamental situation in which an adult proffers to a child verbal, non-verbal and even behavioural signifiers which are pregnant with unconscious sexual significations'.⁴⁹ In Taylor's story, the non-verbal pantomime of swinging, together with the verbal cries of 'There you go', could be interpreted as enigmatic signifiers, loaded with sexual implication.

Picking up Freud's concept of *Anlehnung*, which literally means 'leaning' or 'propping', Laplanche argues that the sexual drive 'leans on' the instinct of self-preservation. But the sexual drive does not emerge endogenously in a predetermined biological process; instead this drive is implanted in the infant by means of the adult's enigmatic signifier.⁵⁰ In Taylor's story it is Sybil, physically leaning on the swing, who transmits the enigmatic signifier — 'something . . . something' — to the child she propels so violently. Instead of rocking Audrey like the baby in Mother Goose's lullaby — 'Rock-a-bye baby, in the treetop' — Sybil sends the child flying into the violent oscillations of adult desire.⁵¹ In this scenario, erotic swinging *leans* on the maternal act of rocking, just as the primal seduction *leans* on maternal care in Laplanche's conception of child development. That Sybil ultimately loses 'consciousness and control' (92) suggests that the enigmatic signifier remains unconscious to its sender as well as its receiver, emerging out of their furious swinging like the 'question-mark of white smoke' that rises from 'the quenched bonfire beside the rubbish-heap' (92).

Warner's wartime story 'Apprentice' (1943) also pivots on the opposition between above and below. The narrative begins by mapping out a vertiginous topography:

The front door, where the officers came in, was level with the street; but the house being built on a slope, from the narrow garden at the back one looked over a wall, and there, six feet below, were the heads

of the passers-by. Not often, though. Not many people . . . Perched on the wall was a small stone summer-house, no bigger than a sentry-box.⁵²

This elevated garden provides a bomber's-eye view of passing heads below. On the garden wall perches the summerhouse-cum-sentry-box, where ten-year-old Lili has taken to perching like a sniper so that she can watch the few surviving Poles pass by: 'Not many people. . .' (103). To her mother Irma's satisfaction, Lili's flaxen hair and eyes testify to an Aryan pedigree, unpolluted by Slavic or Semitic blood. 'Whoever Lili's father had been — and Irma honestly did not know — there could be no doubt that he had been all right. No Jewish blubber-lips had befouled a healthy German maiden on that occasion' (103). The implication is that Irma is a German prostitute, relocated with the occupying army to an unnamed town in Poland, where she lives with 'other doves' (104) under the protection of Major von Kraebbeck. Below their dovecote stagger the starving Poles, surveyed by Lili 'from above' (108), where she finds 'nothing interesting about them' except for the 'extraordinary things' they carry down the lane (104). Downhill go mirrors, mattresses, cellos, gramophones; uphill come beetroots and cabbages, more slowly because of the exhausting climb.

One day the doves above are startled by a crash below. Their cleaner, a Polish woman with a skin disease — 'because her blood was so poor' (104) — has collapsed on the cellar floor, vomiting green slime into her shawl. 'That was grass she sicked up,' says Madam Ulricke. 'I know starvation when I see it. You girls have never seen it, but I have. After the last war, we starved' (105). The younger girls, far from taking pity on the Polish woman, rejoice in their revenge against their country's enemies. 'Ah, the brutes,' Helge scoffs. 'They starved us. Now *they* shall starve, Poles, French, Russians, English, all of them. And we shall eat and guzzle' (105). But the madam, superstitious that her luck might turn, presents the starving woman with a bowl of food, while the other 'doves' flap around the kitchen gathering leftovers to shove into the mix.

Lili discovers that she enjoys feeding the hungry — 'it made one feel good' (106) — just as she used to enjoy throwing biscuits for her little dog to chase in Germany. It occurs to her that she could play this game in secret by feeding the starving in her summerhouse: 'She would feed

children; no one could much object to that, for they would be Polish children only, all the Jews had been put away' (106). First of all she empties a basket of scraps onto the street, where a group of children are hauling a sledge laden with charred wood from a bombsite. Just like the little dog, the children dash to and fro, snatching up the kitchen waste; to Lili's glee they even bark, 'or something very like it' (106). But the children look *down* onto the street, searching desperately for every crumb, whereas Lili wants them to look *up* at their benefactress. '[A]t last they looked up and saw her' (107).

Later Major von Kraebeck, dandling Lili on his knee, feeds her sticky chocolates from between his lips, a sleazy pantomime suggesting that the child is doomed — if not already given up — to prostitution: 'his littlest dove' (104). The abused becomes the abuser: teased with chocolates at home, Lili imitates the Major by teasing local children with morsels stolen from the kitchen, a game that grows increasingly sadistic. Finding scraps in short supply, apart from cigar butts and bits of orange-peel, Lili experiments with pebbles, wrapping them up to look like candy. One of the sledge-children, finding a pebble in his mouth instead of a sweet, spits it out and throws it at her. These children never return — 'Perhaps they were dead,' Lili speculates (103) — but she soon finds others ready to 'look up' at her in search of titbits. Her next ploy is to dangle food from a string, 'lowering it and drawing it up again' (108), so that the children have to jump for every bite.

Only one child refuses to play this game, a black-haired boy who scolds the other children for jumping at crusts. Carrying a beaten-up satchel under his arm, this boy is 'stuck-up, and a spoil sport', in Lili's view (108). As thin as all the others, with the same bloodshot eyes, chilblained hands, swollen belly and verminous scalp, he has no reason to be proud; he is only a Pole, after all. Still worse, with his 'upstanding black hair', he could even be a gipsy or a Jew: 'he might have been hidden when the others were carted off' (108). Yet despite his evident inferiority he walks by 'with his nose in the air', flaunting his satchel like 'a scholar, a professor'. Lili wonders how tall he is: 'it was difficult to tell from above' (108). Indeed it's difficult to tell anything about people you *look down on*; the view from above, the bomber's-eye view, effaces the reality of those below.

Obsessed with this dignified foe, Lili saves up the most enticing scraps to dangle at him, but he still resists her 'fishing game' (109). Frustrated by his obstinacy, Lili fantasizes about tumbling down 'a stone, a heavy stone, on top of that black head' (109), thus reinforcing the analogy between feeding and bombing from above. Before bombing him, however, Lili must 'hook' her prey: 'he must eat from her hand, as the others had done, and *look up*, and be grateful' (109, my italics). At the end of the story, Lili finally overcomes the dark boy's resistance, lowering a bun so skilfully that it bobs against his face. In a reflex action, the exhausted starveling leaps for the offering, but Lili whisks it back too fast for him to catch it. Instead he falls down motionless. Like an umpire at a boxing match, Lili counts the seconds to see if he revives, but when she reaches 890, a passer-by kneels down beside the body and, evidently realizing the boy is dead, tenderly crosses his hands on his breast and smooths his wild hair; he then covers the boy's face with a handkerchief but, thinking better of it, retrieves this precious piece of cloth to tie around his own bare neck. When he walks away, Lili hastily pulls up the dangling bun and eats it herself.

This story, which is narrated in Lili's free indirect discourse, anatomizes the psychology of fascism through the viewpoint of a ten-year-old girl. Like Freud's grandson Ernst, Lili plays *fort-da* with her improvised pulley, lowering food to the famished children only to snatch it from their grasp. Towering above them in her summerhouse, she usurps the position of the adult — or the bomber — who can strike the child from above. Less triumphantly, however, Lili resembles Ernst in being caught up in a syndrome of compulsive repetition; she is 'hooked' into the masturbatory rhythms of this game, even as she tries to 'hook' her unresponsive victim.

By dropping toys, the infant is trying to enslave the mother, forcing her to reappear and bring these missiles back. By dangling food in front of the defiant boy, Lili may be trying to seduce the father that she never had, the Jew or gipsy who could never have begotten her; indeed this boy has already assumed a paternal role in trying to restrain the hungry youngsters. Instead of a father Lili has a rapist-in-waiting, Major von Kraebeck, whose pranks with chocolates have clearly taught the little girl how to play power-games with food.

The power of this story lies in Warner's authorial restraint: she judges neither Lili nor her obscene household, where racism and cruelty

are embraced as virtues essential to purging the species of degenerates. Lili is as greedy, destructive, paranoid and sadistic as any Kleinian infant; even her raids on the larder could be seen as Kleinian attacks on the contents of the mother's body. But Lili is also innocent; in fact it's her innocence that makes her so dangerous. Like Audrey in 'A Sad Garden', Lili is regarded as 'a quiet child', 'her flesh ... like the most expensive face-cream', who is likely to develop from a model baby to a model woman, 'without any break' (104). Little do the adults know or care what she is up to in the summerhouse. But even her sadistic games originate in pity, not cruelty: feeding the starving makes her 'feel good', though she also wants to keep her beneficiaries in their place — a place below, where they must look up *at* her, and look up *to* her. In Warner's story as in Blake's poem 'The Human Abstract', pity and tyranny go hand in hand: 'Pity would be no more, / If we did not make somebody Poor.'⁵³

By emphasizing the dynamics of above and below, Warner implies that Lili's depravity is structural, not personal. The view from above dehumanizes; as Levinas insists, responsibility for the other begins with the face-to-face encounter, which can only take place on an equal level.⁵⁴ From above, Lili cannot even tell how tall her adversary is; were they face to face, this adolescent would probably be looking *down* at her, not *up*. Up and down signify strength and weakness, but these positions must be reinforced continuously; hence Lili grows addicted to the game of raising and lowering her line and bait. While the swing in Taylor's story sweeps *across* the garden, as well as going up and down, thereby hinting at the possibility of levelling out, Lili's world consists entirely of verticals.

In these two stories, Warner and Taylor join forces with wartime psychoanalysis in identifying the child as both the victim and the perpetrator of aggression. At first glance the stories' juvenile heroines look very different: Taylor's Audrey is driven by the swing and the mood-swings of Sybil's mourning and melancholia, whereas Warner's Lili takes the role of the swinger rather than the swung. Yet both stories hint that these positions are reversible: Lili grows addicted

to the game of raising and lowering her fishing-line, lassoed in its demonic oscillations. Despite her pantomime of power, Lili is enslaved to the rhythm that she sets in motion; conversely Audrey seems to be empowered by the *fort-da* game in which she is enthralled, unconsciously colluding in her ordeal in the treetops. Her 'pleasurable guilt' in hijacking Adam's swing suggests a desire to dethrone her rival, to blot out his initials on the seat, as well as to enjoy his airborne jouissance: 'Audrey with her hair streaming among the branches flew dizzily away' (92). By the end of these stories, the distinction between victim and victimizer no longer holds.

Question marks still linger over both these narratives. One of these pertains to gender: why do little girls command the stage while little boys succumb to early deaths?⁵⁵ Both stories hint that girls survive at the expense of boys, conniving in the disappearance of their rivals: in 'A Sad Garden', Audrey usurps Adam's seat, her buttocks rudely blotting out his signature; in 'Apprentice', the nameless boy becomes the sacrificial victim of the girl; indeed she murders him in fantasy, if not in fact. Also conspicuously absent are the fathers of these children: Adam and his father seem to have been killed in one fell swoop, while Audrey's father never appears, and Lili's father is a mere hypothesis. From one perspective, this dearth of men reflects the conditions of the Home Front, dominated by women in the absence of men. This absence may also have contributed to the matricentrism of wartime psychoanalysis, where fathers are relegated to the margins of the mother-child dyad.

Given the gender of the story-writers, their blitz on males suggests a covert sexual politics. When Audrey seats herself on Adam's swing, effacing the name he shares with the first man, she seems to take on 'something' of his knowledge and his power. Indeed it's tempting to interpret her enthronement as an assertion of feminine authority and authorship over the masculine inscriptions of the past. Meanwhile, the game that Lili plays with food could be compared to the games that Warner plays with narrative, baiting the reader with enticing clues only to snatch away the promised revelation. A smoky trail of question marks obscures the facts: we never learn the name of Irma's game, for instance, or the reason why the 'doves' are lodged in Poland under the dubious protection of a Nazi officer. Nor do we find out whether the 'apprentice' of the title refers to the starving boy, perhaps apprenticed to a satchel-carrying profession, or to the creamy German girl, apprenticed to the ways of prostitutes and Nazi persecutors. This

technique of proffering and withdrawing information, which corresponds to Lili's pranks with food, implies that the *fort-da* game, with all its sado-masochistic implications, lies at the heart of narrative itself.

The prevalence of little girls in both these stories may also be a symptom of survivor's guilt, especially because these girls collude in the extermination of the other sex. Warner, whose schoolmaster father died of grief in World War I, devastated by the deaths of the young men he taught at Harrow, may have seen something of herself in Lili's vengeance. Taylor, who published her first novel in the last year of World War II, may have wondered if her writing thrived on carnage, like the question mark of smoke that rises from the ashes of the bonfire. Such autobiographical speculations cannot be proved, but they point to connections between aggression, creativity and matricentrism that call for further exploration in wartime psychoanalysis, as well as in the fiction of this period. As we have seen, psychoanalysis looks to the infantile unconscious to account for the violence of war. But it is war that may account for British psychoanalysis and its exclusive focus on infants and mothers, whereby the father is expelled beyond the reach of theory: *fort!*

Notes

- ¹ See Judith Gardiner, *Wartime: Britain 1939–1945* (London: Headline Book Publishing, 2004): 'the worst privation was the lack of lavatories: 400 mothers and children were despatched the 120 miles from Liverpool to Pwllheli in a corridorless train; while children from West Ham in London's East End were finally decanted at Wantage when it was realized that it was idiocy to imagine they could travel all the way to Somerset without requiring a lavatory...' (26).
- ² Tom Harrison, *War Begins at Home* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1940), 299–300. See also Tara Zahra, *The Lost Children: Reconstructing Europe's Families after World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 63.
- ³ Evelyn Waugh describes this period as 'that odd, dead period before the Churchillian renaissance, which people called at the time the Great Bore War' in the Dedicatory Letter to Major Randolph Churchill (n.p.), *Put Out More Flags* (1942; London: Penguin, 2000). The more common nickname for this period, borrowed from the Americans, was the Phoney War (Gardiner, *Wartime*, 15).
- ⁴ Richard Padley and Margaret Cole, eds., *Evacuation Survey: Report to the Fabian Society* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1940), 4–5.
- ⁵ Zahra, *The Lost Children*, 63.

- ⁶ Adam Phillips, 'Bombs Away,' *History Workshop Journal* No. 45 (Spring, 1998): 183–198; at 191. As Denise Riley has shown in her classic study *War in the Nursery* (London: Virago, 1983), esp. Chs. 4 and 5, 'Bowlbyism' was used to justify the cost-cutting measures of shutting down the war nurseries after 1945, with the rationale that children would be traumatized or even criminalized by separation from their mothers.
- ⁷ The infighting culminated in the so-called 'Controversial Discussions', a euphemism for the battle between Kleinians and Anna Freudians that produced a permanent split between these camps. See Pearl King and Riccardo Steiner, eds., *The Freud-Klein Controversies in the British Psycho-Analytical Society 1941–1945* (London: Routledge, 1991).
- ⁸ Michal Shapira, *The War Inside: Psychoanalysis, Total War, and the Making of the Democratic Self in Postwar Britain* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).
- ⁹ Although Klein's *Narrative* is generally accounted the longest case history in the psychoanalytic repertoire, Marion Milner's magnificent *The Hands of the Living God* (1969; London: Routledge, 2010), the 494-page record of a fifteen-year analysis of a psychotic patient, rivals or exceeds the length of Klein's case history (536 pages): see Melanie Klein, *Narrative of a Child Analysis: The Conduct of the Psycho-Analysis of Children as seen in the Treatment of a Ten year old Boy* (London: Hogarth Press, 1961).
- ¹⁰ John Welshman, *Churchill's Children: The Evacuee Experience in Wartime Britain* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 184–7.
- ¹¹ See Gardiner, *Wartime*, 48–9. For many evacuees, return was more traumatic than departure; see Julie Summers, *When the Children Came Home: Stories of Wartime Evacuees* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012).
- ¹² Zahra, *The Lost Children*, 64.
- ¹³ Welshman, *Churchill's Children*, 185.
- ¹⁴ Quoted in Harrison, *War Begins at Home*, 312.
- ¹⁵ See, *inter alia*, Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), which discusses 'the popular trope that likened the savagery and mysteries of the East End to those of Britain's eastern empire and compared Darkest London to Darkest Africa' (237).
- ¹⁶ See Gardiner, *Wartime Britain*, 38.
- ¹⁷ Barbara Noble, *Doreen* (1946; London: Persephone, 2005).
- ¹⁸ As Gardiner observes, 'just as rural England was evoked during the war as the authentic England (and it was invariably named as England rather than Britain) that men were fighting to keep free, so the countryside was mobilised to redeem the "lost" children of the industrial towns and cities' (*Wartime*, 40). See also Sonya

- O. Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Britain 1939–1945*, 208–13.
- ¹⁹ Susan Isaacs, ed., *The Cambridge Evacuation Survey: A Wartime Study in Social Welfare and Education* (London: Methuen, 1941), 63. Henceforth cited as Isaacs.
- ²⁰ Anna Freud and Dorothy T. Burlingham, *Infants Without Families: Reports On the Hampstead Nurseries, 1939–1945* (New York: International Universities Press, 1973).
- ²¹ Shapira, *The War Inside*, 2.
- ²² *Ibid*, 150.
- ²³ Klein, *Narrative of a Child Analysis*, 16.
- ²⁴ Bill Brown, *Other Things* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 182.
- ²⁵ Lyndsey Stonebridge, *The Writing of Anxiety: Imagining Wartime in Mid-Century British Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 87.
- ²⁶ Donald Meltzer, *The Kleinian Development* (London: Karnac Books, 1998), 157.
- ²⁷ See, for instance, Klein, *Narrative of a Child Analysis*, 80: 'Mrs Klein interpreted that he again found comfort in looking at the uninjured beautiful external mother, represented by the hills, because this made him feel that she was not destroyed, or dirty, or eaten up from within.'
- ²⁸ Brown, *Other Things*, 183.
- ²⁹ Phillips, *Bombs Away*, 187.
- ³⁰ This military connotation is lost in the Stracheys' English translation, where *Besetzung* is translated as the Greek term *cathexis*, meaning 'holding' or 'retention'. An informative discussion of the controversy over the English translation may be found in John Forrester and Laura Cameron, *Freud in Cambridge*, forthcoming from Cambridge University Press in 2017.
- ³¹ Quoted in Stonebridge, *The Writing of Anxiety*, 25.
- ³² Phillips, 'Bombs Away', 190. The livelihood of psychoanalysts was also jeopardized by the arrival of hundreds of Jewish practitioners from continental Europe, producing a fierce competition for patients that undoubtedly exacerbated tensions in the BPaS.
- ³³ Ernest Jones, 'Psychology and War Conditions', *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 14 (1945): 1–27; at 16.
- ³⁴ Phillips, 'Bombs Away', 188, 185.
- ³⁵ Stonebridge, *The Writing of Anxiety*, 54.
- ³⁶ P.H. Newby, *The Novel 1945–50* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1951), 8–10.
- ³⁷ D.W. Winnicott, 'Primitive Emotional Development', *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 26 (1945): 137–143; at 138.

- ³⁸ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, 24 vols. (London: Hogarth, 1966–1974), Vol. 18: 14–16.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.
- ⁴⁰ Winnicott, ‘Primitive Emotional Development’, 139.
- ⁴¹ Quoted by Malcolm Bowie in *Lacan* (London: Fontana, 1991), 27.
- ⁴² Melitta Schmideberg, ‘Some Observations on Individual Reactions to Air Raids’, *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 23 (1942): 146–176; at 152.
- ⁴³ First published in 1945 under the title ‘Study’ and republished as ‘A Sad Garden’ in Taylor’s 1954 collection *Hester Lilly*: see Neil Reeve, ‘The Girl on a Swing: Childhood and Writing in the 1940s,’ in Marina Mackay and Lyndsey Stonebridge, eds., *British Fiction After Modernism: The Novel at Mid-Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 88–98; at 95. The text cited here is ‘A Sad Garden’ in Elizabeth Taylor, *Complete Short Stories* (London: Virago, 2012), 90–92.
- ⁴⁴ Reeve, ‘The Girl on a Swing,’ 96.
- ⁴⁵ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 14–15.
- ⁴⁶ See Reeve, ‘The Girl on a Swing,’ 96.
- ⁴⁷ Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *Les Hasards heureux de l’escarpolette*, c. 1767, Wallace Collection London.
- ⁴⁸ Klein, *Narrative of a Child Analysis*, 64, 78, etc.
- ⁴⁹ Jean Laplanche, *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis*, trans. David Macy (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 126.
- ⁵⁰ See Laplanche, *New Foundations*, 144–5.
- ⁵¹ The sinister conclusion of the lullaby — ‘And down will come baby, cradle and all’ — suggests that Mother Goose is well aware of the ambiguity of rocking, which connotes maternal care and erotic pleasure but also the compulsive repetition of the death drive.
- ⁵² Sylvia Townsend Warner, ‘Apprentice’, *Selected Stories* (London: Virago, 1994), 103–12.
- ⁵³ William Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose*, ed. David Erdman (New York: Anchor, 1982), 27.
- ⁵⁴ See Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 197–201 and *passim*.
- ⁵⁵ Laura Marcus raised this question at a conference in Bristol, organized by Ulrika Maude in July 2016, on ‘Modernism, Medicine, and the Embodied Mind’.