

“This Fortress Built Against Infection”

The BUF vision of Britain’s theatrical and musical Renaissance

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Britain’s forthcoming artistic Renaissance

The ideologues¹ of the BUF produced no equivalent of Rosenberg’s *Myth of the Twentieth Century* as a comprehensive statement of its vision of cultural renewal and artistic palingenesis, nor any monographs on individual spheres of artistic endeavour.² Nevertheless, its diagnosis of the health of Britain’s theatre and music can be reconstructed as a relatively coherent ‘discourse’ from what is, for an abortive political movement which lasted a mere seven years, an abundance of publicistic³ references to them in the movement’s newspapers and periodicals.⁴ It was a diagnosis informed by a cluster of axioms about the arts which were broadly consistent with the ‘Spenglerian’ view of the organic life-cycle of cultures which became so central to the Leader’s palingenetic vision of Britain’s imminent destiny after 1932.⁵

The first premise was that the state of the arts was a direct expression of the ‘greatness’ of the nation conceived in a way typical of the patriotic mind-set of inter-war Europe as a synergy between military, political, and imperial strength on the one hand, and the ability to produce achievements in science, technology and the arts on the other. The profoundly patriarchal nature of such an assumption, already implicit when ‘great men’ alone are listed as having incarnated the qualities of an age actually named after a Queen⁶ or in the constant references to ‘man’, becomes explicit when Mosley calls for the ‘new Britons’ to embody virility⁷ or a ‘manful appreciation of life’.⁸ Before the days of feminism and political correctness such ‘chauvinist’ language could be generated by the patriotic pride in the cultural achievements of the nation’s artists and intellectuals which in liberal democracies so often coexists with a recognition of the deeply private, unpredictable, and mysterious nature of human creativity. What made it specifically fascist,⁹ or at least ultra-nationalist, in orientation in the BUF context was the insistence that all such achievements were to be seen as direct manifestations of the national genius, as revelations of what Herder called the ‘Volksgeist’ or essential spirit of the people. Hence such pronouncements as the following: ‘art is the expression of the whole community, or it is nothing but neurotic self-exhibitionism’;¹⁰ ‘art must have roots: when it is uprooted, when the deadly disease of cosmopolitanism sets in, it ceases to be the trumpet of man’s spirit and becomes the gangrened emblem of the spirit’s death’;¹¹ ‘culture is the supreme achievement of a nation’s conscious communal effort’; ‘a healthy civilisation in which culture flourishes and art is alive, beautiful, is a civilisation in which men may lift their eyes to something nobler than themselves’;¹² ‘politics has lost the one quality which could make it eternal: its close association with the arts and with the culture of man’.¹³

A second axiom was that Britain had once achieved a totality of political and cultural greatness which eclipsed that of any other nation, namely in the Elizabethan Era (occasionally referred to as the Tudor Age). The flowering of England's contribution to the European Renaissance coincided with her emergence as a great naval and colonial power, thereby lending a specious empiricism to the BUF's organic theory of culture, its patriotic belief in Britain's genius and world civilizing mission, and the sense of the lamentable decline from a Golden Age of art and culture so essential to the movement's core myth of imminent rebirth. Indeed, whereas the Italian Renaissance flowered at a low-point in Italy's history as a unified nation-state, the Elizabethan Renaissance (like the ones which took place in 16th century Spain and 17th century Holland) perfectly embodied for a twentieth century fascist the lost Atlantis when thought and action, culture and empire were inextricably bound up as expressions of a young national community growing in self-awareness and organic strength.

Anchoring Britain's future in nostalgia for the Tudors played a major role in the 'naturalization' of continental fascism by enabling BUF ideologues to develop an internally consistent metapolitical discourse in which to articulate the diagnosis of contemporary Britain, one that went considerably beyond slavish imitation of continental role models. Indeed, both Italian Fascists and Nazis could only point to 'Golden Ages' which long predated their emergence as a modern nation-state. To the Fascist mind-set of a Spenglerian persuasion, the fact that Queen Elizabeth, Marlow, and Purcell were roughly contemporaries and that the creation of the greatest empire ever seen began in the lifetime of William Shakespeare, the greatest dramatist of English, if not world, literature, had to be more than a coincidence. Dowland's madrigals, the first dawning of the British scientific, mathematical, and technological revolution,

the colonization of the Caribbean, the defeat of the Armada were all ‘obviously’ manifestations of the same fundamental reality: an organic culture in the full bloom of its first spring.

Seen through a mythic lens of ‘palingenetic ultra-nationalism’ Elizabethan society allowed what Mosley described in *The Alternative* as the ‘thought-deed man’¹⁴ to hold sway untrammelled by a democratic conscience which makes cowards of us all. Hence his statement in *Tomorrow We Live* that ‘Our new Britons require the virility of the Elizabethan combined with the intellect of and method of the modern technician’.¹⁵ Hence the conviction of one of his rank-and-file supporters that ‘Fascists have an opportunity to bring about a Renaissance of British letters comparable to Elizabethan splendour’,¹⁶ and that when Hitler launched the purge of modernist art in 1936 it was a call to German artists to restore the ‘national function of art’ that existed when Shakespeare encapsulated in dramatic prose the soul of Tudor England.¹⁷ The resolute confidence displayed by A. L. Glasfurd in the profound compatibility of Fascism with the ‘English tradition’, not least in the sphere of culture, should thus come as no surprise:

The vigorous patriotism, the advanced social conscience, the idealism and the vital spirit of endeavour that characterised the Elizabethan is also typical of the Fascist. Both, in a word, are men of action. Both belong in a different world from that of the intermediate liberal-bourgeois type. The complacent Old Party politician, who regards our new insurgent Fascism with numb horror or attacks it with hysterical abuse, is also congenitally incapable of understanding the spirit of the Elizabethan age. Those who see in Fascism a force destructive of culture should examine this period of history. Like the dawning Fascist era, the age was

an age of popular dictatorship and national integration, an age when individualism was not suffered to degenerate into anarchy, an age when men did not hesitate to meet force with force. It was the epoch of Hawkins, Drake and Raleigh. And yet it was in this 'barbarous' period that England experienced a cultural Renaissance unequalled in her previous or subsequent history. The Elizabethan had hot blood and a ready hand, but he was none the less not a great artist.¹⁸

The third vital premise of the BUF's discourse on the contemporary British arts was that they were now afflicted by the same pathological symptoms which were affecting the whole of the West. One of the most comprehensive statements of this conviction came, appropriately enough, from the Leader himself in the first flush of his conversion to Spenglerianism:

[W]e have reached the period, by every indication available to the intellect, at which each civilisation and Empire of the past has begun to traverse that downward path to the dust and ashes from which their glory never returned. Every fatal symptom of the past is present in the modern situation, from the uprooting of the people's contact with the soil to the development of usury and the rule of money power, accompanied by social decadence and vice that flaunts in the face of civilisation the doctrine of defeat and decline.¹⁹

Another characteristic Jeremiad about the state of the nation's art came from the pen of the most Spenglerian of the BUF's ideologues, Raven Thomson:

Culture in literature bitterness, cynicism and Gertrude Stein; in music sensuality, swing and Stravinsky; in painting introspection and surrealism; in sculpture puerility and Picasso, excrescences and Epstein. No longer does the artist seek to capture elusive beauty, rather does he make it his business to worship the transient futilities spewed up by modern life, glorifying the misbegotten and pandering to the pervert.²⁰

Though the profound decadence of contemporary culture was axiomatically assumed by all BUF ideologues, they might cite as its root cause one of a number of factors familiar in fascism's catalogue of the blights and woes of modern civilization.²¹ These included the 'disease of Industrialism, with its accompaniments of excessive mechanisation and urbanisation',²² the presence among 'the people of Britain in the dark days of their eclipse' of 'cosmopolitan geniuses willing to make a burlesque of their noble cultural heritage';²³ the 'sorry mess of egotism and greed' which results 'when man ceases to be an individual and becomes a democrat _ that is, when he forgets the soil',²⁴ or when 'money dictates the damning of ...the founts of English culture'.²⁵ Other factors adduced were the rise of leisure, which, according to A. Raven Thomson, initiated 'the decline of Rome';²⁶ usury, which Ezra Pound was convinced had brought down not just the Roman Empire but the Chinese one as well,²⁷ the 'excessive individualism' that 'appeared with particular violence at the Reformation, which is one of Disintegration's landmarks';²⁸ the collective 'harking back to the ideals of the tribe' comparable to a garden reverting 'back to the jungle';²⁹ or the spread of democracy with its 'Philistine majorities'.³⁰

A major result of such pathological processes was a fundamental change in the relationship between the ‘people’ and artists, who have formed ‘a rebellious Bohemian community, intent mainly upon shocking the hippopotamus that crushes their talent, but seldom succeeding in penetrating its thick Philistine hide’.³¹ ‘Looking from the ugliness without to the ugliness within’³² in the search for recognition, their art no longer unconsciously articulates the values of the people which they have internalized as members of the national community, but expresses ‘that extreme mental extroversion which is ultimately responsible for the chaos – social, political, economic and cultural – in which the West now finds itself’.³³ As a result it cannot help but be ‘artifice – synthetic and barren, deadening to the soul’.³⁴ The anti-type of the true artist was the ‘Bloomsbury intellectuals’ who had made it fashionable to assert that ‘Fascism is anti-culture’,³⁵ thereby perversely missing the point that Fascists were committed only to destroying *decadent* art: ‘Are we to destroy all the works of art in Great Britain, or the little muddied stream of forced and warped thinking emanating from long-haired men and sandalled women in Bloomsbury’s dirtier boarding-houses?’³⁶

An even more ominous symptom of the ‘whole rotten intellectual mess of the present day’³⁷ was the alleged domination of the arts by Jews, which was presented as the outward manifestation, not of an alleged loss of racial purity (as Nazi ideology insisted), but of the growing power of money. Thus ‘the Jew’ is accused of being eternally preoccupied with gold ‘causing him to drive Western civilization down to the standards of Eastern barbarism in his quest for profit’.³⁸ One consequence of this was the commercialisation of art, the eagerness to pander to the taste of the lowest common denominator for the purpose of pure profit. Another was the unscrupulous employment of foreign artistes at the expense of British ones. As a result

of Jewish infiltration, aesthetic canons themselves had been degraded and public taste corrupted. In short, the BUF perceptions of cultural decadence were dominated by the feeling (reminiscent of the science fiction film *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*³⁹) that British culture was being infiltrated by alien forces and destroyed from within, a paranoia epitomized in Chesterton's graphic warning that the statues of Shakespeare and Nelson might one day be replaced by ones of Samuel Goldwyn and Hore-Belisha.⁴⁰

The final axiom was that one of the principal missions of the BUF was to reverse this deplorable state of cultural collapse: '[Fascism] is a new and revolutionary creed of national and cultural regeneration, come with a two-fold purpose: to check the rapid decay and corruption produced by the illusion of democracy, and to restore a deeper purpose to national life.'⁴¹ 'Fascism will sweep away that cult of ugliness and distortion in art, music and literature which is the product of neurotic post-war minds, sickened by long incarceration in dim cities.'⁴² It would defy Spenglerian laws of inexorable decline by acting as the catalyst for national awakening. For, as Raven Thomson put it: 'a revolutionary urge that restores the national spirit of the British people may well recover the Tudor atmosphere that gave us Shakespeare and the greatest triumphs of English poetry and drama.'⁴³ The BUF press makes it clear that two key areas of British culture where the battle to combat the syndrome of pathological degeneration promised to be particularly fierce were the theatre and music.

The 'death' of the British theatre

As is implicit in Raven Thomson's words, Shakespeare was a gift to the cultural pundits of the BUF as the epitome of everything that Britain once stood for and was now under threat. Indeed, the only other literary genius who can be directly compared with him for his value to fascists as a cultural icon, and who could be selectively quoted to underpin their ultranationalist agenda, is Dante, whose call for the unity of the Italian nation Mussolini's Blackshirts could claim they were finally answering in a new age of faith.⁴⁴ Not only is Shakespeare an 'immortal' dramatist of undisputable world renown, and the embodiment of the glories of the English language, he was a man 'of the people' about whose private life remarkably little is known compared with the outstanding figures of the Italian Renaissance. Moreover, his plays 'work' linguistically and dramatically entirely within the bounds of the shared world-view and iconography of his contemporaries just at the time when England was emerging as a self-conscious nation-state with its own unique cultural and political 'destiny'. As a result they are replete with eminently quotable sentiments rooted in a vitalistic, mythically charged world-view which patently predates the secular individualism of liberal democracy, or, for that matter, socialist egalitarianism, materialism, hedonism, artistic modernism, or any other of the 'isms' whose proliferation is for a fascist synonymous with cultural putrefaction. In short, Shakespeare supplied irrefutable evidence of the fact that 'the theatre...was not created out of the fortuitous desire of a small section of humanity, but it grew spontaneously from the whole of the people'.⁴⁵

A. K. Chesterton thus spoke for many in the BUF movement when he invoked Shakespeare as proof of the superior truthfulness of art compared with science, and of the need for 'vision' in the life of a people, before going on to deplore the modern values that have caused the immortal bard's place to be taken by the likes of Aldous Huxley and H. G. Wells.⁴⁶ The BUF

appropriation of Shakespeare reaches Monty Pythonesque heights in the article ‘Shakespeare would have been a Fascist’, in which he is presented as the embodiment of patriotism, the hatred of communism, total loyalty to the king, and the celebration of war. What is more, he had understood that only by ‘wounding herself’ could England become vulnerable to foreign conquest. One phrase from John O’ Gaunt’s speech, suitably cut, acquires a fresh resonance in the context of the BUF’s campaign to put ‘Britain First’:

This fortress built for nature by herself
Against infection and the hand of war.⁴⁷

For BUF columnists, convinced that the days when the Globe played Shakespeare to houses packed with audiences drawn from all social strata represented the high-point of the British theatre, the symptoms of its advanced state of decay in the 1930s were plain to see. Instead of being ‘an expression of the spirit and the feeling of the people’, the play had too often become ‘merely the hobby of a man whose money has been made in a purely utilitarian pursuit, and is seeking diversion and the possibility of more profit in the theatre’. In other words it was reduced to being ‘the vehicle for the flaunting of some entirely worthless small personality which has in some ways touched...the pocket of the wealthy’. The ‘spontaneous expression of mental life in the people...has been ‘delivered over to cupidity and avarice’. There is thus ‘great danger that an impoverished and unworthy theatre may be completely superseded by the cinema’. No wonder ‘the theatre today is said to be dying’.⁴⁸

A major cause and symptom of this lamentable situation (in fascist discourse causes and consequences of decadence are mostly indistinguishable) is that both the management of theatres and the system for engaging professional actors has fallen into the hands of Jews. Predictably

BUF columnists had no scruples in enlisting Shakespeare as propagandist of anti-Semitism. Thus a BBC broadcast of excerpts of Shylock's speeches becomes a pretext for citing Antonio's pronouncements on the impossibility of ever reasoning with a Jew in an article which finishes with the threatening words: 'It is fortunate perhaps for Jewry that we have not in England one of these ancient laws of Venice called into execution by Portia!'⁴⁹ Another assures readers that 'There is many a stirring message for National Socialists in the works of Shakespeare', an assertion which it illustrates by citing words from *Romeo and Juliet* as an indictment of the suffering and degradation inflicted on the poor by 'Financial Democracy', usury, and the 'greed for gold'. It proceeds to offer a 'description of modern England' which consists of a passage from *Richard II* interpreted as the portrait of a country crippled by the interest on foreign debt and the influx of 'cheap foreign goods' which are 'condemning thousands of our fellow countrymen to the miseries of unemployment': 'Shylock must have his pound of flesh, cost what it may'.⁵⁰

There is little doubt that BUF journalists struck a deep chord with readers on this issue. One letter to *The Blackshirt* complains that what was once 'the Theatrical Profession' had now degenerated into a "'racket" almost totally controlled by Jewish managers and agents, who exploit the artistes, force them to starvation salaries, and import foreign and Jewish artistes in preference to our own and the public have no say in the matter.' He called for Fascists to sit in silent protest whenever a foreign or Jewish act was on stage.⁵¹ Such complaints recur time after time in the BUF press. In 'The Blight of the Jew', a former actor claims he lived well until Jewish theatrical management and agencies established their 'stranglehold' and forced out British actors like him. He concludes with a memorable racial stereotype: 'Now, in my opinion, large brown and soulful eyes gleam brightly on either side of Jewish noses and the whisper is "Television". Observe and

see if I am wrong.’⁵² In another article a cabaret dancer recounts the immense hardship and humiliation she has experienced in her profession due to the fact that ‘foreigners’ have taken over the Music Hall.⁵³ Such personal testimonies were grist to the BUF’s satanic mills. A leading article ascribed the crisis in the theatre to ‘Exploitation run mad, exploitation carried to a point of destruction that only a Jew knows. The net result was that the theatre faltered and failed, with the life of it being slowly choked out.’⁵⁴ Another claims that in 1935, while British variety artistes joined the dole queues, 1,600 permits for foreign acts were issued and the BBC signed up a growing number of foreign acts, a situation attributable to the fact that ‘nearly 90% of the booking agencies are controlled and owned by Jews’.⁵⁵ The point was summed up in what was hardly the best example of the national genius for writing headlines containing outrageous puns: ‘British Artists Shall not Starve that Foreigners May Staff’.⁵⁶

According to the BUF press the Jewish theatrical ‘racket’ meant not only a flood of foreign artistes and unemployed British actors, but a flood of vulgarity as well:

The English theatre is dying, and the cinema is not responsible. It is the people who dictate that overworked, half-naked chorus girls, queasy-weasy sex philosophy and corpses shall constitute theatrical entertainment and art. But people get tired of blatant stage sex and bright young men and women, devoid of all pretence to humanity, to hurl cheap witticisms at each other from behind the footlights.⁵⁷

Serious drama was not the only victim of the crisis. The great British pantomime had

fallen on hard times because it was in the hands of ‘aliens’ culturally incapable of understanding it.⁵⁸ The BBC was taken to task for preferring to give airspace to comedy served up by ‘four coloured Americans, one Chinese, the usual surfeit of Semites’, rather than choose the ‘eminent’ (and presumably pro-Fascist) English humorist, Mr Gillie Potter.⁵⁹ Even when ‘true art’ was staged, there was another sinister sign of the desecration of the British theatre: the foreign infiltration of Shakespeare. A. K. Chesterton wrote a scathing critique of Hollywood’s rendition of *Romeo and Juliet* and of the decision to allow Russian director Komisarjevsky not only to stage *Anthony and Cleopatra*, but to invite him to produce yet more plays in the very Mecca of Shakespeare, Stratford upon Avon. But what appears to have stuck in his throat above all else was the casting of the Austrian Jewess Elizabeth Bergner in the role of Rosalind in *As You Like It*, especially since it was stipulated in her contract ‘that the name of Bergner should take precedence over the name of Shakespeare’.⁶⁰

The eclipse of British music

For a British fascist obsessed with national decline, the state of music was no more encouraging than the state of the theatre. As with drama, the recurrent BUF premise was that healthy art is a spontaneous expression of the ‘people’ unmediated by artifice or idiosyncrasy, so that ‘music is an integral part of the social life, not of a few, but of the nation. It should be allowed to grow and flourish on the natural soil of its country’. The very idea that the natural home of music was Germany or Italy was ‘astonishing when one thinks of the Elizabethan age when England was

almost, if not the, leading musical nation in the world’, and could still boast having in Elgar ‘the greatest living composer’.⁶¹ Here, too, history had smiled on Fascism by imparting some empirical objectivity to the myth of an era from which Britain had so palpably declined. To quote one of the BUF’s resident musical experts, Selwyn Watson, ‘in the Elizabethan Era – the Golden Age of Britain – we were the supreme and acknowledged masters of the art of music’. It is a matter of record that a cluster of outstandingly original composers, such as William Byrd, Tallis, Gibbons, Wilby, Weelkes, John Dowland, Robert Jones, and one giant, Purcell, created a distinctly ‘English’ dialect of Renaissance music. However, Watson’s claim that ‘the men who defeated the Armada prided themselves on their singing of madrigals’ owes less to academic research than to wishful thinking about the intimate link between military might and musical genius in that ‘organic age’.⁶²

British music and the theatre may have been equally moribund, but the cleavage which existed in the coverage of ‘classical’ and ‘popular’ music was more apparent than for ‘theatre’ and ‘variety hall’. As far as ‘high-brow’ music was concerned, a major cause for concern for the Fascist intelligentsia⁶³ was the neglect of British composers such as Elgar, Bax, Delius, and Vaughan Williams,⁶⁴ who had been crowded out by foreign operas. In his plea to ‘Rescue British Music’ the BUF musical pundit, John Porte, goes so far as to dismiss the Grand Opera season at Covent Garden wholesale as a ‘spectacle of international rubbish’ staged by those who fail to realize that ‘Grand Opera is not part of the life of English musical people’: ‘We are a nation of singers and players, as well as masters of theatre work, but opera, that muddled mixture of bad plays, bad acting and good music and singing, is not English.’⁶⁵ In another scornful attack on the Covent Garden season – ‘foreign operas performed by foreign singers and supported by a

motley audience of aliens and Society folk who consider Grand Opera Seasons as variations of Goodwood and Ascot' – Porte claims that in France, Germany and Italy audiences hear operas performed in their own language, and calls for British operas to be written which reflect 'the spirit of our own people'.⁶⁶ At least Captain Cuthbert Reavely, of whom more anon, could not disapprove of the main fare in the 1935 Grand Opera season, which was Wagner's Ring Cycle. Nevertheless, he took the opportunity to criticize the inclusion of a Rossini Festival alongside the works of the Master, to deplore the 'almost complete absence of any British singers', and to express relief that audiences were spared 'the threat of "Wozzeck", another modern Jewish perpetration'.⁶⁷ Berg's expressionist opera epitomized the fascist equation of Jewish creativity with an ugly, unintelligible modernism, or what Nazis called 'Cultural Bolshevism' (a phrase whose very absence from the BUF press again underlines the fact that we are not dealing with the simple cloning of Nazi aesthetics).

If the BUF's high-brow critics were reduced to carping from the wings, the popular music scene offered a contemporary phenomenon which its more populist cultural purists could really get their critical fangs into: Jazz. For Arthur Reade, who set out the principles involved in the defence of Western civilization, the 'passion for jazz' was a symptom of regression,⁶⁸ while the music critic who called himself 'Bluebird' accused the Jews of literally being able call the tune thanks to the cultural domination they had achieved in Britain, and of imposing 'primitive "native jew"' [sic] tunes with only that weird jumble of rhythm once associated with the half-civilized'.⁶⁹

The most extreme indictment of Jazz stems from the vitriolic pen of an anonymous columnist in *The Blackshirt* who portrays Jazz as a modern form of St. Vitus dance, which originally arose as a hybrid cultural product of two races singing for a lost homeland, the Jews

and America's negroid population. Broadway (like Hollywood, a Jewish financial empire) then turned it into a powerful weapon in the Jews' cultural war against the Gentiles. He claims that not only does constant exposure to Jazz's subversive rhythms undermine racial differences, but the cynicism and resignation of its texts sap the young of courage and vitality, thereby inducing a collective 'neurasthenia' calculated to make the host nations more likely to succumb to Jewish influence.⁷⁰

As with the theatre, the BUF believed the corrupting influence of the un-British contents of the art form went hand in hand with the pernicious economic dimension of its performance imposed by Jewish ascendancy. There is some evidence here of the growing virulence of BUF anti-Semitism (much more apparent in the more overtly political and economic pages of the BUF press) as the decade wore on. In 1934 a piece entitled 'Music in the Gutters' claimed that only 4,500 out of 40,000 British musicians were in employment and blamed the arrival of the talkies for ruining the profession without any mention of Jews, not even their domination of Hollywood. By 1936 the diagnosis presented in such articles had taken an ominous turn. According to one purporting to expose 'The Menace from the East', 'our Press and leading publishing houses, all our cinemas, and even the radio, are either owned or at least controlled to a large measure by Jewish finance', so that now 'the musical profession is entirely in Jewish hands, and, whilst hundreds of English musicians are unemployed and in dire want, hundreds of German Jews have been allowed to come here and gain employment'.⁷¹ The direct causal link between the alleged Jewish domination of the entertainment industry and its high levels of 'indigenous' unemployment was emphasised in numerous articles. One of the more effective, 'Behind the Saxophone', used personal testimony to bring 'home' the hard times inflicted on a

British bandsman by the rise of ‘alien’ Jazz.⁷² It was a situation summed up in the hardly very poetic ditty ‘Yiddles play their fiddles on the wireless, Gentiles play their brass-bands in the gutter’.⁷³

In case the economic crisis for British musicians might be thought to affect only dance bands, ‘The Tragedy of the Concert Hall’ described in vivid detail the humiliations and penury suffered at the hands of agency sharks by a gifted soprano attempting to break into the world of concert performance in terms reminiscent of *They Shoot Horses, Don’t They?*⁷⁴ The BUF’s campaign against the BBC (a foretaste of some of the more hysterical episodes of government paranoia in the Thatcher years) shows how far it too was considered an extension of the same ‘racket’, as well as acting from within the Establishment as the Trojan Horse for the (Jewish) destruction of British culture on all fronts. A steady drip-feed of articles in *Action* and *The Blackshirt* pilloried its exploitation of British artists; employing too many foreigners; putting on variety acts, drama, and music which were out of touch with the people; broadcasting too much Jazz; and of acts of such flagrant cultural subversion as hosting a Bessarabian orchestra which played music in ‘truest kosher style’ (‘Was it a cat fight or an Abyssinian funeral? It was not music’),⁷⁵ and desecrating Christianity by scheduling ‘Louis Levy and his Jewband’ for Christmas Day. In one singular fit of cultural paranoia a columnist raises the spectre of the BBC selling ‘British ether’ to the highest bidder.⁷⁶ In this context an article by Ezra Pound on how ‘mercantilism rots the arts’ and how usuriocracy’ has been destroying English music from within ever since the well-remunerated ‘Handel’ (Georg Friedrich Händel!) first crossed the Channel does not seem out of place in content, despite the idiosyncrasies of style.⁷⁷

The panacea

The doom and gloom which pervaded BUF diagnoses of the pitiful state of Britain's theatre and music, no matter how unrelenting, were far from pessimistic. They were an intrinsic part of the rugged palingenetic logic behind Fascist mythic thinking in every sphere of political analysis, and hence dialectically linked to the vision of rebirth in a revolutionary new order. According to the logic of cyclic rather than linear time, the darker the night, the closer the dawn, the worse the current plight, the more imminent the rebirth. Hence the heady 'cultural optimism' displayed after grim evocations of the present state of the arts in such assertions as 'Nothing short of a national revival, an awakening of the national consciousness, can rescue the national art from slow expiration',⁷⁸ 'Release our natural genius in all directions and music in this country would flourish as it did in the Elizabethan era';⁷⁹ 'We are, as it happens, on the verge of a tremendous musical renaissance'.⁸⁰

The organic laws of culture mean that once the people were stirred politically from their slumber by the gathering momentum of Mosley's movement the drama too would be awakened.⁸¹ The same law (even if incomprehensible to the minds of art experts and intellectuals still in the thrall of decadent liberalism or modernism) will banish discord from popular music and allow melody to return home from exile. It is only when 'the rapidly rising British Union...arouse[s] once again full-blooded feelings in the minds and bodies of full-blooded British men and women...we may hope to hear really great tunes again'.⁸² Yet even the most manic Fascist ideologue recognized that the process of cultural rebirth could not be left simply to a process of osmosis: as in other spheres it had to be induced. National life could only start

becoming ‘organic’ once more if the new government created an all-pervasive structure capable of reintegrating the key areas of activity that had become so fragmented and corrupt under ‘Financial Democracy’. In practice, this meant some radical institutional and constitutional innovations.

The first concerned the function of the Second Chamber which Mosley proposed to replace the ‘unworkable anachronisms’ of the House of Lords. There is documentary evidence here to suggest that the influence which Spengler exerted on Mosley’s thinking after 1933 led him to place culture much closer to the centre of his scheme for the new national order than it had been when his diagnosis was couched in mainly economic terms. In the first (1932) edition of *The Greater Britain* Mosley envisages the new Chamber as a technocratic body, the ‘National Corporation, which would function as an effective Parliament of Industry’.⁸³ The second edition of 1934 talks of the House of Lords being replaced by a Chamber ‘which represents in a special sense every major interest of the modern State’, though the ensuing list makes no reference to cultural matters beyond ‘religious thought’ and ‘education’.⁸⁴ But in 1936 Mosley’s *Fascism: 100 Questions Asked and Answered* specifies that the Second Chamber will represent the industry, culture, and ability of the nation, including outstanding personalities from the fields of Education, Religion, the Services, Science, Art and every aspect of the people’s spiritual life. ‘From this pool of culture and ability Government will derive a real assistance.’⁸⁵ E. D. Randall, composer of the words to the BUF anthem ‘Britain Awake’, reflected the shift in Mosely’s thinking when as early as 1934 he wrote ‘In the Second Chamber of the Fascist Parliament will sit elected representatives of the national culture _ men distinguished in their service of the arts and sciences, philosophy and religion, so that for the first time in our history men of creative

genius will receive their rightful share of public honour, hitherto reserved for politicians and soldiers _ ministers of deceit on the one hand, and on the other, of destruction'.⁸⁶

The main organizational framework for the regeneration of British culture, however, was to have been provided by the Corporate State. Just how the arts would have been regimented in the new Britain is a matter of speculation. By 1937, when Raven Thomson, the BUF's main theoretician of British corporatism, published *The Coming Corporate State*, there were two full-scale contemporary experiments in the fascist incorporation of culture on which he could draw, the cultural sections of Italy's 'Corporativist State' whose structural and legislative apparatus was still evolving on paper, however minimal its effectiveness as an organ of Fascistization, and the far more rigorously hierarchical and ruthlessly 'coordinated' *Reichskulturkammer* which Goebbels ran as his personal empire. Yet in the mere four pages dedicated to the *Gleichschaltung* and revitalization of British culture in Raven Thomson's blueprint for the new Corporatist Britain, little specific on culture emerges other than the crudely utilitarian equation of art with a parlour-game such as backgammon (one which would have fraised the hackles of J. S. Mill). According to the section 'the problem of leisure', every corporation would have been responsible for organizing the leisure facilities in its productive sector, which meant encouraging 'sport and athleticism' as well as 'less strenuous forms of recreation of equal value' such as 'music, dramatics, literature, debate and indoor games of skill'. This followed by an even more laconic chapter entitled 'The Patronage of the Arts' which tells us 'a special corporation' for the artist would ensure 'him' (of course) 'self-governing powers' and 'training' while securing 'his' own honoured place in national life.⁸⁷ However, when Ann Cutmore's blueprint for the 'reawakening of British drama'⁸⁸ promises that there will be a Corporation just for the theatre we can assume

that detailed planning of the new structure was still in its early stages.

The same is true of the third major organizational innovation on which Britain's cultural rebirth was to have depended: 'Afterwork', a nation-wide capillary movement for filling the nation's free-time with healthy productive purpose which was explicitly modelled on the Fascist 'Dopolavoro' and the Nazi 'Kraft durch Freude' organizations. Its highly invasive impact on the private lives of the 'New Britons' is implicit in Raven Thomson's pronouncement that within the Corporate State 'leisure must be directed into developing the cultural standards of the masses by recreational activity', and that 'the mass, in their recreational hours, will be encouraged, by reduced prices and special facilities, to visit concerts and opera, theatres and exhibitions of pictures and sculpture'.⁸⁹ Ann Cutmore's scheme for drama's rebirth confirms that the BUF saw 'Afterwork' as a vital means both of healing Britain of its cultural malaise and of solving the problem posed by the increasing amount leisure which she assumed would be generated by the Fascist mastery of science, technology, and planning and the subsequent reduction in working hours.

While the Second Chamber, the Cultural Corporation(s), and Afterwork were being put in place, a raft of new legislation and measures could have been expected from a Mosley government aimed at regenerating the theatre and music. For one thing the new State would ensure that no artist was forced to live in poverty. Not only would the arts be heavily subsidised, but the existing agency system would be swept away and replaced by a national organization run by paid professionals.⁹⁰ On paper this meant that at a stroke not only would exploitation and the profit motive be taken out of the arts, but that it would be possible finally to regulate centrally the number of foreigners working in Britain while guaranteeing jobs for (registered)

British artistes. Moreover, the aesthetic content of theatre programmes, classical concerts, and light entertainment (not forgetting the BBC, which would finally become a 'British' Broadcasting Corporation) would be strictly controlled – through mechanisms of censorship never spelt out – so as to eliminate any art which smacked of the cynical, the prurient, the vacuous, the sensationalist, or the cosmopolitan. In the case of the theatre, for example, this system would have ensured a steady supply of 'edifying plays and suitable variety acts to be performed in a national network of Municipal Theatres subsidized by a special tax so that tickets were affordable'.⁹¹ Afterwork would, presumably, have seen to it that their seats were always full.⁹²

But, such measures were within the BUF mindset only the pragmatic, 'material' aspect of a deeper spiritual process which lay at the heart of the Fascist 'reawakening': the healing of the rift between the artist and 'his' people, the re-rooting of the artist's inspiration in the common experience and aspirations of 'his' nation from which it had been torn, the re-harnessing of artistic talent to the collective destiny of Britain. It is in this sense that Raven Thomson announces that 'The Corporate State will maintain a much closer contact between artist and people'.⁹³ The organic, idealist vision of culture which is second nature to fascists made it self-evident to BUF cultural commentators that any constitutional or institutional innovations it introduced would fail miserably if it did not succeed in spreading a sense of higher communal purpose. This they saw as vital to the synergy between the nation's material and cultural power which they believed had existed in its Golden Age some three centuries earlier. For Fascists it was axiomatic that the real revolution commended 'in the hearts and not on the barricades'.⁹⁴ 'It will be in rediscovering the Age of faith of Christendom and the vital energy of Tudor England that we may realize in part the great future of our nation'.⁹⁵

The ambiguities of Britain's cultural rebirth

For those imbued with the 'decadent' mentality of scepticism it is patently obvious that the BUF's seven years of intense ideological activity had been insufficient to resolve many crucial issues raised by the perceived need to reverse the decline of Britain's theatre and music. Not only were the mechanisms of the control and organization of the arts still at a rudimentary stage of forward planning and described in nebulously mythic language, but a close study of the BUF press reveals that major differences in interpreting the Fascist vision of Western civilization persisted at the highest level on such issues as the role of Christianity or religion in underpinning the West's past and future 'greatness', the part played in its decline by Jews, and the centrality of culture rather than technocracy to its regeneration. A comparison of the 'philosophy of history' of Mosley with that of major ideologues such as Raven Thomson, A. K. Chesterton, Arthur Reade, or E. D. Randall suggests latent conflicts and potential personality clashes on Britain's reborn culture at least as profound as the ones which existed between Hitler, Goebbels, Darré, and Rosenberg. For instance, Raven Thomson's Philistine view of art as a glorified leisure activity was incompatible with Chesterton's more genuinely 'organic' (and far more virulently anti-Semitic) view which owed much to fin-de-siècle aestheticism both in the supreme value it put on art as a gratuitous expression of human spirituality, and in its fascination with putrefaction.

Also latent in BUF publicism on the arts was an impenetrable vagueness about precisely what the aesthetic forms and contents of Britain's reborn arts would be. *The Blackshirt* and

Action are frustratingly devoid of the detailed theatre criticism or surveys of contemporary drama which might have allowed inferences to be drawn about the sort of British and continental plays from the past which would have become the basis of an expurgated ‘British’ repertoire, and what kind of new ones would have been encouraged – presumably with the competition prizes and generous grants of the sort instituted in the new Italy and Germany. It is not even clear if all forms of experimentalism or theatrical modernism would have been banned, since Leigh Vaughan-Henry’s article strikes a stridently Futurist note when he insists that:

We cannot carry over the effects of a new spirit and a new mental trend in the garbage of outworn thought or expression. We live in an age of aviation, telegraphy, radio, and electricity. Only in equivalent types of thought and expression can we voice the spirit of our time.⁹⁶

In similar vein, another commentator declares that ‘The world is moving forward to a new and strange age, and Fascism must be ahead of, not behind, the times. There is no place for the reactionary’⁹⁷ Translated into terms of theatre management such pronouncements imply that at least some elements within the BUF might actually have encouraged the emergence of a British Pirandello or Marinetti (though tributes to Vorticism or a BUF attempt to emulate Wyndham Lewis’s *Blast* are conspicuous by their absence).

In music, too, the case for a Fascist modernism had its proponents. Indeed, it was the main music critic of the BUF, Selwyn Watson, who must have shocked many a reader with his article ‘In defence of Modern Music: its causes and its future’. It not only stressed that music

is constantly evolving, so that over time what seems jarring comes to be heard as melodious, but praised Debussy, Stravinsky and Schönberg as ‘revolutionaries of immense talent’. The unfamiliar harmonies and atonal qualities of modern classical music, like the syncopated rhythms and strident discords of jazz, reflected a world, which with the outbreak of the First World War, had simply ‘gone mad’. Yet he insisted that even British composers whose sound to many was ‘unwelcome’, such as William Walton and Benjamin Britten, had ‘definite points of contact with the past’, and that in their day Bach, Beethoven, Schumann, Wagner were trail-blazers and mould-breakers.⁹⁸

The decadence or health of musical modernism was not the only nettle a BUF regime would have had to have grasped. There was also the dispute between those advocates of radical cultural cleansing who would have banned opera sung in a foreign language (and even opera altogether as ‘un-British’), and those who, true to a sense of belonging to a Western and not just British civilization, vigorously defended performances of opera in the original as long as the British public saw the best that foreign musicians could offer.⁹⁹ It would also have had to decide whether to give in to calls for a total ban on foreign artists working in Britain or to introduce some sort of quota or exchange system.¹⁰⁰ If extreme xenophobes and anti-modernists had won the *Kulturkampf* over the interpretation of the slogan ‘Britain First!’ when applied to theatres and music halls, it would have led to a Cultural Revolution which smacked more of Chairman Mao than of Queen Elizabeth I.

There is slightly more to go on in the case of music than of the theatre when trying to hazard a guess as to what the new regime might have promoted in practice. In popular music the marching anthems of the BUF are on several occasions welcomed as signs of the rebirth of British

tunefulness after the cacophonies of Jazz, despite the fact that the tune of E. D. Randall's 'Britain Awake!'¹⁰¹ was cribbed from the Nazi Horst Wessel Lied. Yet Fascists in whom Elgar's 'Land of Hope and Glory' induced shivers of ecstasy were on a collision course with the many advocates of British swing. One self-styled 'Christian' bandsman even wrote to *Action* claiming that British dance music was actually pioneered by 'white men', but that 'the Jews, true to their character, soon copied the original brains'.¹⁰² This mythic narrative left the door wide open to a 'de-Judaised' Jazz scene persisting under Mosley, and adverts offering the services of BUF and 'Aryan' dance bands suggest that, as in Germany, 'decadent' rhythms would have continued to be heard in the new Britain, as long as they were played by Gentile hands.¹⁰³

As for classical music, the presence of a fundamentalist xenophobic lobby is suggested by the inordinate praise heaped on *Iernin*, a Cornish opera of 'phenomenal brilliance'¹⁰⁴ composed by George Lloyd [sic], 'a young composer of genius', and on Sir Edward German's no less obscure *Merrie England*, which, we are told, pointed the way towards 'a real national opera in a future national England'.¹⁰⁵ John Porte's scheme for 'rescuing British music' within the Fascist State also involved an unmistakable *völkisch* element in his emphasis *on* revitalizing 'our great heritage of folk singing and dancing, and our amateur choral societies, so returning Britain to its 'natural State'.¹⁰⁶ A more reliable glimpse of the musical shape of things to come in a Fascist Britain is probably afforded by the concert held on 18 December 1935 at the Aeolian Hall in London by the British Union of Fascists. The programme consisted of orchestral pieces by Elgar, Schubert, and Wagner performed by the All British Orchestra in a display of 'uncompromising, joyful virility'. These were supplemented by Carmen's 'Toreador Song' and 'In the Gloaming' sung by Captain Cuthbert Reavely (described as 'in the forefront of living

baritones'), who also helped organize the concert and was a contributor of several articles on music to the Fascist press. In the sphere of classical music at least, the ascendancy of safe, bourgeois, 'middle of the road' music over the avant-garde seems to be a law-bound feature of all modern revolutions whatever their political complexion,¹⁰⁷ and the same would have undoubtedly been true of the 'reawakened' British theatre as well under Mosley.

Yet in British Fascism, following another apparent 'law' of modern revolutionary movements, a mystifying rhetoric routinely papered over any ambivalences concerning aesthetic modernism and the profound contradictions between the BUF's utopian promises and the banality of what probably lay in store for audiences. A classic example of this rhetoric is provided by the short speech which Mosley made after the hardly earth-shatteringly innovative Aeolian Hall concert. In it he announced that, since great ages of creative activity foreshadow rather than reflect the periods of action, from his movement there would emerge an art, pure, original, and higher than anything so far conceived: 'Fascism will bring to the new age the inspiration that is lacking today, for any creed which affects the human spirit so profoundly, and which fuses all human things in a white heat, can never fail to bring an art and a culture which shall be the glory of mankind'.¹⁰⁸

Yet Mosley's bombast euphemized something much more sinister than a Philistine misunderstanding of the anthropology of culture, the nature of artistic creativity, and the impossibility of inducing cultural rebirths without creating aesthetic abortions. Latent in so much of the BUF's coverage of theatre and music, and perhaps made more insidious by the absence of explicitly eugenic or biological rationale, is the hidden agenda of ethnic cleansing in the name of cultural regeneration. The BUF may have started out as a movement trying to emulate Fascist

Italy, but it is clear from its cultural criticism that for most of its active supporters its heart lay in Berlin rather than Rome. In July 1935 we are told that Jews ‘only have themselves to blame’ for the decision to eliminate their culture from German life, given the fact that ‘the infusion of alien thought and repulsive forms of “art” into the culture of a nation is infinitely more harmful’ than economic domination.¹⁰⁹ The following year, on the occasion of the opening of the Haus der deutschen Kunst and the Decadent Art Exhibition in Munich, we are informed that Hitler is ‘superbly suited to put an end to the infantile meanderings of the “Modern Art” of international Jewry’.¹¹⁰ But as early as July 1933 *The Blackshirt* published what is, in the wake of the Holocaust, a chilling article in its series Letters of ‘Lucifer’ entitled joyfully ‘Cleansing England!’ It vilified the hostility of ‘decadent’ ‘Bloomsbury’ intellectuals to the draconian literary censorship recently introduced by the Third Reich and to the book-burnings which accompanied it:

While the Nazis are cleaning out the sewers of the Kurfürstendamm and burning the productions of German intellectual decadence, the ‘enlightened’ government of Parliamentary England allows handbooks on opium-smoking to circulate among the young generation of our country. It is high time that Fascism applied the stomach-pump of common sense to the unclean stomach of English intellectualism.¹¹¹

Thus the call in 1936 for a ‘cleansing flame’ to purge Britain of vice as effectively as Hitler has done in Berlin, Hamburg, and Munich’,¹¹² or the warning two years later that ‘it will need the

iron grip of National Socialism to loosen the Semitic stranglehold on the arts',¹¹³ suggest that the BUF's 'economic' and 'cultural' variant of anti-Semitism might well have led to a use of state terror to 'remove' Jews from civil society indistinguishable in practice from that imposed by a more overtly biological, eugenic variety.

Even in this crucial area of BUF ideology ambiguities persisted, however. The article lamenting the 'death of tunefulness' and the readiness of the British to 'dance with no heart to any little yiddish tune that any little yiddish dance band cares to give them', makes the very un-Nazi admission that 'many of the great tunes which we all sang in 1914-18 were composed by Jews', explaining that 'the Jew then was the servant and not the master'.¹¹⁴ Arthur Reade argued that Jews should lose all citizenship rights and be physically removed from the West if its civilization was to be saved. But he went on to debate where they should be moved to, suggesting that Palestine was too small, and that the most likely candidates were Uganda, Biro-Bidjan (in a far Eastern province of the former USSR near the Chinese border), and Madagascar (by the late 1930s a favourite imagined location for a Jewish homeland among non-extremist anti-Semites). The article closes with another sentiment unthinkable in a Nazi context that, once secure in their own territory, the Jews' drive towards world domination may well be channelled into 'developing an all-round national life which would constitute their own special contribution to the human race'.¹¹⁵

Nevertheless, even if the BUF's anti-Semitism stopped short of being genocidal, there is ample evidence in its press that, despite the steady flow of information about what was happening to the 'enemies of the Third Reich', in the main its supporters' admiration for the escalating Nazi programme of ethnic cleansing was sustained right up to the outbreak of the war.

For example, one article published in the summer of 1939 expressed unqualified enthusiasm for the cultural and spiritual rebirth which would ensue from a ‘de-Judaised’ Europe.¹¹⁶ It is thus difficult to see how when push came to shove the BUF would have avoided collaborating in the Final Solution just as whole-heartedly as Pétain’s Vichy or Szálasi’s Hungary in its pursuit of a ritually purified and regenerated culture, no matter how ‘unbiological’ its racial theories. With hindsight, then, *The Blackshirt*’s reference to England as ‘a fortress built against infection’ manages to contaminate Shakespeare’s turn of phrase with anachronistic eugenic connotations of industrialized mass-murder using chemical pesticides. As Goethe (another of Mosley’s cultural heroes) once put it, ‘real events cast their shadow before them’.

Conclusion: the nemesis of one Faustian man

Denied political space by Britain’s stable liberal democracy and sated nationalism, deprived of a structural crisis profound enough to spark off an epidemic of palingenetic political myth, British Fascism could never gain critical mass as a charismatic revolutionary movement.¹¹⁷ The Corporate Britain was thus destined to remain a figment of utopian fantasy. It must therefore remain a matter of counterfactual speculation what would have become of the theatre and music within a Mosleyian new order. Were it to have retained political autonomy I suspect that a typically British compromise (no doubt dignified by the euphemism ‘synthesis’) would have resulted: a botched blend of Italian Fascist ‘hegemonic pluralism’ in which the state associated itself with any outstanding acts of creativity (even by non-Fascists) without imposing an official aesthetic or indulging in racial persecution,¹¹⁸ and Nazi-style ‘totalitarianism’, complete with

attempted purges of ‘foreign’ modernism and Jewish ‘cultural bolshevism’ from British society and impressive state-sponsored revivals of Elizabethan drama and music (not to mention madrigals and morris-dancing). On the other hand, there is every indication that the new Britain, had it been incorporated into the Nazis’ New European Order, could have supplied enough home-grown collaborators who sympathized with Nazi aesthetics and art policies to ensure the sort of cultural convergence with the Third Reich that was witnessed in occupied France. It is far from inconceivable that stage-managed book-burnings outside the British Museum and the spectacle of the front rows of London theatres and concert halls filled with Nazi uniforms might one day have become part of the British way of life within the ‘European New Order’.

As for Mosley himself, it is perhaps a tribute to the extraordinary tenacity of palingenetic myth (not to mention the human capacity for denial and self-delusion) that in the last phase of his life he did not recognize how badly he had misjudged the revolutionary potential of Britain’s political situation in the 1930s. Nor did he contemplate with relief the systematized mass murder he would have been forced to collude had circumstances turned him into an English Quisling. Instead, he withdrew into a highly aestheticized ‘metapolitical’ world of his own extrapolated from his pre-war Spenglerian vision. His essay ‘Wagner and Shaw: A Synthesis’ suggests that towards the end of his life he cast himself (at least subliminally) in the leading role of a cosmic opera in which his consummate failure in reality was simultaneously dramatized and lyricized, transfigured poetically into a heroic self-sacrifice which opens up for others the possibility of eventual triumph. In it he suggests that Wagner chose to follow the portrayal of Siegfried’s triumph in the eponymous epic with the depiction of his failure in *Götterdämmerung* in order to convey the message (one that he believes was too subtle for Shaw to have grasped)

that beyond all human striving, whether successful or not, a higher cyclic law of nature is at work. The opera's theme is 'the presage of rebirth in the recurring motif of destiny proving, affirming, and heralding another great upsurge in the life force'.

In this cosmic, aestheticized vision of the historical process Mosley has indefinitely postponed the paradise of a new Britain until another turning point in history occurs at some unspecified point long after his death. He now clearly identifies with those men he feels are the true subject of Wagner's opera, ones 'who will be ready to renounce the lesser order to achieve the greater, who will yield joy to serve destiny because some are called to strive greatly that higher forms may come'. To be worthy of this higher calling such a man:

must have within him 'die ewigen Melodien' (the eternal melodies) and be 'at one with all high things'. Otherwise the synthesis of life and love would not be there. He would not be the final hero, the symbol of that generation of higher men which is ready to give all that all may be won.¹¹⁹

In 1933 Mosley had proclaimed his bid to create a new breed of 'Faustian Man' in the 'sceptered isle', seemingly oblivious of the cycle of murder, destruction, and self-deception into which the legendary Faust was drawn by his drive to conquer the realm of total experience. But, as in Goethe's version, he had now found a way of narrating his own redemption at the last minute, even if he had to play the part of the 'eternal feminine' himself: the ultimate patriarchal fantasy.

Endnotes

- 1 It will soon become clear that this chapter is concerned primarily with the ideological matrix underlying the BUF's diagnosis of the state of the theatre and musical arts. It is thus not concerned with the biographical profiles of individual artists and intellectuals who devoted their creative or critical skills to the BUF, nor with actual performances of theatrical or musical works put on by BUF members or under the aegis of the BUF. I hope that a student of fascism is waiting in the wings to fill this lacuna.
2. The closest to such a monograph is Alexander Raven Thomson's Civilisation as Divine Superman which was published in 1932 just before the creation of the BUF and at least a year before Raven Thomson fell under Mosley's spell. It nonetheless expounds the (slightly adapted) Spenglerian philosophy of history which informed all his subsequent ideological production for the BUF including his important corporatist theory. It also displays fascinating parallels and contrasts with the numerous cyclic theories of history elaborated by other fascist ideologues (Arthur Rosenberg, Adolf Hitler, Julius Evola, Giovanni Gentile, Francis Yockey, and Oswald Mosley himself). The most probing account of Raven Thompson's philosophy of history to date is Peter Pugh, A Political Biography of Alexander Raven Thompson, (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Sheffield, 2001) which will hopefully one day appear in book form. Significantly,

Spengler himself, after the success of Der Untergang des Abendlandes, developed his own anti-tragic, counter-deterministic (and deeply fascist) vision of rebirth based on the concept of Caesarism, even though both the Nazis and Mosley continued to brand him as a 'fatalist' and a 'pessimist'.

3. 'Publicism' refers cultural production in the written media in the form of newspapers, pamphlets, and periodicals. In this case it is synonymous with the BUF press.
4. For a sense of how the present chapter fits into a comparative studies of fascist culture and an example of how a relatively homogeneous cultural vision can underlie the highly heterogeneous aesthetics of another fascist movement, see Roger Griffin, 'The sacred synthesis: The ideological cohesion of Fascist culture', Modern Italy, iii/1 (1998), pp 5-23. This analysis in turn is rooted in the emergent academic consensus (pioneered by George L. Mosse in the 1960s and Stanley Payne and Zeev Sternhell in the 1970s) that fascism is to be seen as a revolutionary form of nationalism whose mythic core is the vision of a total cultural (rather than economic or political) regeneration (palingenesis). On the growing acceptance of this approach to generic fascism see Roger Griffin, 'The Primacy of Culture: the Growth (or Manufacture) of Consensus in Fascist Studies', Journal of Contemporary History, xxxvii/1 (January 2002). For an important analysis of the central preoccupation with cultural decadence and renewal within British fascism in general see Thomas Linehan British Fascism 1918-39. Parties, Ideology and Culture (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), chs. 8-11, a book which appeared

after this chapter was written but which is in full harmony with the ‘new consensus’ and vital for locating this chapter in the wider context of BUF ideas of cultural decadence and regeneration explored here. For a collection of pioneering essays on fascism and Nazism which prepared the ground for this approach see George L. Mosse, The Fascist Revolution (New York: Howard Fertig, 1999).

5. Partly under Raven Thompson’s influence, Oswald Mosley devised his own eclectic cyclic theory of the rise and fall of civilizations, equally influenced by Oswald Spengler’s Decline of the West. For Mosley’s own account of his own ‘anti-determinist’ version of Spenglerianism, which he unveiled in a major speech given to the English Speaking Union in March 1933, see chapter 17, ‘The Ideology of Fascism. Science and Caesarism’, in his autobiography My Life (London: Nelson, 1968). See also Richard Thurlow, *Destiny and doom: Spengler, Hitler and “British” Fascism*, Patterns of Prejudice, xv/4 (1981).
6. A. L. Glasfurd, ‘Fascism and the English tradition’, Fascist Quarterly, i/ 3 (July 1935), pp 360-4
7. Mosley: ‘The Ideology of Fascism’, p 330
8. *Action*, 69 (17 August 1934), p 9
9. In this text ‘fascism’ refers to generic fascism, while Fascism refers specifically to the fascism of the BUF, or where the context makes it clear, Italian Fascism.
10. A. Raven Thomson, The Coming Corporate State, (London: Greater Britain Publications,

1937), p 45

11. A. K. Chesterton, 'The cancer of Jewish art', Action, 85 (24 July 1937), pp 10-11
12. E. D. Randall, 'Fascism and culture: The true place of creative genius', The Blackshirt, 48 (23 March 1934), p 1
13. Theo Lang, 'Britain's leadership and Britain's culture: Fascism lends its strength to the eternal realities of man', The Blackshirt, 194 (9 Jan. 1937), p 2
14. Mosley: 'The Ideology of Fascism', pp 316-7
15. Ibid., p 330
16. H. A. Harvey, The Blackshirt, 76 (4 October 1934), p 8
17. Action, 76 (31 July, 1937), p 7
18. Glasfurd: 'Fascism and the English tradition', p 363
19. Mosley: 'The Ideology of Fascism', p 328
20. Editorial, *The Blackshirt*, 256, (Nov. 1938), p 2
21. It is to be stressed that the jeremiads on contemporary society so familiar in fascist ideology are only to be seen as expressions of 'cultural pessimism' if we accept that the 'despair' is dialectically related to hope in imminent rebirth, in other words is an integral component of the palingenetic mind-set.

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22. Arthur Reade, 'The defence of Western civilization', The British Union Quarterly, Part One, iii/3 (July-Sep. 1939) p 16
 23. A. K. Chesterton, 'Our cultural inheritance debased by aggressive cosmopolitans', Action, 37 (31 Oct. 1936) p 7
 24. Chesterton: 'The cancer of Jewish art', pp 10-11
 25. Henry Gibbs, 'Crisis in the English theatre', Action, 99 (6 Jan. 1938) p 17
 26. Raven Thomson: The Coming Corporate State, p 43
 27. Ezra Pound, 'A cultural level', British Union Quarterly, ii/2 (April-June 1938), p 41
 28. Reade: 'The defence of Western civilization', Part One, p 16
 29. Ibid.
 30. Thomson, The Coming Corporate State, p 45
 31. Ibid.
 32. Chesterton: 'The cancer of Jewish art', p 11
 33. K. T. Duffield, "'Fascintern' or 'Pan-Europa'?", The British Union Quarterly, iii/3 (July-Sept. 1939), pp 58-9
 34. Chesterton: 'The cancer of Jewish art', p 11
 35. E. D. Randall, 'Fascism and Culture', The Blackshirt, 48 (23 March 1934), p 1

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36. Ann Cutmore, 'Assumed and deliberate barbarism is decadence', The Blackshirt, 69 (17 August) 1934, p 9
 37. A. K. Chesterton: The Blackshirt, 73 (14 Sept. 1934), p 4
 38. John Rumbold, 'Dangers of our Film Censorship', British Union Quarterly, i/3 (July-Sept. 1937), pp 45-55
 39. The original version (1956) of this film is pervaded by the anti-communist paranoia of the McCarthy years.
 40. Chesterton: 'The cancer of Jewish art', p 11. Samuel Goldwyn was the cinema magnate and Hore-Belisha Minister of Transport at the time Chesterton was writing, and eventually Secretary of State for War. They were also both Jews.
 41. Alexander Raven Thomson, 'Why Fascism', Fascist Quarterly, i/2 (1935), p 235
 42. Randall: 'Fascism and culture', p 1
 43. Thomson, The Coming Corporate State, p 46
 44. There was indeed a huge state-sponsored Dante cult under Mussolini. Other candidates for fascist appropriation, such as Manzoni, Calderon, Goethe, Nietzsche, Wagner, Racine, Corneille, Homer, all required even more selective editing to become part of the nation's 'usable past' or long preexisted its emergence as a modern state.
 45. Action 25 (6 August 1936), p 13

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46. A. K. Chesterton, The Blackshirt, 76 (5 Oct. 1934), p 8
 47. The Blackshirt, 104 (18 April 1935), p 4
 48. Ann Cutmore: 'The drama's reawakening', *Fascist Quarterly*, 1/iv (Oct. 1935) pp. 490-1
 49. The Blackshirt, 125 (13 Sept. 1935), p 11
 50. Action, 120 (4 June 1938) p 9
 51. Martin Adeson, Jr., The Blackshirt, 168 (11 July 1936), p 4
 52. The Blackshirt, 202 (6 March 1937), p 2
 53. Action, 183 (26 August 1939), p 16
 54. The Blackshirt, 202 (6 March 1937), p 2
 55. The Blackshirt, 205, (27 March 1937), p 5
 56. 'Save the music halls', Action, 63 (1 May 1937), p 11
 57. Gibbs, 'Crisis in the English theatre'
 58. Action, 148 (17 Dec. 1938), p 9
 59. The Blackshirt, 108 (17 May 1935) p 5
 60. Chesterton: 'Our cultural inheritance debased by aggressive cosmopolitans', p 7
 61. John F. Porte, 'Rescue British music', Fascist Week, 111 (9-15 Feb. 1934), p 7

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62. Selwyn Watson, 'The future of music', The Blackshirt, 87, (21 Dec. 1934), p 5
63. I am using this phrase loosely to refer to the most articulate and educated of the many ideologues of fascism (Raven Thomson, A. K. Chesterton etc.) who contributed to the BUF's publicistic production of propaganda and doctrine, which was prodigious given the size of the BUF membership.
64. Reader's letter to The Blackshirt, 99 (15 March 1935) p 7
65. Porte: 'Rescue British music'
66. John Porte, 'Merrie England', The Fascist Week, 29 (25-31 May 1934) p 7
67. Captain Cuthbert Reavely, 'Hotch-potch of Garvin and Beachcomber', The Blackshirt, 97 (25 April 1935) p 4
68. Reade, 'The defence of Western civilization', Part One, p 16
69. Action, 89 (30 Oct. 1937), p 4
70. The Blackshirt, 85 (7 Dec.), p 9
71. The Blackshirt, 166 (16 May 1936), p 2
72. Action, 7 (2 April 1936), p 11
73. The Blackshirt, 221 (24 July 1937), p 3
74. George Baker, 'The tragedy of the concert hall', The Blackshirt, 77 (12 Oct. 1934), p 6

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75. The Blackshirt, 223 (7 August 1937), p 4
 76. Action, 16 (4 June 1936) p 16
 77. Action, 126 (16 July 1932) p 13
 78. Watson: 'The future of music'
 79. Cutmore: 'The drama's reawakening', pp. 489-95
 80. Reader's letter, The Blackshirt, 99 (15 March 1935) p 7
 81. Porte: 'Rescue our British music', p 7
 82. Action 89 (30 Oct. 1937) p 4
 83. Oswald Mosley, The Greater Britain, (London: BUF Publications, 1932), pp 31-2
 84. Oswald Mosley, The Greater Britain (London: BUF Publications, 1934), p 41
 85. Oswald Mosley, *100 Questions Asked and Answered* (London: BUF Publications, 1936),
Qu. 25, pp 23-5
 86. Randall: 'Fascism and culture', p 1
 87. Thomson: The Coming Corporate State, pp 43-6
 88. Cutmore, 'The drama's reawakening'
 89. Thomson: The Coming Corporate State, pp 43-6

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90. S. W. Wilkinson, 'Save the music halls', Action, 63 (1 May 1937), p 11
 91. Cutmore: 'The drama's reawakening'
 92. Another BUF commentator, writing in The Blackshirt, 192 (30 Jan. 1937), was particularly impressed by the way the Nazi Strength through Joy organized local variety shows and the People's Stage (*Volksbühne*) put on plays at affordable prices.
 93. Thomson: The Coming Corporate State, p 45
 94. Leigh Vaughan-Henry, 'Fascist culture', The Blackshirt, 91 (18 Jan. 1935), p 6
 95. Thomson: The Coming Corporate State, p 48
 96. Vaughan-Harvey, 'Fascist culture', p 6
 97. Edwin Cornforth, Action, 69, (17 August 1934), p 9
 98. Action, 13 (14 May 1936), p 13
 99. The Blackshirt, 62 (29 June 1934), p 12
 100. See the detailed scheme proposed in the article 'Save the music halls', Action 63 (1 May 1937), p 11
 101. For the typically palingenetic text of this song see Roger Griffin, Fascism, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp 177-8
 102. Action, 17 (11 June 1936), p 8

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103. See, for example, the advert for the Blackshirt Dance Band playing at the Surrey Blackshirt Ball in The Blackshirt, 99 (15 March 1935), p 7, or for ‘Jazz without Jews’ in The Blackshirt, 227 (4 September 1937), p 7. For a brilliant analysis of the ideological complexities and tensions within the Nazi Jazz scene see Michael Kater, Different Drummers. Jazz in the Culture of Nazi Germany, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).
104. ‘Cornish Opera’s Success at the Lyceum’, The Blackshirt 116 (12 July 1935) p 3
105. John Porte, ‘Merrie England. A lovable opera of national music’, The Fascist Week, 29 (25-31 May 1934), p 7
106. Porte, ‘Rescue British music
107. On the complex relationship between Nazism and modernism in music see Michael Kater, The Twisted Muse. Musicians and their Music in the Third Reich, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); for the anti-modernist law which operates in the painting of totalitarian regimes see Igor Golomstock, Totalitarian Art in the Soviet Union, the Third Reich, Fascist Italy, and the People’s Republic of China, (London: Collins Harvill, 1990).
108. Selwyn Watson, ‘Enthusiastic Audience at B.U.F. Concert’, The Blackshirt, 140 (27 December 1935), p 2
109. Albert Lynden, ‘Why Germany banned Jewish culture’, The Blackshirt, 170 (25 July 1936), p 2

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110. Action, 76 (31 July 1937) p 7
111. The Blackshirt, 12 (15-22 July 1933), pp 14-5
112. 'The cleansing flame', The Blackshirt, 174 (22 August 1936), p 5
113. Eveline Marlow, 'Jewish theatrical agencies', The Blackshirt, 147, (4 December 1935),
p 3
114. 'Bluebird', 'The death of tunefulness', Action, 89 (30 October 1937), p 4
115. Arthur Reade, 'The defence of Western civilisation', Part Two, British Union Quarterly,
iii/1, (Oct.-Dec. 1939), p 61
116. Kenneth Duffield, 'Fascintern or Pan-Europa?', British Union Quarterly, *iii*/3 July-
(September 1939), pp 44-60
117. See Philip Coupland, 'The Blackshirted Utopians', The Journal of Contemporary
History, xxxiii/2, (1998)
118. Marla Stone, 'The state as patron. Making official culture in Fascist Italy', in Matthew
Affron and Mark Antliff, Fascist Visions. Art and Ideology in France and Italy,
(Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997)
119. Oswald Mosley, 'Wagner and Shaw: A synthesis', The European, (17 March 1956), p
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