The Representation of Reality and Fantasy
In the Films of Powell and Pressburger
1939 - 1946

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This thesis will examine the films planned or made by Powell and Pressburger in this period, with these aims:

- to demonstrate the way the contemporary realities of wartime Britain (political, social, cultural, economic) are represented in these films, and how the realities of British history (together with information supplied by the Ministry of Information and other government ministries) form the basis of much of their propaganda.

- to chart the changes in the stylistic combination of realism, naturalism, expressionism and surrealism, to show that all of these films are neither purely realist nor seamless products of artifice but carefully constructed narratives which use fantasy genres (spy stories, rural myths, futuristic utopias, dreams and hallucinations) to convey their message. Also, that the use of stereotypes as a basis for character was an attempt to achieve universality while retaining topicality and credibility and that these films seek to reconcile the perceived opposites of life and death, youth and age, the industrial and the rural, tradition and innovation, past and present.

- to show that the authenticity of location, costume, manners and modes of address sustains a more ambitious and imaginative representation of reality which explores inner truth as well as outer verisimilitude and that the films play with and investigate the function and nature of perception by formal experiment with the conventions of film (sound, vision, time).

It will do this in eight sections:

1. Preface.
2. Prologue, *The Spy in Black* and *Contraband*.
3. *49th Parallel* and *One of Our Aircraft is Missing*.
4. *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*.
5. *A Canterbury Tale* and *I Know Where I'm Going!*
7. Post War.
8. Conclusion.
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My thanks go also to the staff of the British Library, the British Newspaper Library, the Imperial War Museum Departments of Film and of Printed Books, the Goethe Institute, the University of Westminster Harrow IRS Centre, the University of London Library, the D M S Science Library, University College London Library, the Public Record Office, the National Film Archive and the British Film Institute Library, with particular thanks to Janet Moat in the Special Collections Department.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to Kevin Macdonald for the gift of a copy of Emeric Pressburger’s pencil draft of ‘A Matter of Life and Death’ and a video of the interview he conducted with Wendy Hiller on the making of *I Know Where I’m Going*. 

Abbreviations

These abbreviations are used for the following works and institutions:

Aldred, Nanette, "A Canterbury Tale: Powell and Pressburger's Film Fantasies of Britain" 'C T'
Barr, Charles, ed. *All Our Yesterdays*, 1986. AOY
_____ . "Introduction: Returning to the Edge of the World", *Edge*. 'Intro', *Edge*
Hall, Femau. *Modern English Ballet: an Interpretation*. MOB
Horne, Philip. 'Life and Death in A Matter of Life and Death,' February 1998. Horne
Imperial War Museum Department of Film. IWMDF
Mellor, David, ed. *A Paradise Lost: The Neo-Romantic Imagination in Britain*. Paradise
_____ , "Editor's Preface," *Paradise*. 'Ed's P', *Paradise*
This pamphlet, based on the interviews Gough-Yates conducted with Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger in 1970, has no page numbers. For ease of reference I have assigned page numbers, beginning with 'Interview with Michael Powell'.
Since a large number of citations are taken from Ian Christie's edition of Powell and Pressburger's *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, I have assigned abbreviations for some of the contents of this publication as well as the publication itself.

*C.B.*

'Introduction: A Very British Epic', by Ian Christie.  
'Intro'

'The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp: First Outline', by Emeric Pressburger.  
'Outline'

'Letter from Powell to Wendy Hiller'  
'Hiller'

'Letter from Laurence Olivier to Powell'.  
'Olivier'

'Ministry of Information, The Life and Death of Sugar Candy: Report'.  
'Report'

'Memorandum from The Archers'.  
'Memo'

'PJG Grigg, note on the Blimp film to the Prime Minister'.  
'Note'

'Screenplay: The Life and Death of Sugar Candy'**.  
'S.C.'

'Analysis of the Idea behind the Story of *Blimp*.  
'Analysis'

**The Faber edition of 'The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp' is a combination of screenplay and film transcript. Ian Christie identifies 'The Life and Death of Sugar Candy' screenplay as the one used for this edition. Quotations I make from the screenplay are, with one exception, taken from this publication, and quotations from the film from my own transcript.
Preface

This thesis examines the films Powell and Pressburger planned or made between 1939 and 1946 with the aim of determining in what way and to what degree their content and style conform to definitions of fantasy, and which realities are evident in these films, or could have influenced their production. I will maintain that the films Powell and Pressburger constructed rarely try to convince us that what we are witnessing is absolute reality, but encourage us to be aware that the version of reality we are given is a distorted and selective one. This is achieved by the following means: using characters who are 'types', rather than individuals; playing with the function and nature of perception; and choosing genres which conform to notions of fantasy rather than reality.

The main concern of my thesis, however, is reality: to examine the ways in which real events, real relationships and real pressures impinge on the creative process and sometimes provide its initial stimulus. Though this is true of most artists throughout history, the period covered by this thesis made imperative for these artists the confrontation with ineluctable realities. The Second World War affected the whole of the country's population, economically, socially, politically and, to some extent, culturally. I aim to demonstrate how Powell and Pressburger's films reflect some of the social changes and cultural shifts of this period, to what extent they were affected by the movement towards documentary realism, and that the overt propaganda content of their films was remarkably consistent with the needs of the government. But it is not only political, social, cultural and economic realities which are reflected in their films. Other realities have an effect on the creative process, since reality can be said to include everything within an artist's experience. A cinematic production uses many sources and conveys its message in a multitude of ways, and this thesis will attempt to highlight the most relevant examples in the films Powell and Pressburger planned or made between 1939 and 1946.

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The first part of this preface covers other critics' contentions, definitions of some of the terms, and a note on materials used. The second half sketches the context in which the films were produced, a context which has dictated my approach in this thesis.
Andrew Higson maintains that all dominant cinema, all classic realist texts, work as fantasy for the spectator, while playing on the tension between 'believing that the diegetic world is real, and recognising that it is fantasy'. But, he points out, different genres 'mark themselves as more realistic, or more fantastic.' V. F. Perkins places the most rigorous forms of documentary, those which aim to present the 'truth about an event with the minimum of human intervention between the real object and its film image', at one end of the generic scale, and, at the other, the 'abstract, cartoon or fantasy film which presents a totally controlled vision.' During the Second World War, according to Higson, the documentary aesthetic equated 'cinematic realism and an indigenous cinema' with the work of repressing the traditions of the gothic, the expressionist, the melodramatic'. And he maintains that it constantly attempted to articulate 'a common, public sphere of responsible social activity, as distinct from the spectacular cinema of "escapism", which apparently foregrounds individual desire and wish fulfillment'.

Powell and Pressburger espoused an eclectic approach which left them free to adopt any style of film making that suited their purpose. They presented musical entertainment, modern parables, futuristic utopias, escape dramas, spy stories and rural idylls in order to more entertainingly convey their 'truth'. They used comedy to subvert the overt message of their films, fantasy to create a more entertaining envelope for that message, and authenticity of location, costumce, manners and modes of address to sustain a more ambitious and imaginative representation of reality, one which explores inner truth as well as outer verisimilitude. The films play with the function and nature of perception: the conventions of colour versus black and white; the role of 'natural' sound as opposed to underscored musical accompaniment; the difference between film time and real time. Real time is a tyranny that film can evade, tricking us into accepting the passage of years in minutes or seconds, reversing chronology and flashing us back into the past or forward into the future. Time is malleable and so is our perception of sound and vision; what we see and what we hear are partly determined by what the film maker allows us to see and hear. And the use of 'types', even stereotypes, as a basis for characters in many of their films is, I believe, an attempt to achieve universality without sacrificing topicality and credibility.

The British documentary movement's realist aesthetic was based on the principles

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1 Andrew Higson, "Critical Theory and 'British Cinema'," *Screen*, vol. 24, no. 4-5, July-October 1983, p. 91.
3 Andrew Higson, "'Britain's Outstanding Contribution to the Film': The Documentary-Realist Tradition," *AOY*, pp. 81-83.
'enunciated by John Grierson in the Thirties - location shooting, ordinary people in place of trained actors and a degree of improvisation in word and gesture'. The most successfully realistic films, however, are those which are the most artfully constructed, since the fictional film at its most powerful, 'achieves a credibility which consummates the cinema's blend of actuality and fantasy' (Perkins, p. 62). Powell and Pressburger, while availing themselves to some extent of the documentary aesthetic, declined to be restricted by it. They used realism as the basis for all their films of this period, but utilised other forms of representation, such as expressionism and surrealism where appropriate. 1941 was the crucial year of change. From 1942 onwards the style and content of their films were culturally dominated by Neo-Romanticism, a movement which embraced a wide spectrum of the arts, and which influenced some other British film-makers, though not, I will maintain, to the same extent or for the same length of time as Powell and Pressburger.

The realities examined in this thesis are more historical than epistemological. Some recent critical analysis has concentrated on the links between history and artistic creation. D. F. McKenzie, for example, demonstrates that the text which provides the basis for a theatrical production is only a pre-text, since that production employs a multitude of sources and conveys its messages to its audience by a wide variety of means. All of this applies with equal force to a cinematic production. The artist lives in the real world and, as Ralph Stephenson and Jean R. Debrix have pointed out, draws artistic inspiration from his experience, so that reality can be said to include 'everything in the artist's experience: other works of art; other people; everything he sees, feels, hears and knows'. And the artist is further constrained by the reality of the medium in which he works and the need to present his creation to a real audience.

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Since fantasy and reality are capable of more than one interpretation, I have selected definitions appropriate to the use I have made of them in this thesis. The Oxford English Dictionary defines "Fantasy" as: 'a product of imagination, fiction, figment'; 'delusive imagination, hallucinations'; 'the fact or habit of deluding oneself by imaginary perceptions or reminiscences'; and 'a genre of literary compositions'. It defines "Reality" as: 'having an actual..."
existence'; and 'that which constitutes the actual thing, as distinguished from what is merely apparent or external'.

"Realism" has become so fluid a term that it can be made to embrace a wide field of representation. Some of the definitions cited by John Ellis and Raymond Williams are, I believe, the most helpful with reference to the uses of the term in this thesis.

Ellis defines realism as the expectation that a particular representation should present a 'realistic portrayal' of character and event: by having 'a surface accuracy of costume, setting and props'; by conforming 'to common sense and taken-for-granted notions of events'; by providing adequate motivation in the sense that 'the events have explicable causes'; and, finally, by placing the motivation for events centrally upon 'the psychology of individual characters who are taken as the unifying point in a representation in which weird and "unrealistic" events take place'.

Williams defines the nineteenth century artistic sense of realism as an emphasis on the real world as against 'the characteristic presentation of the world in romance and myth', which was seen as including extra-human, supernatural forces. In this sense it is similar to naturalism, except that naturalism became associated more with the notion that what is described or represented is seen only superficially, 'in terms of its outward appearance rather than its inner reality'. He also states that a later reaction against naturalism and realism included moves back to the world views which realism and naturalism had attacked, introducing 'forces above and beyond human history in timeless archetypes and myths', as in the plays of Eliot, Yeats, and some Beckett.

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Among the original materials I have used to support my argument, are a number of treatments, screenplays and drafts of screenplays written by Pressburger, sometimes in conjunction with other writers. They have provided invaluable insights into the development of the narrative, the changes that occur between conception and fulfilment, what is removed and, sometimes more interestingly, what is added. In this revised version of the thesis, I have included more material from these sources, including a 'Pencil Draft' for I Know Where I'm Going, which, I feel, reinforces my contention for the film's basis in contemporary reality.

I also found Pressburger's diaries helpful for their revelation of his feelings and opinions on matters of contemporary importance, and for the more accurate dating of certain key events. Some of the Ministry of Information files in the Public Record Office have provided material which significantly expands our knowledge of the extent to which Powell and Pressburger's films could have been influenced by information from various government ministries, particularly for Contraband and 49th Parallel. Also included are references to some of the literary, artistic and cultural sources which I believe had an influence on many of their films. Like all writers on the subject, I have relied extensively on Michael Powell's autobiographies, A Life in Movies and Million-Dollar Movie (while aware of the potential for unreliability implicit in all memoirs), and Kevin Macdonald's biography of Emeric Pressburger, Emeric Pressburger: The Life and Death of a Screenwriter. When citing original material published in secondary sources, I have, where possible, checked the original source, often finding in the process additional points of interest.

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Although I consulted various analysts of film, and was stimulated and challenged by their contentions, I found their concerns more theoretical than mine. I wished my contentions in this thesis to establish themselves by the accretion of example rather than by a purely theoretical exposition. In order to achieve a balance between new research and an acknowledgment of the importance and achievements of already existing critiques, I have made substantial use of the analyses and reviews of others. Retrospective reviews are used only when they draw attention to something I consider to have importance to the subjects of my research. Because I was concerned to evaluate how critical opinions may have influenced the creative process, I decided that contemporary reviews in books, newspapers and magazines would be more relevant than the Mass-Observation surveys of films made during this period, since very little of that material found its way into print at that time. I have included the Robsons among those contemporary critics, not only because they were a benchmark of the far right critical stance in opposition to far left views, but also because I believe that Powell's published response to their letter attacking 49th Parallel establishes that both Powell and Pressburger took the discussion aroused by their views seriously.

10 "The typed reports ... reached a certain kind of audience, chiefly at the Ministry of Information, but no popular works on film or cinema-going were ever actually produced by Mass-Observation" (Jeffrey Richards and Dorothy Sheridan, eds, Mass-Observation at the Movies. London, New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987, p. 1).
Emerick Pressburger and Michael Powell were witnesses to the end of empire: for the former, the sudden collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the end of the First World War; for the latter, the slower erosion of the British Empire over the first half of the twentieth century. The effect was more dramatic for Pressburger, since it determined the beginning of a pilgrimage to complete his education, find an occupation and settle in a country that he could regard as home, a pilgrimage that brought him to England in 1935. Powell, though, was a traveller by choice, seeking adventure and his own personal empire. Both men started their film careers on the continent; Pressburger at the Ufa studios in Berlin and Powell with the Rex Ingram company in Nice. They met in England in 1938, their long partnership initiated by the Hungarian film maker, Alexander Korda, with his production of *The Spy in Black* (1939).

Korda had established his film empire in England in the 1930s when the feature film market was already dominated by American imports. His films rarely dealt with the lives and problems of ordinary working people, but with heroic myths of empire and the lives of the rich and privileged. Among the politicians he befriended, Churchill and Vansittart were to prove instrumental in the defence of the British film industry when it was threatened with dissolution at the beginning of World War Two. When Korda left Britain for America in 1940, yet another British film empire was in the process of being established, that of J. Arthur Rank.

The Second World War was a total war; civilians and places of cultural significance were targets as valid as armed forces and military installations. It was christened the 'People's War', because the whole population of the country was affected by austerity measures (rationing, travel restrictions and blackout regulations) while sometimes enduring the sustained bombing of towns and cities. The mass evacuation of children to rural areas enforced awareness of class and cultural differences, as did the mobilisation of young men into the forces, and young women into the Land Army and the factories. Men too old or unfit for the regular army formed a Home Guard, workers put in voluntary hours as fire-watchers and firemen, and rapidly the unemployment problem ceased to exist. In defence of democracy the British Government had imposed a system that any totalitarian regime would envy and the people of Britain had accepted it. A loosening of sexual mores (helped by the arrival in Britain of large numbers of American G.I.s) accompanied the tightening of belts and stiffening of upper lips. With the social changes, came a political shift from right to left; the Conservative government of 1939 was replaced by a coalition for the duration of the war, which gave way to a Labour government in 1945. This time, the people decided, it really would be a land fit for heroes
(and heroines) with good housing, education and health care for all - a 'Welfare State'.

The Films Division of the Ministry of Information was responsible for the promotion of both documentary and feature films as part of the war effort. Feature films continued to be privately financed while documentary film production, through the Crown Film Unit, was funded by the Government. Documentaries were, for the most part, addressed to the domestic market, but feature films proved to be the most successful propaganda vehicles for productions intended to influence other countries. Just as the political parties united in a coalition to meet the extraordinary circumstances of war, so did the makers of documentary and feature film, helped in 1942 by the Ministry of Information’s formation of an ideas committee where they could meet, talk and exchange ideas. There was a degree of cross-fertilisation: some documentary film makers developed narrative strategies similar to feature films; some defected from The Crown Film Unit to feature film studios; and some feature film makers adopted a documentary-realist approach in their choice of subjects and characters.

The war was a reality but its presentation to the public required that reality to be tempered by political considerations. The people had to be persuaded that the enemy was a real threat, but capable of defeat if met by a determined unity of purpose. The propaganda during the war needed to convince its audience that it was telling the truth and its opponent was telling lies. To be effective it had to be subtle, but not so subtle that the point it was trying to make was lost; it had to find the balance between telling as much of the unvarnished truth as was advisable for credibility and as much of the varnished half-truth as was necessary for its main purpose. Since, more often than not, the target for the Mol’s propaganda was America, the presentation needed to be reasonably subtle; many Americans considered that they had been tricked into entering the First World War by British persuasion and were unwilling to be bamboozled into another war by the same means. They had to be persuaded that Britain was worth saving and, after their entry into the war, that she was an ally worth supporting in peace as well as war.

British film-makers, on the whole, responded to the need for contemporary subjects by producing films based on original screenplays. As Brian McFarlane points out, ‘only 45 of the 350 films released in the years 1940-45 were derived from novels’, and the post-war literary cinema boom only really got under way with David Lean’s Great Expectations at the end of 1946. All of the films Powell and Pressburger made during this period, with the exception of The Spy in Black, were based on original screenplays that could respond to the course of the war and attempt to predict its future direction. They were sometimes limited by shortages of

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12 Brian McFarlane, "A Literary Cinema?: British Films and British Novels," AY, p. 132.
men, material and suitably authentic locations, and by the necessity of raising production finance. They also had to satisfy the Ministry of Information that the films they planned were worthy of Government assistance. From 1942 onwards, though, the generous terms of their contract with J. Arthur Rank released them from the burden of raising finance while ensuring almost complete artistic freedom. Most British films of the period tended to emphasise the everyday courage of ordinary people who were doing their best to live normal lives in extraordinary circumstances or of service men and women who were adapting to the demands made of them. Powell and Pressburger, however, were not always content to confine themselves to 'ordinary' people, but widened the horizon to show the effect of war on other nationalities and classes, and to promote an understanding of the enemy.

The differing personalities and experiences of the two men themselves inevitably influenced the films they made together. Powell was a man 'whose ambitions were foreign but whose means were domestic'; Pressburger 'was a cosmopolitan who was desperately trying to be English. It was a paradox that ran through all their films' (Emeric, p. 146). They came from different cultural backgrounds with different upbringing, education and formative experiences, but both were well-educated, well-read and had a wide range of cultural interests, which included music, drama and painting. They also had a passion for film making, and a willingness to experiment with different approaches to cinema. Although they submerged their individual professional identities under a joint credit of writer, producer and director for the films they made together after 1942, all their films were the result of both creative tension and creative stimulus.
From a Spy In Black to a Blackout

Prologue

Michael Latham Powell was born near Canterbury in 1905, and educated at Kings School, Canterbury, and Dulwich College in London. When his brother, John, died in 1918, he perhaps felt it necessary to combine his own romantic and classical inclinations and his brother’s fascination with scientific and technical matters. His parents divorced in 1921, and he left school to become a bank clerk. In 1925 his father, who had a hotel on the French Riviera, introduced him to Rex Ingram’s film unit, which was based at the Victorine Studios in Nice. Powell joined them in the middle of Mare Nostrum (MGM, 1925), and stayed for The Magician (MGM, 1926) and The Garden of Allah (MGM, 1927). When the unit disbanded, Powell had his first experience of directing with Harry Lachman’s series of comedy shorts, Travelaughs (1927).

Back in England, his employment at Elstree Studios led to contact with Alfred Hitchcock on Champagne (BIP, 1928), The Manxman (British International, 1929) and Blackmail (BIP, 1929), the first successful British talkie. He scripted Caste (Harry Rowson, 1930), wrote the shooting script for 77 Park Lane (Famous Players Guild, 1931), and was second-unit director on A Perfect Understanding (Gloria Swanson/ British Pictures Ltd, 1931). Between 1931 and 1936 Powell directed 23 movies, all but six of them with Jerry Jackson as producer, and almost all of them quota quickies. The Star Reporter (Film Engineering, 1931) showed his determination to achieve telling touches of authenticity (he went to Southampton to shoot the Queen Mary coming in and docking) (G-Y, 1971, p. 2). The Fire Raisers (Gaumont-British, 1933) was inspired by a newspaper article, as was The Red Ensign (Gaumont-British, 1934). Both were scripted by Jackson and Powell, who claimed that ‘the elaborate staging of the shipyard, the big sweeping exteriors, the high standard of performance and the sincerity of the actors, the overall seriousness of my approach to directing our story’ puzzled those who saw it at the time (Life, p. 233). His passion for getting his facts right and for authentic detail, led him to insist on visiting lighthouses and seeing the manufacturers of the lenses for all the lights before he made The Phantom Light (Gaumont-British, 1935).

It’s a fascination with the way things work, in the kind of thing that some writers, like Kipling for instance, had too. It wouldn’t be enough for instance that you had a lighthouse flashing, he would want to say how it flashed, and why it flashed. What the code was, ... I naturally operated from the idea that the light is the soul of the lighthouse and had to have a personality of its own (G-Y, 1971, p. 3).
In 1936 Joe Rock agreed to fund *The Edge of the World* (Rock Studios, 1937), the film Powell had been planning since his eye had been caught by a newspaper article on the evacuation of the entire population of the islands of St. Kilda in 1930. By the summer of 1937, both *The Edge of the World* and *200,000 Feet on Foula* (the book he had written on the making of the film), were ready for presentation. Powell’s agent, Chris Mann, sent a copy of the film to Alexander Korda, who offered Powell a one-year contract. He was asked to direct a film version of Edward Thompson’s *Burmese Silver* (screenplay by Sir Robert Vansittart), for which he made a reconnaissance trip to Burma in July and August 1938. When he returned, Korda told him the film would have to be postponed since the political situation was too serious to risk sending a film unit to India or Burma. He softened the blow, however, by offering him another project: *The Spy in Black* (*Life*, pp. 270, 299).

Imre Pressburger was born in 1902 in Hungary. An only child, he was a voracious reader, and his love of food probably stemmed from the delights of Hungarian cuisine. When his part of Hungary was assigned to Romania by the Trianon Treaty of 1920, he was deprived of his country, his language, and the opportunity to complete his studies in Budapest. He studied first in Prague and then at a technical college in Stuttgart. In 1926 his father died and he returned to Romania to support his mother, but when summoned for military service, he absconded to Germany. In Berlin mounting inflation soon rendered him homeless and he slept on park benches and ropes in pubs, in shop doorways, Salvation Army hostels and a synagogue reading room. He began to write short stories on the back of telegram forms and sent his efforts to newspapers and magazines. One story, *Auf reisen* ("Travelling"), was published in *BZ am Mittag* in March 1928, and he began to focus on writing for films, sending his film stories to the script department at Ufa. He heard that Robert Siodmak, whose first film had been *Menschen am Sonntag*, 'People on Sunday', (Filmstudio, 1929), was looking for something extraordinary.

I went home and during the night I wrote a nine page synopsis and I gave it to him the next morning and he said, "This is it". And the extraordinary thing was that the story ran exactly the same time as the passage of the film - which was an unusual thing - and it was called *Abschied*.\(^1\)

*Abschied* was, to some extent, ‘a continuation of the realist, socially conscious Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity) style’ of *Menschen am Sonntag*, and led to the commissioning of a similar screenplay for *Eine von Uns* (Gigli) (TK Tonfilm-Production, 1932) (*Emeric*, pp. 66, 91). In

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1. The chief Rabbi made a religious test-case out of his initial rejection and he was allowed to attend. It left him with no love for the city: ‘Many of the right-wing students were members of the Burschenschaften, elitist social and political clubs’, later parodied in *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (*Emeric*, p. 29).
1931 Pressburger entered Ufa's Dramaturgie department, and in that year collaborated with Erich Kästner on two screenplays; one based on Kästner's *Emil und die Detective* (UFA, 1931), which was reworked by Billy Wilder and their contribution never credited; and *Dann Schon Leiber Lebertran*, 'I'd rather have cod liver oil' (UFA, 1931), the first film directed by Max Ophuls. Many of Pressburger's Ufa films were collaborations with Reinhold Schünzel and Gunther von Stapenhorst: *Der Kleine Seitensprung, Emil und die Detective, Ronny* in 1931, and *Das Schöne Abenteuer* in 1932. *Ronny* was a 'sophisticated late addition to the operetta genre', which was 'characteristically set during a dewy-eyed version of the Hapsburg Empire's golden age and concerned the exploits of handsome cavalry officers, Ruritanian princes and pretty young girls'. The review in *Variety* noted 'some swell ironic touches. The prince's army dances when it marches' (ibid., pp. 88-89).

In 1932 Pressburger was informed that his contract would not be renewed. Hitler was appointed Chancellor in January 1933, the Reichstag fire in February was used as an excuse to clamp down on political freedom, and after the March elections, Hugenberg (Ufa's chief shareholder) was appointed Hitler's finance minister. Pressburger left for Paris in May 1933. Work was not easy to find, but in 1934 he sold an option on his story, 'The Miracle in St Anthony's Lane', and rewrote an operetta, *Mon Coeur T'Appelle*, 'My Heart is Calling' (Cine-Allianz Tonfilm, 1934). The next year his story, 'The Satyr', was produced as *Monsieur Sans-Gêne* (Amora Films, 1935), and he wrote a script of Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata*. He worked on *La Vie Parisienne* (Nero Film, 1936), based on Offenbach's operetta, went to London to collaborate with Arthur Wimperis on the English language version of the film in July 1935, and in September returned to England with all his worldly possessions in a few suitcases.

For two years he lived in the Mount Royal Hotel, where his neighbour was the Weimar lyricist, Fritz Rotter (composer of 'I Kiss Your Little Hand, Madam'). He studied British history and culture in the British Library, and the English language with a pre-war German text book but the only work he could find was as a technical expert, 'employed to write shooting scripts, structuring scenes and detailing the type of shot to be used' (Emeric, p. 128). He was probably employed by Stapenhorst as script editor on *The Great Barrier* (Gaumont-British, 1937) in mid-1936, and collaborated with Hans Wilhelm on an adaption of Stacey D'Aumonier's *A Source of Irritation*, for Toeplitz de Gran Ry in the same year.

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*Other film refugees in London included Curt Siodmak, Rudolf Katscher, Allan Gray, Alberto Cavalcanti, Hans and Wolfgang Wilhelm, Eugène Shuftan and Gunther Stapenhorst.*

*Pressburger visited his mother in Hungary after completing this assignment. It was the last time he saw her. She was deported in 1944, probably to Auschwitz, and was never heard of again (ibid., pp. 132 and 259-26).*
Korda had negotiated a co-production agreement with Stapenhorst for two films, the second of which, *The Challenge* (Denham / London Films, 1938), was the story of the first successful ascent of the Matterhorn. In May 1937 Pressburger started work on the story and screenplay for the English version, in collaboration with Patrick Kirwan (*ibid.*, pp.133-135). In 1938 he married a young Hungarian girl called Agi, moved into a new flat in St John’s Wood, and was asked to look at a script by Alexander Korda.

*The Spy in Black*

I saw a short, compact man, with beautiful and observant eyes, and broad intellectual forehead, formally and neatly dressed. He was a Hungarian Jew, which meant that he was witty, ingenious, creative and sports-loving.

Emeric saw a young lean Englishman (for the Burmese trip had brought me down to about 148 pounds and the sun had burnt me black), with a toothbrush moustache and piercing blue eyes. At the moment they had a look of veneration in them. They had seen a marvel: a screenwriter who could really write. I was not going to let him get away in a hurry (*Life*, pp. 304-305).

Korda had asked Irving Asher to produce three inexpensive Denham films, of which *The Spy in Black* (Harefield / Alexander Korda, 1939) was to star Conrad Veidt and Vivien Leigh (later replaced by Valerie Hobson) (*Emeric*, p. 144). Korda had a contract with Conrad Veidt to make five films in three years. This was the third year and they hadn’t done anything so they found this story which Korda liked and an American producer was to produce it at Korda’s studios and everybody loved it except Conrad Veidt’ (*Pressburger, ‘Appendix 1,’* p. 47).

Pressburger, who had been introduced to Korda by the Hungarian composer Miklós Rózsa, was asked to look at a screenplay, which was

in a green folder with the title in black ink: “The Spy in Black”. “It’s a terrible job - a disaster. I need a part for Conrad Veidt and this just doesn’t have one. See what you can do with it and come back and see me if you have any ideas!” ... Emeric worked away at his version of the script for over a month, reporting, it seems, directly to Korda, and without Irving Asher’s knowledge. It was not until the beginning of October that Emeric was asked to meet Asher, Pertwee and a new director who had replaced Hurst (*Emeric*, p. 144).

Powell had read the script and found it awful: ‘wordy and quite obviously adapted from a novel. ... It was written by a member of a famous English theatrical family, who knew all about writing for the theatre and nothing about writing for films (*Life*, p. 300).”

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5 This was valid criticism of much of the pre and post-war output of British studios. ‘British adaptations have exhibited a decorous, dogged fidelity to their sources, content to render through careful attention to *mise-en-scène* the social values and emotional insight of those sources rather than subjecting them to critical scrutiny or, indeed, to robust exploitation’ (Brian McFarlane, “A Literary Cinema?,” *AOY*, p. 120).
When they were all ushered into Korda's office, Pressburger produced a very small piece of rolled-up paper. Powell listened, spellbound,

to this small Hungarian wizard, as Emeric unfolded his notes, until they were at least six inches long. He had stood Storer Clouston's plot on its head and completely restructured the film. [He] pointed out that the object of the exercise was to provide a stunning part for a great star, Conrad Veidt, and in the present script no such part existed. It was also necessary to provide an intriguing part for Miss Hobson, who was no dummy. No such part existed, and so long as we were bound to the iron rails of Storer Clouston's plot, it would never exist. Emeric threw it out and invented a new one (ibid., p.302).

Asher and Pertwee were, according to Powell, open-mouthed. 'Nobody had ever told them that when you buy the rights to a famous book which turns out to be useless for a screenwriter's purpose, you keep the title and throw away the book. That lesson had been learnt many times by Alex and Emeric in Germany in the past'. And Powell had learnt that lesson from Alfred Hitchcock who, while filming John Buchan's *The Thirty Nine Steps* (Gaumont British, 1935), mentioned that the girl would be played by Madeleine Carroll ('The girl? What girl? There's no girl in the book") and the secret service man at the beginning by Lucie Mannheim. Powell realised that gender may be bent in the name of film artifice and almost anything else as well: 'This was the Hitchcock who liked to bewilder you, to turn things topsy-turvy. The Hitch who cast Peter Lorre as the hairless Mexican, when he was neither hairless nor a Mexican' (ibid., pp. 303, 227).

J. Storer Clouston's 1917 novel, *The Spy in Black*, had been inspired by the rumours of a German U-boat penetrating the defences of Scapa Flow during the First World War. It is set in a group of 'Northern islands', to which entry is restricted by the naval authorities to holders of a suitable passport. It is principally the narrative of Lieutenant Von Belke (of the German Navy), and concerns his mission to liaise with a German spy who has access to details of the British Grand Fleet's manoeuvres. He is chosen for this task because he has 'a cool hand in a tight place' and 'can talk English fluently ... like a native'. He is provided with a motor bicycle because it would not attract suspicion, and wears his uniform under his cyclist's overalls to 'escape the fate of a spy'. He is brave, honourable and resourceful. In Pressburger's screenplay the lieutenant is upgraded to captain but is just as brave, honourable and resourceful. The major changes concern his opponent: "Herr Thiel" becomes "Frau Thiel," which means that the gallant U-boat captain does not have to contend with a male counter-

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* Powell has exaggerated a little here. Pressburger did not throw out Clouston's plot and invent a new one, but he did add, subtract and indulge in a little gender-bending.

* Winston Churchill (First Lord of the Admiralty, 1911 to 1915) related that, in the autumn of 1914, 'the Grand Fleet was uneasy because the idea had got round that the German submarines were coming after them into the harbours' (Winston Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960, p. 379).

agent masquerading as a German spy, who is masquerading as a Scottish minister of religion, but with a female double agent masquerading as a German spy, who is masquerading as a schoolteacher. Pressburger amalgamated the characters of the governess, Miss Holland, and the supposed minister to create a role which would leave Veidt and Hobson the maximum time alone together. Having a female opponent provides similar opportunities for intimacy and sexual frisson to those achieved by Hitchcock in *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, and it is, as Christie says, ‘in the dramatic ambiguity of the scenes between Veidt and Valerie Hobson that the film achieves its most subtle effect’ (Arrows, p. 48). Veidt’s gallant captain, a man used to authority and instant obedience to his commands, has to take his orders from a woman! The change also created roles for June Duprez as the real schoolmistress, and Mary Morris as the chauffeuse (as opposed to the novel’s chauffeur). Veidt still had difficulty pronouncing certain English words and, rather than have him portray a man whose English was perfect, they seized the opportunity to have the schoolmistress correct his mispronunciation. During rehearsals ‘Hobson light-heartedly ticked him off and corrected him. “But it’s not my fault,” Veidt would say, “my scriptwriter writes with an accent!” Their personal jibes about pronunciation spilled over into the film, where there is a running joke about Captain Hardt’s mispronunciation of “butter”.

The screenplay was tailored to the actors’ strengths and weaknesses and was, in the end, a collaboration between the writer, the director, Veidt and Hobson.

Emeric would arrive every morning with the scenes roughed out and we would tear into them as if we were making home movies. It was great. Connie and Valerie were both serious, dedicated artists, but we were all more often laughing than we were crying. They would act the scenes out in front of us and we would watch, eager and excited, chipping in with our comments or suggestions in the middle of the scene, scribbling down ideas to be debated afterwards, while up from the floor below came the sound of Rózsa’s piano as he composed themes for pictures yet unborn, including *The Thief of Bagdad* (*Life*, p. 306).

Veidt was their greatest asset. Powell maintains that he had been longing to get his hands on him ever since the German actor came to England.

He was tall, over six feet two inches, lean and bony. He had magnetic blue eyes, black hair and eyebrows, beautiful strong hands, and a mouth with sardonic, not to say satanic, lines to it. He used an eye-glass. He was the show-off of all time. In private life, as I was to discover, he was the sweetest and most easy of human beings.

For Powell and Pressburger, Conrad Veidt was a legendary figure. ‘For us, he was the great German cinema. For us, he was invention, control, imagination, irony and elegance. He was the

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8 *Emeric*, p. 150. But Veidt had his revenge. When Hobson and Mary Morris had trouble pronouncing their German phrases, ‘Powell decided to enlist the assistance of the most qualified and most readily available German-speaking person on the set - the leading man, Herr Veidt’ (Jerry C. Allen, *Conrad Veidt: From Caligari to Casablanca*. Pacific Grove: Boxwood Press, 1987, p. 256).
master technician of the camera, who knew where every light was placed’ (*ibid.*, pp. 272, 305).

He was, perhaps, the leading exponent of German expressionist cinema, admired for his performances in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Decla-Bioskop, 1919), *Waxworks* (Neptun-Film, 1924), *The Hands of Orlac* (Pan Film, 1924), *The Student of Prague* (H.R. Sokal-Film, 1926) and *Congress Dances* (UFA, 1931). After he had made *Jew Süss* (Gaumont, 1934) for Michael Balcon, he was forbidden to return to Germany and all his films were banned there.10 His contract with Korda was nearing its end and he had made only two films, *Under the Red Robe* (New World Pictures) and *Dark Journey* (London Films/Victor Saville), both in 1937. Finding a suitable subject for him had proved difficult and now, with *The Spy in Black*, he was contributing again to the screen persona that *Dark Journey* had helped to establish for him - the German agent who has to put duty before his personal feelings for an attractive woman who is a double agent. That film had been a great success for Korda, who ‘arranged to have a huge picture of the pair mounted over Piccadilly Circus so that they appeared to be looking down over the whole of London’.11 The original casting for *The Spy in Black* again teamed Veidt with Leigh, and Pressburger’s screenplay may well have been shrewdly tailored to cash in on a successfully established formula. In the event, a new romantic partnership was formed, with results that were perceived by Veidt’s biographer to be almost identical. In *Dark Journey*,

Vivien Leigh is the lovely and dedicated French spy who falls in love with Conrad Veidt’s character, the handsome and equally dedicated German spy. The story develops into a bitter-sweet ending for the two lovers.

And in *The Spy in Black*,

Valerie Hobson plays the role of a charming, mysterious double-agent. The plot combines surprise twists and a marvellous bittersweet romance between the Veidt and Hobson characters (Allen, pp. 253-254).

Although the romantic leads are not, as in *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, actually manacled together, Powell arranged an enforced intimacy based on situation and setting.

The scale was entirely different on the islands, because of poverty, because of primitive materials, because of the terrible winds in winter. The houses hug the ground. The rooms are tiny, and a man of six feet two like Conrad Veidt should look like a black giant in the white box-like interiors (*Life*, p. 312).

In these cramped quarters the characters played by Veidt and Hobson are inevitably brought together.

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10 Allen, p. 220. Veidt visited Germany before making the film. He was put under house arrest by Goebbels’s ministry, and Balcon was ‘convinced that pressure was being brought to bear on him not to play in *Jew Süss*, a work which was anathema to the German government not only for its subject matter but because the author, Leon Feuchtwanger, was one of the early German Jews to express his contempt for the Nazi regime’ (Michael Balcon, *Michael Balcon Presents ... A Lifetime of Films*. London: Hutchinson, 1969, p.76).

into close physical contact. The film had already established the physical appetites of Commandant Hardt when released from the confines of a long voyage: first good food; then a good cigar; finally an attractive woman. Hardt in the schoolmistress’s house on the Orkney island has satisfied the first and is satisfying the second when his eyes are drawn to Frau Thiel’s silk-stockinged legs and he is, we assume, contemplating the satisfaction of the third.

But there was another possible reason for the confined space that Powell was so eager to achieve. There are many scenes and shots that pay homage to German expressionist cinema and, in particular, to those films in which Conrad Veidt appeared. In Paul Leni’s Waxworks, in which Veidt played the part of Ivan the Terrible, ‘Leni embraces the traditional idea of the heavy-beamed, low-ceilinged Russian cottage. Even in the imperial palace it is necessary to stoop on account of the squat arches everywhere’, and the set construction forced actors to use ‘those jerky movements and broken gestures which produce the extravagant curves and diagonals required by Expressionist precept.’ In The Spy in Black, however, it served to emphasise the latent power and authority of Veidt as Captain Hardt and the difficult task of resistance to that power experienced by Hobson as the counter-agent. Later in the film Veidt cannot re-enter the schoolhouse because the door is locked and we, from the inside, are startled to see a disembodied hand, crooked and clawed, tapping at the window, a reminder of Veidt in The Hands of Orlac, as a man whose hands are those of a dead murderer and seem not to belong to him.

There are also imaginative uses of camera angles: the suitcase tumbling downstairs at the schoolmistress’s home which, because the camera is set at the bottom of the stairs pointing up, appears to be about to fall directly onto us; the shot of the schoolroom down through its skylight from Veidt’s angle at the window of the bedroom above it, and then up through the skylight again from the schoolroom to the window from which he is viewing the children singing while the British Fleet guns are booming in gunnery practice (a menacing reminder of the potential suffering of innocent children in Captain Hardt’s mission). There are, too, shots with mirrors that serve more than one purpose. Sometimes it is to give us a new perspective, as when the camera travels up a rod to a circular object that shows us a tiny, slightly distorted image of a man’s head which, when it pulls back, we realise is Veidt doing up his tie in the rear-view mirror of the motor bike. At other times a mirror is used to break up potentially static dialogue scenes or subtly make us aware of emotional attitudes and alignments, most notably when the Reverend Hector Matthews and his wife call on the schoolmistress at an awkward moment (her putative fiancé is tied up in the next room and Hardt is expected back at any

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moment). Hobson is out of shot but reflected in the mirror on the wall between the two of them. When the wife moves, she too is seen only as a reflection in that mirror, and we are given the impression that she is in sympathetic agreement with the schoolmistress, and both of them are the objects of the reverend’s homily on courtesy and moral conduct, an impression reinforced when she leaves with these words of comfort: “I understand, my dear, but he’ll be fighting his conscience the whole night”.

All these scenes were shot in the studio at Denham, but Powell was determined to include authentic location footage, and promised Hobson and Veidt that they would do exteriors on Orkney. ‘Asher, tight with his budget, refused to let them go ... In the end - after special pleading by Korda - Michael was allowed to spend three days on the island, supposedly for research purposes, sans Hobson or Veidt’ (Emeric, p. 150). Powell set off with his ‘Foula Regulars’, Vernon Campbell Sewell, Buddy Farr and Bill Paton.

My rough plan was to use this survey as a briefing for Vernon and Buddy. I intended them to operate beyond the clutches and control of Irving Asher. ... I knew I could screw a few hundred pounds out of the budget to keep my wildcat film unit going until they had got all the atmospheric and establishing shots, using local doubles for the principals in the story. ... Upon our return I labelled it as a reconnaissance and research unit trip of two people, which sounded routine and got them their money.

Vincent Korda, head of London Films’ art department, and Poppa Day took photographs of Scottish crofts and manses and the 1914-18 war in Scapa Flow, and recreated Stromness as it was in 1915. They filled Scapa Flow, ‘as seen through the window of the schoolhouse, with the whole British North Sea Fleet at anchor’ (Life, pp. 310-312). These actuality shots were invaluable for lifting the atmosphere of the film and giving it a realistic setting. One only has to compare the scene with the car that is used to kidnap June Duprez near the beginning of the film with the scenes set in Stromness and Long Hope in the Orkneys, to see how much credibility the latter scenes possess by comparison.

Many of Pressburger’s additions to the novel are humorous, ironic or serve to highlight the dilemma of divided loyalties. The humour, more often than not, concerns food. When Captain Hardt and his first Officer (played by Marius Goring) enter the restaurant of the Kleler Hof Hotel, they stand for a few moments breathing in the smoke-laden atmosphere, and Goring says, “Sixteen days without a smoke. This is absolutely perfect.” The anticipation of food is as palpable as the cigarette smoke; they could eat a horse. No meat? then they would have “roast goose, pate de foie gras, apple strudel, plum pudding - as big as a depth charge”. The menu offers them boiled fish and carrots. Veidt declaims: “We pave the seabed with some of

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13 This couple echo the dour, thrifty, moralising Scotsman in The Thirty-Nine Steps, and the sweet, patient wife who helps the unfortunate Hannay despite fears of her husband’s vengeance.
14 They were called ‘Foula Regulars’ because they had all worked with Powell on Edge of the World.
the finest food the world produces and when we return to port they give us boiled fish and carrots," and they throw down their menus in a concerted gesture of disgust. When, in the living room of the schoolhouse in the Orkneys, Captain Hardt turns and stares with shocked disbelief, the object of his fascinated attention turns out to be - butter! He lifts the butter dish reverentially to his nostrils and, with closed eyes, breathes in its perfume. Then he attacks the ham like a man with a mission and heaps the butter onto his plate to resemble a mini Matterhorn.

The film has not entirely dispensed with Scottish ministers of religion but converts the original leading character into two supporting ones. The Reverend Hector Matthews, that officious and interfering self-appointed guardian of the new schoolmistress's morals, is also anxious to acquire spare food coupons, and deftly relieves the Reverend John Harris (the real schoolmistress's fiancé) of his when the latter is too encumbered by an enormous gramophone (and natural politeness) to refuse. The fiancé loses more than his meat coupons when he enters the schoolhouse. He is taken prisoner, trussed up like a chicken and fed milk through a straw, which he is advised not to bite as it is macaroni (a dig at the Italians who were portrayed at this time as "soft"). His final indignity is to be relieved of his entire wardrobe to provide Hardt with a disguise when he escapes from the schoolhouse for the film's climactic ending on board the St. Magnus. So, in a way, there is a clerical spy in black in the film. But the clergy are reduced to roles that provide comic relief, and made to appear venal, stupid, self-satisfied and grasping.

Neither the beginning, in the port of Kiel and on board the U-boat while it manoeuvres through the mine fields into Scapa Flow, nor the ending, on board the steamship, are present in the novel. The beginning is ironic humour balanced by subsequent tension as the captain and crew perform small miracles of precise navigation to avoid a fatal encounter with a British mine. Terse orders are given and instantly acknowledged, but the rest is silence. The ending has irony and tension but no humour. It is a deadly race between Captain Hardt and the commander of the British fleet, and it is made quite clear that both sides are prepared to sacrifice the civilians on board the steamship to prevent the enemy from winning. Hardt learns the full extent of the deception that has been practised on him when "Frau Thiel" reveals herself to be Mrs. Blacklock (Captain Blacklock had impersonated the drunken traitor, Ashington). He tells her that he is heading for the submarines at Sandwick Bay to warn his compatriots of their danger. The fact that the channel is full of mines and thereby a danger to all

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16 The credits for the film are superimposed over two stills of Veldt, one with his arms stretched out over the schoolhouse window and the other of just his face in semi-profile, wearing the broad-brimmed episcopal hat.
on board, women, children and old people, will not deter him. "Their deaths will be at your door, not mine. We are at war. Perhaps you forget that, as I did for a while. You are English, I am German. We are enemies." The British fleet's Commanding Officer is preparing to shell the St. Magnus rather than let it reach the submarines and endanger his ships, even though Captain Blacklock's wife is on board. The problem is resolved by the arrogant young First Officer on the submarine, who disobeys Hardt's orders and shells the St. Magnus. The passengers and crew escape in the life boats, and the captain of the steamer leaves Hardt standing on the bridge. He chooses to go down with the ship that he had commandeered rather than live with the disgrace of having been outwitted by the enemy and disobeyed by his own men: "It was my own ship that sunk us." The life belt proffered by the steamship's captain is seen at the end of the film floating among the wreckage.

The night shots of the U-boat had been done in the tank on the lot at Denham, and since it was, by then, late in December, it was very cold and wet. Captain Hardt, his officers and crew, among them the young Marius Goring and Torin Thatcher, were old pals, and a great deal of whisky and rum was consumed as the night wore on and we waited for the fog to clear or for the wind machines to blow it in the right direction. By the time the fog had lifted, the gallant Captain and his crew could hardly stand, and were lined up on the deck of the submarine singing "Silent Night, Holy Night" (Life, p.314).

Both Powell and Pressburger experienced problems with the producer, Irving Asher. He had asked Pressburger how much he wanted for writing the screenplay, and then told him to halve it. Only the intervention of Zoltan Korda resolved the situation. Powell had problems with him throughout the production. There was a tight shooting schedule of five weeks and he was shooting mostly in close-ups. Asher was not impressed and called Powell's friend and previous partner, Jerry Jackson, telling him that Powell would have to be taken off the picture. Jackson saw the previous three days' rushes, which were

the schoolhouse sequences between Conrad Veidt and Valerie Hobson on the night of his arrival, and I had shot it all for cutting, mostly in close-up, using unusual angles and foreshortenings to emphasize the smallness of the set, and the enforced intimacy of the scenes between the two principals. There was no room for tracking or panning or clever camera work here. What mattered was what the principals were thinking. Of course, Irving used to seeing master shots ... long explanatory shots with dialogue as long as possible, so that the people who sit there chewing their cigars can get a rough idea of what the story is about. I detest master shots. I hardly ever make master shots; they're a waste of time and money (Life, p. 314).

Powell stayed as the director but, when the shooting was completed, he found himself barred from the cutting room. His contract with Korda had expired and there was no one to defend his right to a part in the editing process. He maintains that his presence was not necessary, since

16 As recalled by Miklós Rózsa, 'Zoltan went to his office and screamed at him: "You damned Jew! You're doing the same thing to your own people as Hitler is!"' (Emeric, p. 148).
it is perfectly possible to edit, alter, present and have a resounding success without the director having anything more to do with the film from the moment he stops shouting at the actors [and] with this little film, which was no more than a quota-quickie except for the exceptional talent on the acting side, and the quality of the thinking and of the dialogue, I was perfectly content to leave it in the hands of Irving Asher and Hugh Stewart. I could trust them to do a good job of finishing and presentation (ibid., p. 315).

But Hugh Stewart, the film’s editor, recalls that Powell sent him a 23-page letter ‘detailing his ideas and suggestions on the editing. Here was a director who took his work seriously, who did not just churn the stuff out and forget about it’ (Emeric, p. 152).

*The Spy in Black* was trade shown on 15 March 1939, but not released until 12 August. Its commercial success was enhanced by two events, the first being the fact that war was declared three weeks after its release.

England was at war and the public wanted to see war pictures, and *The Spy in Black* was a war picture. It didn’t matter that it was the 1914-18 war. It didn’t matter that the hero was a heroic German. It didn’t matter that all the values and sympathies of the story were in direct contradiction to the current course of events. It was a war picture, all about submarines and spies, full of action and suspense, looking authentic. The British Navy triumphs in the end and it was all lovely! Columbia, the American distributors, with a completely unexpected hit on their hands, whipped it over to America, retitled it *U-Boat 29*, and made a fortune with it (Life, pp. 335-336).

The second fortuitous event was that on October 14th ‘a U-boat sneaked into the great naval base at Scapa Flow, in the Orkneys, and sank the battleship Royal Oak as it lay at anchor’ (Calder, p. 60). It made *The Spy in Black* seem weirdly prophetic, particularly since the perpetrator of the deed was both a spy and a Captain in the German Navy.17 And, as Powell noted, there was a grim humour in all of this, in that

> Scapa Flow was still the main anchorage of the North Sea Fleet, and its defences, land, sea, and air, were ridiculously out of date. Moreover, there was no secrecy, as we had amply proved by our lightning tour of the island. The area was open to anybody, and maps and charts could be bought anywhere (Life, p. 313).

It was an indication of British complacency and blind reliance on the policy of appeasement that was soon to cost the country dear. But the same openness and lack of secrecy was an opportunity that Powell and Pressburger were to exploit again with their next exercise in collaborative creativity.

*The Thief and The Lion*

For the day of the bombers, Armageddon, was palpably at hand (Calder, p. 25).

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17 While on holiday in Orkney, the Captain of the U-boat (Gunther Prien) had made ‘a study of the entrances to the Flow and, realising how well guarded and protected were the southern and western approaches, turned his attention to the easterly channel’ (Geoffrey Cousins, *The Story of Scapa Flow*. London, 1965, pp. 147-150).
Pressburger had come to see all the dailies of *The Spy in Black*, and he and Powell became very close, 'planning to do other films together if Denham were to close its doors' (*Life*, p. 315). Jerry Jackson, now in control of Warner UK, offered them £500 each to write and develop a couple of scripts. From Warner's 'tripe pile' they chose Somerset Maugham's *Caesar's Wife*, and a treatment of a novel about the history of the Cunard Line, which Pressburger called 'Fathers and Sons'. In May they were both employed again by London Films. Pressburger, as a contract writer, was set to work on a Korda project entitled 'Ballet Story' and then on a script called 'The Conjuror' (a tale of espionage set in Burma), which Korda announced would star Conrad Veidt and Sabu, and be directed by the 'Burmese expert' Powell. That film never materialised, but Powell was asked to become one of the directors on another Korda production.

Late in 1938 the Prudential decided that Denham Studios, as London Films' primary asset, should be taken out of Korda's hands and amalgamated with J. Arthur Rank's Pinewood studios. Denham had been the symbol of Korda's film empire, and its loss (to another British empire-builder in the making) was a bitter blow. It did, however, allow Korda to shuffle off the burden of responsibility of keeping the studio running with low-budget films, and return to the production of the kind of pictures that he loved. In March 1939 he formed a new company, Alexander Korda Productions, and immediately started work on *The Thief of Bagdad* (London Film Productions, 1940).

The political realities were becoming more threatening, and the illusion that Munich had meant 'peace in our time' had withered.

Men flocked to join the rapidly inflating Territorial Army. In March, the German Reich digested what was left of Czechoslovakia. In the same month, Britain promised to support Poland in the event of a German attack. April saw the announcement of military conscription in peace, for the first time in British history (*Calder*, p. 31).

And Korda began work on a fairy tale. He was still chairman and managing director of London Films, and had a controlling interest in Denham Laboratories (the first Technicolor laboratory in England).

The script, written by Miles Malleson and Lajos Biro, was to be developed along entirely new lines in order to exploit several things: the popularity of two of Korda's major stars, Conrad Veidt and Sabu; the technical expertise of Denham's special effects department; [and] the lavishness of Georges Perinal's colour cinematography and Vincent Korda's colour art direction. The film was conceived as a tremendous spectacle, an epic fairy tale with an international appeal, and its budget was as spectacular as its scope (*Kulik*, p. 224).

Korda had chosen Ludwig Berger to direct the film, presumably on the basis of his previous

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18 *Emeric*, p. 156; *Life*, p. 318. Pressburger received a screen credit for this film, released as *Atlantic Ferry* (Warner, 1940). *The Silent Battle* (Pinewood, 1939) was based on a Pressburger treatment, but credited only to Wolfgang Wilhelm and Rodney Ackland (*Emeric*, pp. 152, 156).
experience with fantasy and large-scale musical productions, but Berger’s strength was for
directing actors. Korda, however, wanted The Thief to be a spectacle and could not ‘abide the
idea of his enormous and colourful sets taking a back-seat to the actors’. They also clashed
over the music. Berger wanted Richard Strauss to write the score for The Thief of Bagdad, but
when the music began to arrive from Vichy, it was ‘typical turn-of-the-century candy-floss’. So
Korda told Rózsa to compose an alternative score, and said:

“What I’m going to do is give you an office next to Dr Berger’s. Keep playing your music
until he comes in and listens to it.” So ... from ten in the morning until five every evening I
thumped out my music as loudly as I possibly could. Now Korda had a genius for this sort
of manipulative diplomacy. He was like a brilliant chess player, moving his pieces around
the board, always half-a-dozen moves ahead of his opponents (Rózsa, pp. 78-79).

But Korda’s manipulative diplomacy was tested to the limit with Dr Berger. Their working
methods were diametrically different, since, according to Powell, ‘Berger wanted to get it all
absolutely set [but] Alex wanted the whole thing to grow in the way that Alex usually made
his big pictures. He wanted other people to do all the work, and he’d come in and criticise it’
(‘John Player Lecture’). Despite his unhappiness with the working conditions, Berger refused to
relinquish his contract. Faced with a film director as stubborn as himself, Korda resorted to
subversive tactics: he hired two other directors, Powell and Tim Whelan.

So Powell found himself, the day after his introduction to the disconsolate Dr Berger, on his
way to Sennen Cove in Cornwall ‘with an astonished film unit, Sabu and a bottle’. His
cameraman was Osmond Borrodaile, who had shot on location in India and the Sudan for
Elephant Boy (London Films, 1937) and The Four Feathers (London Film Productions, 1939).
Thanks to his skill, some of the Sennen Cove shots survive in the final cut of the film, but the
expedition there was really just a ruse to undermine Berger’s authority.

Alex knew that I couldn’t do much good in Cornwall without proper preparation, but I was
in the position of a valuable guerrilla leader, on the payroll, and ready to jump in anywhere
and at any time at the head of an experienced unit. And in glorious Technicolor, and in full
naturalism, not in the style of the deliciously erotic Arabian Nights entertainment of Dr
Berger’s dreams (Life, pp. 322-323).

Even this did not persuade Berger to abandon his contract so, ‘to everyone’s consternation
and amazement, Korda adopted a tactic which exacerbated the crisis by making Berger’s life
intolerable. In one of the most aggressively and flagrantly rude manoeuvres of his career, Alex
decided to co-direct all of Berger’s scenes’. Berger endured the humiliation for a while but he
finally left the film.

In the 1924 silent version of the film, the thief had been played by Douglas Fairbanks, but

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would go away and build a set. Alex would come and look at it and say, “Vincent, you are crazy! Go away, get a
lot of men, build it four times as big and paint it all crimson. It stinks”.’ (G-Y, 1971, p.5).
Korda wanted his thief to be played by Sabu. Rewriting the story to accommodate the casting of the thief as a boy was, it seemed to Powell, an inspired stroke since ‘for a boy there is no future and no past - only the present. He speaks the truth or tells lies with equal facility, according to circumstances. His reactions to danger are immediate and unsubtle’. And for Powell the film would have had a particular resonance. His recollection of his first day working for Rex Ingram in the south of France was on the set of Mare Nostrum. John F. Seitz (the cameraman who had photographed most of Rex Ingram’s great movies) was trying to align a chandelier with an object suspended over the camera, which turned out to be ‘a miniature ceiling, built in false perspective to fit over the top of the camera, and by careful adjustment make the set appear like a ceilinged room’ (Ibid., pp. 325,122). The maker of the false ceiling was Walter Pahlman, who had done the miniature work on Thief of Bagdad (Douglas Fairbanks, 1924) two years before. Now Powell was doing a lot of foreground miniature work on another Thief of Bagdad for Korda, who, like Ingram, was a flamboyant movie maker. Powell had at last returned to the kind and quality of film production that he had begun with. Having been the sorcerer’s apprentice, he was now in a position to use what he had learnt and could be one of the magicians.

I was handed a huge ship which was supposed to be at sea amidst storms which was firmly grounded on the lot at Denham .... for the ship that arrives in the port which should be an Arabian port so having been out there on Burmese Silver, the very first thing I did was to get the painter to paint an enormous eye on the front of the ship like the Arabs usually do. ... then I lined up a highly elaborate track shot which approached the ship swarming with people and went right into the eye and went away again to give the impression that the ship was sailing towards us, went right by us, and then receded and I had all this built with a crane shot and the actual crane tracks had waves constructed in them so that the ship appeared to roll (G-Y,1971, p. 5).

When he returned to Denham he was no longer a guerrilla leader but a commander of a regular army of technicians and extras: ‘I had three complex sequences under my command, in exterior sets, strung all along the valley of the Colne’; ‘I had a team of daring horsemen under my command’; ‘I had a magnificent-looking champion archer with a forearm that would have given Praxiteles something to think about, and who stood by me, ready to send an arrow to within an inch of where I wanted it’; and then, ‘I moved my combat team up to the port of Basra set and started to rehearse with Sabu and the dog’ (Life., pp. 327-328). It is the terminology of battle and, of course, a monumental battle was waiting in the wings of the real world outside the studio gates.

There were a number of uncredited contributors to The Thief of Bagdad, from directors (Alex and Zoltan Korda, William Cameron Menzies) to art directors (Alfred Junge worked on a couple of sequences). But perhaps the most significant uncredited contributor was the
diplomat and statesman, Sir Robert Vansittart. Rózsa has described how Ludwig Berger wanted to shoot certain scenes in the manner of a musical, with the music pre-recorded and the action shot to synchronise with it.

Naturally enough the result was chaos. Little Sabu was expected to move like a puppet in a puppet theatre, the actors like dancers in a pantomime, but to appear at the same time to be acting quite spontaneously and naturally. ... In the end the only sequences shot to pre-composed music were those involving special effects - the gallop of the Flying Horse and the Silvermaid’s Dance. The scene with the Flying Horse, in which the Sultan is so enchanted by the magic toys and the ride across the sky above Baghdad that he gives his beloved daughter’s hand to Jafar the Magician, was a collaboration between Vansittart, Miles Malleson and myself. The script and the music were conceived as a single entity; the three of us spent all day at the piano at Denham Place working out the details.

And Rózsa notes the oddity of Vansittart’s behaviour as seen from abroad.

It was at about this time that Figaro in Paris printed an article to the effect that if the chief diplomatic advisor to the British Foreign Office had time to write lyrics for a motion picture with me, there could be no immediate danger of war. A fortnight later, on 3rd September 1939, war was declared (Rózsa, pp. 84-85).

Vansittart had been a close friend of Korda’s for quite some time. He had strong views on the need to prepare for war with Nazi Germany and, early in 1938, had been appointed head of a Coordinating Committee for Propaganda. Korda, while making a fantasy, was probably planning with Vansittart how to use film to counter the grim reality of war.¹⁰

About a week before the declaration of war, Korda revealed his intentions to a group of his contract staff, among them Michael Powell.

Alex explained his personal agreement with Churchill, and how it affected us all. Britain was preparing for war. Denham was already a classified area. Now came our orders. When war was declared, filming on The Thief of Bagdad would stop. The next day, everybody at Denham would start working on a feature propaganda film which Alex had promised Churchill would be ready in one month. During this month, Alex guaranteed the salaries of all his contract people. All he asked of us was that we would go with heart, mind and soul into making his new picture, and work with whomever we were assigned to. The coordinator of the whole production was to be Ian Dalrymple ... now one of Alex’s associate producers. Dalrymple’s brief was to build the main case against Hitler as a warmonger and butcher of his fellow men, to show Britain’s potential for men and munitions in the coming struggle, and above all, to star the Royal Air Force. The film was to be called The Lion Has Wings (Life, pp. 329-330).

A rather less gung-ho description of this meeting is given by Ian Dalrymple, who says that it was a ‘fortuitous gaggle of directors and writers of various ages and origins, all of sadly unbellicose aspect’, who were summoned to Korda’s office. They were told that they were going to make a film to reassure the public of the power of the RAF.

Almost immediately the door opened and a fair young god in sky-blue with the rank of squadron leader appeared. ... All of us rose to our feet as one, in salute to this

¹⁰ ‘Korda met Brendan Bracken through friends, and through Bracken he came to know Robert Vansittart, Winston Churchill, and other Conservative Party members’ (Kulik, p. 254). Later in the war, Vansittart’s unrelenting condemnation of all Germans, without distinction, coined the term ‘Vansittartism’.
representative of our potential guardian angels. The squadron leader, named appropriately H. M. S. Wright, was quite taken aback.\textsuperscript{21}

In an effort to complete \textit{The Thief of Bagdad} before the now seemingly inevitable outbreak of hostilities, even the weekends were treated as normal working days.

September 3rd was a Sunday. At eleven o'clock, the British ultimatum expired. At eleven fifteen, the metallic voice of Chamberlain was heard on the radio, and querulously he told the people that his work for peace had failed. ... the eerie feeling of relaxation, even of elation, was dispelled at eleven twenty-seven, as the sirens sounded over London.

On that Sunday, both Powell and Pressburger were working at Denham. Pressburger's main feeling seems to have been one of relief. He was now an enemy alien, whose camera and wireless were to be confiscated by the Central Registry of Aliens, and who would be required to observe the aliens' curfew; but 'I had something in common with everyone I met. It no longer mattered that I was a foreigner, that my English was broken. More than anything else, we all wanted to defeat the Nazis'.\textsuperscript{22} Korda’s announcement of his intentions to the assembled crew and cast of \textit{The Thief of Bagdad} was delivered in an unlikely but dramatic setting.

At Denham, we had all gathered in one of the big concrete coal bunkers to listen to the broadcast, and I remember John Justin, and June Duprez, Conrad Veidt and Sabu and Miles Malleson in his wonderful white whiskers as the gadget-mad Sultan, whispering together, their extravagant costumes somehow making the whole drab scene more menacing and final. ...We waited for the All-Clear and then trooped back to our fairy tale. And that was my last day on \textit{The Thief of Bagdad} at Denham Studios (\textit{Life}, p. 331).

Work on \textit{The Lion Has Wings} (London Film Productions, 1939) started the next day, and it was released by the first week of November. Dalrymple has described its progress.

Those among us geared to undertake the film promptly set to work, though with little conviction that we would complete it before the Germans blew us to bits. Michael Powell dealt with Fighter Command, Brian Desmond Hurst with Bomber; the GPO Film Unit supplied material from factories overnight; Alex, Richardson, and our excellent American film-editor, William Hornbeck, and I compiled a rude opening sequence denigrating Nazism ... after five or six weeks, we projected the show copy of a feature-length film to the inaugural chiefs of the Ministry of Information, to their stupefaction as to how the film had happened.\textsuperscript{23}

It was a strange hybrid, part documentary, part an emotional call to the defence of the realm.

Graham Greene reviewed it in \textit{The Spectator} and praised the first half of the film for its intelligent use of material for propaganda, but he was scathing about the second half.

With the war the film loses force and authenticity: we soon begin to tire of the fake elocutionist voices of trained actors. The Germans, I believe, have remarked that the Kiel battle was fought in the Denham film studios (rather tamely fought, it may be noted), and


\textsuperscript{22} Emeric, p. 159. Veidt, a British citizen since April 1938, donated 'his entire personal fortune to the British Government interest-free' (Pat Wilkes Battle, "Conrad Veidt," \textit{Films in Review}, 44 (8), August 1993, p. 235).

we become aware of some point in the jest as we watch imaginary battles between fighter squadrons and raiders, ... in which all the deaths are German and all the heroics English. ... Imaginary battles are all very well in a thriller - they are unpleasantly out of place in a documentary, and smack of bravado.

He found the ending particularly risible; Merle Oberon speaks for all the women of England, 'telling the world, through United Artists, that we are fighting for "Truth, and beauty, and fair play, and" - with whimsical hesitation and a professional quaver, "kindliness". As a statement of war aims, one feels, this leaves the world beyond Roedean still expectant'.

Powell is equally uncompromising in his evaluation of the film as 'an outrageous piece of propaganda, full of half-truths and half-lies, with some stagy episodes which were rather embarrassing and with actual facts which were highly distorted'. He did, however, defend the rationale behind its production. Korda's personal agreement with Churchill was to produce a feature propaganda film in one month, to show that British films could be an invaluable weapon in the propaganda war, and to keep British film production alive through the coming conflict. Powell admitted that it was 'a hodgepodge': one third a reconstruction 'of the way Europe in the last five years had crawled to lick Hitler's boots'; an industrial section, showing the Midlands swinging into war production, 'mostly done by clever montage technique, and mostly lies'; and the third section which 'had to present a picture of an impregnable Britain, capable of defence and attack through its Air Force' (Life, pp. 335, 330-331). He was assigned to all the Fighter Command sequences in the picture, and had begged to be allowed to go with the RAF on their Kiel raid. Disappointed of this 'scoop', he had contented himself with recreating it with the fuselage of a crashed Spitfire, set up on one of the Denham stages and surrounded with wind machines, sound machines, lighting effects, sound effects, playbacks, back projection, recordings of shells exploding, and machine gun fire, and prop-men throwing fire-crackers. 'It was all shop-made, edited and directed in less than a month. The labs worked day and night and the film was playing in about sixty countries all over the world a week or ten days later (Life, p. 335). Korda had kept his promise, but the hasty nature of this production laid it open to this criticism in the organ of the documentary movement: 'It is one of the most essential features of any air picture that the characters should take off in one sort of aeroplane, fly in another sort, and alight in a third entirely different sort' (Documentary News Letter, February 1940, p. 5).

24 Graham Greene, "The Lion Has Wings," The Spectator, 3 November 1939, p. 619.
The Spy in Black and Contraband (British National, 1940) are linked by a network of common indices. They are, respectively, the first film Powell and Pressburger made together, and the first that Pressburger wrote for Powell based on his own original idea. They are both spy thrillers starring Conrad Veidt and Valerie Hobson, which use the sea as a springboard for their plots, and they were both successes, both in Britain and America. They are also the films that most commentators on the Powell and Pressburger phenomenon gloss over in a few paragraphs, if they mention them at all. They are, for the most part, uncontroversial, entertaining little films, easily dismissed as sub-Buchanesque or Hitchcockian thrillers, and they do indeed conform to the genre that had been exploited so well in Britain, both by Buchan on the page and Hitchcock on the screen.

After The Spy in Black had been released and proved to be a great success, Powell suggested to Pressburger they should follow it up. Veidt, who had maintained contact with Powell and Pressburger after the shooting on The Spy in Black finished, may have promoted Powell’s employment as a director on The Thief of Bagdad. Veidt even ‘discussed setting up a production company with them, and the contracts with British National, who supplied the meagre £35,000 budget for Contraband, were, in fact, signed by the three of them in partnership’ (Emeric, p. 160). The film was produced by British National because, in order to finance the production of The Lion Has Wings, Korda had pawned his last Life Assurance Policy, was in financial difficulty and had gone to America to find production capital. In 1939, British National, owned by Lady Yule and managed by John Corfield, had been joined by John Baxter, a young director [whose] presence, combined with the outbreak of war, seems to have galvanised [them] into action. While others cut back, the company announced an ambitious programme and kept Denham open with the Powell and Pressburger film Contraband (1940).

But Powell had to fight to keep the production at Denham against John Corfield’s pleas to have the film made at Elstree (which Rank had bought in 1939). With the outbreak of war the future of British studios was uncertain: ‘Studies were requisitioned for war needs; studio staff and technicians were called up. In 1939 twenty-two studios with sixty-five sound stages had

23 Dalrymple added that Korda’s financial problems were due to being ‘caught at the beginning of the war with a great mass of product which he couldn’t immediately show’ (Ian Dalrymple, quoted in Sussex, p. 124). British National had been formed by J. Arthur Rank and Lady Yule in 1934, and in 1936 they built Pinewood Studios in. In 1937 Rank took Lady Yule’s share in Pinewood, while Yule retained Rank’s interest in British National (Geoffrey Macnab, J. Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry. London: Routledge,1993, pp. 15, 24, 26). In 1940 Lady Yule bought the Rock Studios and renamed them British National Studios (Patricia Warren. British Film Studios: an illustrated history. London: Batsford, 1995, p. 59).

been in operation; by 1942 there were only nine studios active with thirty sound stages' (Manvell, p. 60). Part of Denham became a sugar store, and for a time, 'all of Pinewood's sound stages were submerged beneath stockpiles of flour' (Emeric, p. 160).

Pressburger had written to the Ministry of Labour a year earlier, offering 'to serve this country as best I may in the event of war' (Ibid., p. 158). With the outbreak of war, he was put on the secret Central Register of Aliens with Special Skills and told to await notification of duties. Impressed by the outrageous fictions that Powell and the other directors of *The Lion Has Wings* had manufactured for the RAF, he 'decided to do a little sabre-rattling himself on behalf of the Royal Navy and the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve'. While Powell went off to stay with Seton Gordon on the Isle of Skye, Pressburger liaised with the MoI to find a fitting subject for a propaganda film. When Powell returned from Skye, Pressburger had 'not only thought about a story, but had half written it' (Life, p. 338). The script was finished and ready for production by the end of October. They had the pick of the Denham staff, and among those technicians who were working (at a fraction of their normal salaries), were: Fred Young, chief cameraman; Alfred Junge, designer and art director; John Seaborne, editor; and Richard Addinsell, composer. But this last addition did cause some friction.

Miklos Rozsa, the composer of the original musical score for *The Thief of Bagdad*, who was Hungarian like Alex and Emeric, had also written the music for *The Spy in Black*. Emeric naturally supposed that I would want his friend and compatriot to write the score of *Contraband*, and had assured him of the job. But I felt that we needed more English contributors. Miklos Rozsa's future was already assured in Hollywood, and it was time to give an English composer a chance. My decision caused an understandable coolness between Emeric and myself, but I stood firm.

The opening scenes of *Contraband* are set in and around a Contraband Control base in east Kent, which was 'still wide open for a film unit. The Admiralty read our script, laughed a great deal, and gave us their blessing. The county police followed suit' (Life, p. 341). This was in mid-December 1939, and when the cast and crew were on location in that base, so relaxed was the security in this period of the 'phoney war' that they socialised in the hotel bar, 'hobnobbing with the Royal Navy, the Royal Naval Reserve, and the Royal Volunteer Reserve'. Alfred Junge, an enemy alien, was holding forth.

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27 During the Second World War the major British Studios requisitioned by the government for "war work" included Sound City (Shepperton), 1941-45; Pinewood, 1940-45; MGM, 1940-46; ABPC (Elstree), 1940-45; Nettlefold, 1942-45; Worton Hall, 1941-44; Islington, 1940-41; and Beaconsfield, 1940-45' (Derek Threadgall, Shepperton Studios: An Independent View. London: BFI, 1994, p. 30).

28 *Life*, p. 341. *Life*, p. 341. Rózsa did go to Hollywood in 1940, and Richard Addinsell, who had composed the scores for many Korda films including *Fire Over England* (1937), went on to write the music for Thorold Dickinson's *Gaslight* (British National, 1940) and Desmond Hurst's *Dangerous Moonlight* (RKO, 1941). In 1940 Rózsa had his opportunity to turn the tables on Powell: 'I got a telegram from Powell asking me to join him in Canada to research Canadian folk music and then to return to London to do the music for *49th Parallel* (1941). I had to refuse since at that time I was committed to Korda and he would not let me go' (Rózsa, p. 77)
to a circle of admiring senior officers on how you design a motion picture, and asking searching questions about Ramsgate and Contraband Control, which should have got him interned for the rest of the war. Emeric, another enemy alien, was seated at a table with the Chief Constable of the county, expounding the script and explaining how we cut between studio and real exteriors. I rubbed my eyes and marvelled. ... it couldn't possibly last. Such openness and enthusiasm, and such innocence! And I decided that the sooner we shot the essential scenes the better, and we should get out as soon as possible, taking our booty with us, before anyone high up mentioned the word "Security" (Life, p. 341-342).*

Again Powell's work methods caused anxiety to his producer. A scene in the Contraband Control base involved a lot of movement and technical jargon. It ran four minutes, and 'after consulting with Fred Young we decided to shoot it in one continuous tracking shot, rehearsing it and speeding it up until we had cut about a minute out. This took all day and nothing was in the can at five o'clock'. John Corfield could not understand why, with seven scene numbers to be covered, nothing had been shot, but John Seabourne reassured him that they would be covered in one shot and that Powell was just ensuring that the tempo did not drop.

Powell and Pressburger wrote the shooting script together, 'as we had on The Spy in Black, laughing and fighting, biting and scratching, with frequent consultations with Valerie and Connie' (Life, p. 341). As a consequence, according to Valerie Hobson, they wrote the film around the kind of things that Connie Veidt and I actually did. We used to go out to dinner to this funny restaurant which they actually put into the film as The Three Vikings - they copied it almost exactly in the studio. I can't remember if the original had the same name, but they copied it almost to the Hay Petrie part as the dotty chef. It was just down by the side of the Strand Palace Hotel, in Glasshouse Street. There were lots of other in-jokes like that (Emeric, p. 161).

Alfred Junge and his art department would have done the actual creating of the set for The Three Vikings, and for the various night clubs visited by Captain Anderson and his team of intrepid Danish waiters hunting for the location of the German spies. When they finally locate the right one, it has an elevator which is the only way down into the basement where Mrs. Sorensen and Mr. Pigeon are held captive. Pressburger had requested 'a modern building with a lot of action around the elevator', and Junge gave him 'a full working elevator, from basement to ground floor, and the unit never tired of playing with it' (Life, p. 343). Junge's career as a designer for film had by then spanned nearly twenty years and ninety films made in Germany and Britain. At Gaumont-British, with his 'invaluable organisational skills, sense of discipline and technical expertise, he had coordinated an entire staff of art directors and

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29 And, of course, it didn't last. Junge was interned before the next film (49th Parallel) was made and Pressburger came close to internment during the making of it.
30 Ibid., p. 342. This long tracking shot may have been inspired by the famous one used by Hitchcock in Young and Innocent (Gainsborough, 1937), where the camera starts at ceiling height in a hotel lobby, dollies down through the lobby and into a ballroom, past the dancers, and ends up with an extreme close-up of a black-face drummer's eyes (Surewic, pp. 26-27). Powell's shot is not as ambitious but is well-managed. Young and Innocent and The Man Who Knew Too Much (Gainsborough, 1934) were both designed by Alfred Junge.
draughtsmen' (Sureiwic, pp. 14-15). For a man like Junge, creating a functioning elevator on a minimal budget was child's play, and out of this small budget he supplied the interiors of three nightclubs, the Army and Navy Club, a fashionable London residence and a passenger-carrying freighter. 'He finished the picture under budget. Alfred Junge was always under budget. Hitler could have used him for the invasion of England' (*Life*, p. 343). But Hitler, fortunately, did not have that opportunity.

When war was declared, most people expected an immediate attack by Germany. Korda had shown them what to expect in his production of *Things to Come* (London Films, 1936), where newspaper hoardings declaring war are quickly followed by aerial bombardment and the destruction of London. Hitler's methods (*blitzkrieg* followed by occupation) had been seen at work in Czechoslovakia and Poland, and there was no reason to expect that they would not be used against Britain. There was a mass exodus from city centres of those rich enough to find safer accommodation, of businesses and government departments, and of children. Theatres and cinemas were closed, petrol was in short supply, and stringent blackout regulations were enforced. But then no bombs fell and no German armada seemed about to cross the Channel, so people drifted back to the cities and life began to return to something like normality.31

In the circumstances of this 'phony war' almost the only action against the enemy was at sea, where the U-boats had become very active, but Powell and Pressburger had just made a film about German U-boats. The battle of the River Plate in December 1939 came too late for them to exploit that dramatic defeat for the German Navy. It formed the main subject of Maurice Elvey's production, *For Freedom* (Gainsborough, 1940), which 'attempted a mix of documentary method and fictionalized story', with even more muddled results than *The Lion Has Wings*.32 The convoy system to protect merchant ships had been revived, but Pen Tennyson was making that film, functionally titled *Convoy* (Ealing Studios, 1940).33

31 'It is estimated that between the end of June 1939 and the first week of September some 3,500,000 or 3,750,000 people moved from areas thought vulnerable to those considered safe ... it was, of course, above all the well-to-do who could afford to flee.' But by December, 'the dance halls were packed again. Cinemas and theatres outside the cities had been allowed to reopen before a week was out, and from September 14th the rest were permitted to follow suit if they shut at ten p.m.' (Calder, pp. 35-36, 64).
33 *Feature Films of the present war are already being made by private companies (Note: *The Lion Has Wings* may be reckoned as three documentaries strung together to attain feature length. This is its principal defect.) A film on *Contraband* is well under way; another on *Convoys* has begun, a third on *Minesweepers* is in preparation. In all these the documentary element is made part of a dramatic story.' (INF 1/867, 1940, quoted in "Appendix," *Powell/Press.*, p. 122). For *Convoy* (Ealing, 1940) 'the titles carry a long list of official credits in the style that would become familiar' (Charles Barr, *Ealing Studios*. London: Cameron and Tayleur in association with David and Charles, 1977, p. 22). It was trade shown in June 1940.
Pressburger chose a story that goes to the heart of the reason for the U-boat activity and the convoy system; to attack or protect Britain's vital imports of food and raw materials. In the files of the Ministry of Economic Warfare he may have found what he was looking for. In September 1939 Germany had seized three Danish ships and sunk another as they were en route to England, in contravention of an agreement that allowed neutral countries to continue normal trade with belligerent countries. This diplomatic incident between Denmark (then a neutral country) and Britain was worrying for its immediate impact on food imports from that country, as witnessed by this letter from the Ministry of Food: 'our stocks of bacon and butter are running dangerously low ... every obstacle in the way of Danish exports coming to this country should be removed as quickly as possible'. It was a rather peculiar sabre that Pressburger chose to rattle, but a bacon hock can be just as valuable as a sword in times of war, and food was dear to Pressburger's heart.

Contraband seeks to demonstrate that the inconveniences caused by the contraband control system are regrettable but necessary, and highlights the difference in tactics employed by the British government (as opposed to the German) to keep neutral countries, especially America, content to keep supplying Britain with essential goods. The scenes on board the Helvig and in the Contraband Control base are designed to demonstrate the reasonableness of the detention system and the politeness and efficiency with which it is administered, with casual references to the altogether different approach adopted by Germany. When Captain Andersen and Mrs. Sorensen are in the clutches of the enemy, held prisoner in the spy circus basement, the reference is less casual. When Mrs Sorensen declares: "We are not Germans, who shoot first and ask questions later," the reply is an ominous silence. With relish the spy master then expounds just how much damage he is going to inflict on British relations with America by his stratagem of supplying the Admiralty with false information. If they believe that an American ship is really a German ship masquerading as a neutral, the ensuing battle could even provoke a war between the two countries.

This, then, is the overt propaganda message of Contraband, but there is propaganda content that is less overt: showing how London is coping under wartime conditions.

From then on, Emeric was concocting an amusing thriller in a wartime setting. We were on familiar ground here, and we made the conditions of London, blacked out but still getting on with its night life and private life, so interesting and so fascinating that they called the film Blackout when it was released in America, and I wish we had too. With its double meaning, it's a much better title for the story (Life, p. 339).

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The major part of the film is set in the capital at night, demonstrating the variety and liveliness of London's nightlife, vibrant and functioning normally in spite of the all-pervasive blackout. The Three Vikings has a lavish display on its cold table, and the clientele of the nightclubs patriotically support their ally, France, by the copious consumption of brandy and champagne.

The blackout, though, was a serious problem. Its effect was comprehensive and immediate, and it 'transformed conditions of life more thoroughly than any other single feature of the war'. At first, pedestrians and civilian drivers alike were not permitted to use any form of light when trying to navigate the city's streets but, from mid-October, they were allowed to use hand torches, 'if these were dimmed with a double thickness of white tissue paper' (Calder, p. 63).

The Victoria Station sequences, shot on location, show buses and cars looming out of the dark with only sidelights for illumination, traffic lights masked with only a central cross left for light to escape, and kerbs and crossings marked with white paint (picked out in the light of Hobson's torch). Within this realistically presented shell of topicality, however, is a typical London-based spy thriller. Most of Contraband is a chase in the blackout, with the tracking down and defeating of a nest of foreign spies as its motivating force, and with the blackout itself providing a confusing and menacing milieu. The female spy adopts "Lang" as her nom de guerre, an acknowledgment of the film's debt to Fritz Lang's Spione (Fritz Lang Film, 1927), the arch-originator of between-the-wars spy films. The coded message in a hand-rolled cigarette had been used in Victor Saville's I Was A Spy (Gaumont, 1933), and the London base of foreign spies had been employed by Hitchcock in The Man Who Knew Too Much (Gaumont-British, 1934). What makes Contraband different is its topicality and the specificity of the enemy. The blackout restrictions allowed Powell to use strong contrasts of dark and light and, in true Langian form, concentrated beams of torchlight that illuminate Veidt and Hobson's faces in Victoria and at the door of the house in Chester Square. When the two of them approach the door, the camera gives us their point of view; we see a hand turn the key in the lock and, once inside, both their hands pushing open the inner double doors to reveal a well-lit but silent interior. We are, therefore, entering with them and made aware of the threat implicit in the silence and emptiness of the hallway. This subjective camera also emphasises their new relationship of collaboration instead of confrontation. They are together, facing any problems that may arise.

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36 Turner, p. 138. Rationing was not introduced until January 1940, and then only on bacon, butter and sugar. In December 1939, 'banqueting bookings in London were almost normal' for Christmas.
39 Lang uses a torch to dramatic effect in Metropolis (UFA, 1926), 'when the mad inventor's torch chases Maria until she is caught in a circle of light out of which there seems to be no escape' (Lotte H. Eisner, "The German Films of Fritz Lang," PFR, 6, April 1948, p. 55).
One of the most stark dark and light contrasts is presented in the top floor storage room of the spy circus, where the ‘Patriotic Plaster Products’ seem to consist of nothing but row upon row of dead-white plaster heads of Neville Chamberlain, frostily caught in the beam of Veidt’s flashlight. The significance of those heads has been described as a ‘sarcastic comment on the mood of 1940’ (Arrows, p. 50), but Veidt does find a use for them when he brains the master spy with one and comments: “They always said he was tough”.\(^{38}\) Before that, though, they had proved serviceable as decoys for the spy’s bullets, with Veidt’s head dodging between the plaster representations.

The blackout sequences also provide humour. Navigating your way, even when familiar with your surroundings, proved difficult for most city-dwellers; for a sea-captain familiar with navigating only on the ocean, they were particularly confusing. Captain Andersen proudly proclaims “Have you any idea how many times I’ve stood on my bridge in the middle of the Atlantic on a night just like this?”, and walks slap into a policeman.\(^{39}\) Throughout the film his automatic expectations of superiority are dashed by Mrs Sorensen’s familiarity with the location and situation. But he does have one advantage: he can steer by the stars, which the blackout helps to make unusually clear. When they are taken by car through the dark streets of London, he leans casually back and looks through the rear window at the night sky. Later, in the Three Vikings, he is able to map the route they took and lead his band of Danish brothers to the right location. Nonetheless, by the end of the film he is a man who has been tamed, not by the enemy but by a woman. Her last blow is struck when she reveals that the British authorities have known of his escapades in London, and she invites him to examine the ‘stomach powder’ that the head of Contraband Control had just given him. It turns out to be his watch (which he had dropped in a scuffle with the police as he was escaping from the spies). He presses the winder twice, and she allows herself to be overruled, for once, when he orders her to drop the life jacket which is all that is keeping them from the final clinch.

There is a lot of ‘doubling’ in the film, from the winder that has to be depressed twice before it will play the tune which is the basis for the opening maritime music, to the lift button that has to be pressed twice before the lift will descend to the basement. Then there are the two possible sides from which Mrs Sorensen will escape from the train at Victoria, and the two exits from the Ladies Cloakroom (another put-down for the captain as he states authoritatively, “Where you go, I go”, as she sweeps confidently into the one place where she knows he will

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\(^{38}\) ‘In the light of the torch Anderson looks at the bust of Chamberlain with gratitude’ (‘Contraband Screenplay’, S-33, Powell Collection, BFI, p. 148).

\(^{39}\) It was difficult for people to manoeuvre in the blackout. ‘In the main streets, beneath winter stars for the first time clearly visible, they cannonade with strangers, tumble into piles of sandbags, and sprain their ankles falling over the kerb’ (Vera Brittain, England’s Hour. London: Macmillan, 1940, pp. 22-23).
not dare to follow). In addition there are the two sides of any sheet of newspaper, which results in a straight-faced reading of an advertisement for indigestion relief by the ship's first officer rather than the revised train timetable that Captain Andersen needs. And that first officer, played by Hay Petrie, turns out to have a twin brother who manages the Three Vikings restaurant in London.

In other ways the film plays provocatively with our expectations and with the senses that we are forced to use when the sense of sight is denied us. In the spy circus, Veidt and Hobson can smell cooking. They can also hear the national anthem being played and, down in the basement, a banjo with a male voice accompaniment. Their conclusions that the building contains a restaurant, a cinema and a nightclub are later verified, apart from the male banjo player who turns out to be a woman with masculine voice. When the all-girl band flee in fright, they reveal that their provocative fishnet-clad legs framed in can-can skirts are false, as they leave them abandoned incongruously on the stage. And theirs is not the only false front in the film; Mr. Pigeon, a talent scout, is habitually seen hiding behind the cover of a copy of Variety, which, since he is an undercover agent, is doubly appropriate.\(^a\)

Powell considered that only the 'novel and up-to-date setting of a detained neutral ship in Ramsgate Roads, and the charisma of the actor and actress', saved the scenes between Veidt and Hobson at the beginning of Contraband from banality. As in The Spy In Black, Veidt's character was 'a real man with a man's appetites and resourcefulness' (Life, pp. 339, 306). There is the same emphasis on the sensuality inherent in the sense of smell (here of Mrs. Sorensen's perfume bottle stopper), and in a healthy appetite for food and drink (Danish smorgasbord replaces ham and butter on white bread, but is consumed with the same dedication), and of the sense of touch (the silk stockings are not just talked about and eyed speculatively, but, while he investigates Mrs Sorensen's empty cabin, one of them is delicately penetrated by Captain Andersen's hand, equally speculatively). The Spy In Black started the affair, but Contraband increases the erotic charge. When Veidt is regaining consciousness in the spy circus and hears Hobson ordered to strip, he strains to watch the performance instead of averting his gaze,\(^b\) and when they are tied up in the basement, the same rope binds their upraised arms to a pillar and their ankles to the chairs they are seated on, back to back. The escape is effected by the fairly long-drawn out manipulation of one of

\(^a\) Hitchcock's Sabotage (Gaumont-British, 1936), based on Joseph Conrad's The Secret Agent, uses a cinema as the 'cover' for its 'undercover agent'. Mr. Pigeon was played by Esmond Knight, an actor who had first been noticed by Powell while making 77 Park Lane. The two of them became good friends.

\(^b\) His returning consciousness is shown by a circling trio of heads, a watch face and the slurred repetition of "Not Mr Pigeon".
Hobson's long, silk-stockinged legs. Veidt then reties her hands above her head to the pillar so that she is left in a provocatively vulnerable and seductive position.

When Mrs Sorensen drops her life jacket at the end of the film, she is maintaining her right to continue a life of adventure rather than preserve her life at all costs. Captain Andersen, who never did wear a life jacket, had expounded his philosophy ('the smaller the ship, the bigger the adventure') earlier in the film. At the end of *The Spy in Black*, Captain Hardt ignores the proffered life jacket, preferring to die honourably at sea rather than preserve his life and probably face a traitor's death. They all choose life only on their terms.

Veidt, according to Hobson, was pleased to play a sympathetic role in *Contraband*.

We mustn't forget that he was a German, and at that time, with the war just starting, it was difficult for him. I think he always felt faintly embarrassed by the fact that he'd been a German star and had a very ripe German accent. Very cleverly Emeric made him not a German in *Contraband*. He was just as believable being a Dane, and that was charming (Emeric, p. 161).

Another reason for choosing the subject of contraband control on neutral shipping was the need to find a suitable role for Veidt, and making him Danish meant that they could still keep his pronunciation problems intact (e.g., Captain Andersen's pronunciation of the word "Vikings", which is received by the hansom cab driver with complete incomprehension). Another advantage of being cast as a neutral rather than an enemy was that Veidt was allowed to survive the climax of the film. He had been given a copy of the script before the actual shooting began, and he noticed,

to his surprise and delight, that he would not be killed off in the story and that he, for a change, would win the pretty girl at the film's end. [He] challenged [Powell] to a wager about the final outcome for Captain Andersen: "Mike, I'll bet that you'll have them write in another ending so that when Valerie and I finally sail away to freedom, the ship strikes a mine and sinks!" Michael Powell laughingly accepted (Allen, pp. 278-279).

The film was trade shown on March 26, 1940 and released in the U.K. in May, just after Denmark lost its neutrality. It opened at the Odeon Leicester Square, and was a popular success. The executive producer of British National Films asked Veidt to go to America to assist in the distribution of the film there, and Veidt accepted on condition that his wife, Lily, could accompany him. They never returned to Britain, but Veidt continued to support his adopted country financially from his earnings in the U.S., and, as Christmas approached in 1940, 'he donated approximately $1600 (roughly 400 British pounds) for the purpose of providing Christmas gifts to the poor children of London' (Allen, p. 280).

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42 Again, as in *The Spy in Black*, there is an echo of Hitchcock's *The 39 Steps*. They are tied rather than manacled together, but the sensuous connection (between flesh, silk, and the imagination) is very similar.

43 Veidt knew his name was on the Gestapo's official arrest list, 'among those British citizens who would be arrested, interrogated and imprisoned as soon as Germany had successfully invaded and conquered England' (ibid., p. 280).
Contraband was released as Blackout in the U.S. on the 29th of November 1940, and in December, 1940, the Globe Theater advertised the showing there of the exciting new film. The advertisement also stated that patrons could gain admission to see this film either by paying cash, as usual, or by turning in a firearm of any type. The purpose was to obtain weapons to be sent to England for use by the Home Guard (ibid, p. 278). By then the 'phony war' was over, France had fallen and Denmark had discovered that its neutrality was no protection against German occupation. Britain stood alone against a seemingly invincible enemy and the time for adventure stories and spy thrillers had passed. War had become a serious business. Powell and Pressburger had anticipated the change in the tenor of the war and were aiming their propaganda message across the Atlantic, at the people of North America.

But 'Blackout' is the title of a treatment and an early version of the screenplay, both of which begin with a lengthy preamble which establishes the infiltration into positions of power (in the Government and the City) of German spies and fifth columnists (Emeric Pressburger, 'Black-Out Treatment', S-31; Emeric Pressburger, 'Black-Out', Story and Screenplay by Michael Powell and Brock Williams, S-32. Michael Powell Special Collection, BFI).
Two Escapes

49th Parallel

'Imagine ... France was falling, the Battle of Britain was looming and here's some bastard who wants £80,000 or £50,000 to go and make a film in Canada' (G-Y, 1971, p. 5).

The Treasury may not have liked the idea, but Powell and Pressburger did get £50,000 from the British government to make their film on location in Canada in the summer of 1940. The extraordinary aspect of the film was its government funding at a time when everything was in short supply: men, materials and money. This aspect, however, becomes less extraordinary when Britain's propaganda work aimed at the USA is taken into consideration.

America was crucial to Britain's survival as an independent nation, but American public opinion was, in 1940, still opposed to any involvement in yet another European war and wary of the persuasive force of British propaganda.

The belief that the American people had somehow been 'duped' into involvement on the Allied side in 1917 by British propaganda ... merely served to reinforce the arguments of those isolationist elements which advocated post-war withdrawal from the devious machinations of the Old World. ... American sensitivity to foreign propaganda was highlighted by the passing of the 1938 Foreign Agents Registration Act which required all foreign publicists operating on American soil to register with the US Government. The British had responded to such sensitivity by persistently refusing to inaugurate an official propaganda campaign in the United States.

But there was an unofficial propaganda campaign under way to keep American public opinion on the side of Britain, and it was one that received help from the Ministry of Information.

Alfred Duff Cooper, who had resigned his post as First Lord of the Admiralty in 1938 in the wake of Chamberlain's Munich agreement with Hitler, had discovered on his lecture tour of America at the end of 1939 that, at this fateful moment of history,

the majority of American citizens were possessed by two firm convictions. One was that they had been enticed into the first World War by the craftiness of British propaganda; and the other was that the second World War was due to the harsh conditions imposed by the French and the British upon the defeated Germans in the Treaty of Versailles. ... The British Government, having been informed of the exaggerated ideas entertained in the United States as to the power and the danger of propaganda, decided to abstain from it altogether.

This, he decided, was a disastrous policy since American citizens, 'when they saw no sign of our propaganda, naturally assumed that we were doing it very badly, and hence concluded that if we were conducting the war in Europe as inefficiently as we were conducting our

propaganda in America, we were likely to lose it’ (ibid., p. 269). Americans had to be convinced both that Nazism was a threat to them and that Britain was worth defending: no easy task. To the average American, England had been the tyrannical power against which American democracy had rebelled [and] was still being portrayed as an Imperialist Power subjugating the Poor Irish. [It] was also imprisoning the courageous brown little Mr. Ghandi[sic]-the loincloth-clad George Washington of his country who was peacefully fighting the power of the British Raj. Also any country which did not pay its world war one debts could not be trusted [and] any country with a king and queen, dukes, princes and the like could not be a democracy.

If John and Jane Doe of George Gallup’s polls could not be convinced that England was worth fighting for, there would be no intervention on her behalf.®

In May 1940 Winston Churchill became Prime Minister and Duff Cooper was appointed Minister of Information. In June, Laurence Olivier received a response to his offer to leave America and return to Britain. It was a cable from Lord Norwich (then Duff Cooper, Minister of Information and a personal friend of Olivier) advising him somewhat cryptically to stay put until it was decided how best they could use his services to help the war effort. ... Alexander Korda arrived in New York and explained that he planned to work from Hollywood on films with a strong propaganda angle [since] there he could make semi-propaganda movies assured of a far wider distribution. He could be a useful contact with Hungarian exiles abroad; also he had sufficient influence and powers of persuasion to gain the support of many American stars for strongly pro-British films.®

Olivier stayed and appeared in Alexander Korda’s That Hamilton Woman (Alexander Korda Films, 1941), which exploited the indirect opportunities for propaganda that Korda had already used in a previous period piece, Fire Over England (London Films/Pendennis, 1937). Another Hungarian director, Michael Curtiz, made a similarly patriotic period propagandiser with his production of The Sea Hawk (Warner, 1940), and Korda co-produced Ernst Lubitsch’s comic debunking of Hitler, To Be or Not To Be (Alexander Korda/Ernst Lubitsch, 1942). That Hamilton Woman (Churchill’s favourite film), was produced as exhibit ‘A’ by the isolationist senators Nye and Vandenberg in their case against Korda, whom they accused of running an espionage and propaganda centre for Britain in violation of a law that demanded registration of all foreign agents. Britain’s propaganda policy was alive and well despite its apparent non-existence.

In January 1940 Kenneth Clark became Head of the Films Division of the Ministry of Information. John Sutro, one of the directors of London Films and a personal friend of Alexander Korda, persuaded Powell to apply to Clark for financial assistance, with the assurance that the Films Division would be sympathetic to any idea that promoted the war effort. He added that Duff Cooper, soon to be the new Minister of Information and great friend of Churchill, understood the importance of films (*Life*, p. 345). Pressburger, ‘aware that during the war there was nothing more important than that the United States should be brought in on Great Britain’s side’, pondered on how to devise a story which would help to persuade the American public to enter the war as Britain’s ally. The film could not be set in the United States and, considering the strong feelings of many Americans towards foreign propaganda, might not be allowed a showing in that country. Pressburger thought long and hard, and then it hit him: ‘it didn’t make the slightest difference if we didn’t do it in the USA but did it in Canada instead, because the Americans would certainly know that anything which can happen in Canada could also happen in the USA’ (*Pressburger, ‘Appendix 1’,* p. 48).

When Powell met Clark, he promoted Pressburger’s idea by pointing out that Canada’s entry into the war would inevitably draw the United States into the conflict.

Canada is in the war already as a member of the British Commonwealth and is no more ready than we are to deal with Hitler. Sooner or later, their coast will be attacked and their ships sunk, and that will bring America into the war. I want to make a film in Canada to scare the pants off the Americans and bring them into the war sooner (*Life*, p. 347).

Clark, impressed by the idea, persuaded the Ministry to sanction somewhere between £2,500 and £5,000 for an exploratory trip to Canada. Powell and Pressburger, together with Bill Paton, John Seabourne and Bill Gillet, set sail from Liverpool on the 13 April, 1940, on the Duchess of York - familiarly known as ‘The Drunken Duchess’ because of its propensity to roll - and landed in New Brunswick on the 18 April. The opening idea was born early in the voyage. The Chief Engineer had told them horrifying stories about U-boats; that there was no escape from them and that one could surface, fire and submerge in 50 seconds (*1940 Diary*, p. 6). This solved the problem of what kind of military threat Nazi Germany could pose to a vast country 3,000 miles away. In the First World War three U-boats had ‘blockaded’ the eastern coast of the United States, and had sunk or damaged a cruiser, a battleship, forty-two steamers and over 50 small, unarmed craft, including sailing vessels, tugs, barges, and motor boats. What had happened once could happen again. But more important than the physical threat was the psychological and moral threat that Nazism posed to the free world. Few people in Britain had been aware of the true nature of the Nazi regime, since neutrality had

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imposed strict censorship of negative views of Germany, and neutrality was still the watchword in the United States. The idea for the original ending came as soon as they saw the border with America: ‘We crossed the USA border. There’s no control or anything. The landscape didn’t change’ (‘1940 Diary’, p. 13). It was a virtually unguarded frontier that an enemy could cross with ease.

The most important aim of the film was to be the countering of Nazi propaganda and the exposure of the true nature of its ideology. As they sailed back to England Pressburger wrote the first treatment of the film that was to be called 49th Parallel (Ortus Films/Ministry of Information, 1941). The structure was

highly schematic, almost allegorical, with four “acts” in each of which the Nazi group encounters a different element of the Canadian population; on each occasion there is an overt clash of ideologies which contrasts Canadian democracy with German fascism and one Nazi dies.

Back in England, Powell met the Minister of Information, Duff Cooper, and read out the prologue to Emeric’s treatment.

We want to show to the French Canadians that they are threatened, to the foreign settlers that their privileges and their freedoms are in danger, and to the easy-going English Canadians that they had better knock hard and knock first... There are many eyes to be opened north of the 49th Parallel. And south of it too (Emeric, pp. 171-172).

France was falling, the Battle of Britain was looming, but the Treasury officials were persuaded to part with the money to make the film. Anthony Aldgate, however, maintains that the initial idea for the film could have originated within the MoI, and that Powell’s proposal of a film to be made in Canada would have fitted quite neatly with ideas which were then circulating in the Empire Division and the Dominions Office.

Very early on in 1940 it had been agreed that there was room for a ‘first class feature film developing as an exciting story the history of the growth of freedom, referring to the American parallel and stimulus in order to give it appeal to US audiences’. Furthermore, the proposed plans of the Empire Division for the months of April to September, 1940, contemplated making at least two full-length feature films, ‘one for Canada on the NW Mounted Police and one for South Africa on the life of General Botha’. The budget for these films would be met from the Films subhead of the Ministry’s vote, amounting to £500,000 in 1940.⁶

Powell’s trump cards were that the actors playing the Nazis who would go to Canada to film authentic scenes would be cheap, and the actors who would play the star parts and would be filmed in England had agreed to work for the same flat fee. Those stars had been chosen with some care. Laurence Olivier had already made a name for himself in American-made movies with his appearance as Heathcliff in William Wyler’s Wuthering Heights (Samuel Goldwyn, 1939), would soon be on screen again in Hitchcock’s Rebecca (David O. Selznick, 1940), and

had completed his performance as Nelson in Korda's That Hamilton Woman before returning to England and service in the Fleet Air Arm. Elizabeth Bergner was the surprising addition to the cast list, since she usually commanded high salaries and worked only under the direction of her husband, Paul Czinner. Pressburger, who had been commissioned to adapt a strange psychological novel called Rings on Her Fingers for Bergner's next screen appearance, was amazed when she asked for the part of Anna in 49th Parallel instead and insisted on doing exteriors in Canada without asking for a larger fee (Emeric, p. 173). Anton Walbrook, an Austrian-born refugee from Germany, had mastered the English language to the point where he could appear on stage with ease, and his appearance as Prince Albert in Victoria the Great (British Lion/Imperator/Herbert Wilcox, 1937) had established him as a film actor in Britain. Leslie Howard, as familiar to American audiences as he was to British ones, was riding high on the success of Gone With the Wind (MGM/Selznick International, 1939). He represented the quintessential English romantic intellectual and was supremely well-placed to appeal to American audiences since, as he explained in his broadcasts to his overseas listeners, he was a dual personality: 'I am an Englishman because I was born and raised one, and an American because I have lived the greater part of my adult life in the United States.' Raymond Massey was Canadian, and had just scored a notable success portraying Lincoln in Abe Lincoln in Illinois (RKO, 1940) after many years of bolstering up Korda classics such as Things to Come (London Films, 1936) and Fire Over England (1937).

One evening I received a cable from my brother, who was Canadian High Commissioner in London: 'Michael Powell will call you. Please cooperate - Vincent.' That is how Mickey entered my life .... He can be extremely persuasive .... By 11 o'clock that night in Hollywood I had agreed to act a small part in a propaganda film to be made in Canada for the British Government. The budget would not have covered a week's shooting in a Hollywood B. But the script was a fast-moving, hard-hitting war thriller.

With Ministry funding assured and with extra funds promised by Oscar Deutsch, the film crew and (with the exception of Elizabeth Bergner) non-starring actors set sail for Canada for location-shooting. Pressburger, however, was unable to accompany them. On their return from the exploratory trip to Canada, he had been arrested as an enemy alien.

With typical loyalty, Michael doggedly refused to leave his collaborator's side until he was released. They spent the night together in a cold, damp cell, Michael raging about the injustice and ingratitude of it all, while Emeric sat pensive in the corner. The next day Emeric was released only to be told that his right of residence had been withdrawn and he would have to leave the country within a month.

Duff Cooper had to intercede on his behalf.

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It would obviously be deplorable if Mr. Pressburger, through his having undertaken certain work at the request of this Ministry, were to lose the status he previously enjoyed. I am to ask, therefore, that he be absolved from the condition imposed subsequent to his return from Canada, and that his previous status be restored (Emeric, pp. 171-172).

After an anxious month of reporting daily to the police, his status was restored, but not his passport. Pressburger worked on the script in London, posting it in sections to Powell in Canada.

In Canada, Powell was working against the clock and with the seasons. Scenes of a lakeside in Banff had to be shot, then of a harvest in Manitoba, on to Churchill before the ice closed Hudson's Bay, then down the coast of Labrador to Newfoundland, and on to Niagara Falls for the concluding sequence of the film. Raymond Massey had joined the Canadian Army and was, therefore, the only star who would not be able to shoot his interior sequences in England. He was unhappy with his scene as written, so Pressburger (who had by then retrieved his passport) was given permission to join Powell in Canada to rewrite this crucial last sequence. Massey was delighted. 'I played the soldier, a honey of a part .... Emeric Pressburger wrote the sequence the night before we started shooting. That my part had a lot of comedy was a tremendous help. It actually increased the tension' (Massey, p. 274).

Massey did not need to travel to England to shoot his scenes, but another star of the film who should have made that journey declined to do so. Elizabeth Bergner had shot the exteriors for the Hutterite sequence in Manitoba, where her appearance at the settlement had caused some commotion. She was dressed in an appropriately modest gingham frock, but she was also wearing a full make-up, with glistening lips and false eyelashes - and she was smoking, holding the cigarette in fingers with prettily varnished nails. The Hutterite ladies, who had never seen a film actress before, were outraged - and one of them, succumbing to anger and bolder than the rest, made a dash at the 'impious' star and soundly boxed her ears. After suffering such an indignity it is, perhaps, hardly to be wondered at that Miss Bergner left for Hollywood - where, at least, the natives accept make-up as a common necessity and the smoking of cigarettes (except, of course, 'reefers') is not frowned upon.

A more serious motive for her refusal to return may have been the uncertain position of Britain as a refuge for German émigrés, now that the possibility of invasion by Germany was very real. 'It became clear that her initial generosity and enthusiasm for the project was only a ruse to obtain a travel permit to leave a vulnerable-looking Britain' (Emeric, p. 176).

Back in Britain the interiors were shot at Denham studios between February and April 1941. The basic storyline was adhered to, but the defection of Elizabeth Bergner and her replacement by the young Glynis Johns necessitated some changes to the Hutterite sequences, since a young woman was considered to lack the emotional range of the more

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mature Bergner. One star had been lost, but another was created: Eric Portman, who, as the fanatical Hirth, carried the main burden of revealing Nazi philosophy in conflict with the democratic ideals of the citizens of Canada.

The first purpose of 49th Parallel was 'propaganda to counter the extremely able Nazi propaganda that had been threatening and frightening the North American continent for years' (Life, p. 350). As counter-propaganda, the film had to take the realities underlying the distortions in the enemy's propaganda, and reveal those distortions in a compelling way. Jeffrey Richards has analysed the ‘Cinema of National Socialism’ and made connections between the films it produced and their basis in Nazi ideology. He maintains that Hitler preached a form of Volkism and his ideology was of a strong and united pure Aryan race conquering Europe and, after Europe, the world. It would be the rule of the strong, neither democratic nor Christian but the dictatorship of a Master Race dominating inferior breeds. The Fuhrerprinzip was the concept of a strong leader who, given all the infallibility claimed by the Pope over Roman Catholics, would command unquestioning obedience from his adoring subjects. The brotherhood of men would become the brotherhood of an élite, with unquestioning obedience demanded of their followers. Women would merely be the mothers of the next generation of heroes willing to sacrifice all to the Fuhrer and the state. The mystical union of blood and soil would unite Germans wherever they lived and create a global German bund.10 This was the 'jackboot philosophy' which Pressburger sought to expose in 49th Parallel (G-Y, 1971, p. 11).

When the six U-boat crewmen land to reconnoitre the trading base in Hudson's Bay, their Captain salutes them and reminds them that it is "Today Europe, tomorrow the world!" They are the first representatives of a conquering army that will overrun the continent, but with the destruction of their U-boat, they become less a conquering vanguard and more a vulnerable alien entity trying to escape from an uncongenial host body; the invincibility of the 'Master Race' is shown to be an illusion and their ideology is demonstrated to be fatally flawed when compared with the moral strength of democratic freedom. The four main protagonists of the democratic process are a motley collection: a French-Canadian trapper and a crusty old factor at an isolated trading post; a community of religious fundamentalists; an effete Englishman writing a book in a tee-pee; and a whining Canadian soldier who is absent without leave from his regiment. But the apparent weaknesses of these representatives of democracy are, for the most part, turned into strengths by the development of the narrative.

The first propaganda points that are made are intimately related to race and religion. The first Canadians the marauding Nazis encounter are the Factor, the French-Canadian trapper

and his Eskimo helper (who is brutally rifle-butted and left to die). The fanatical Hirth declares Eskimos to be "racially as low as Negroes" and Negroes to be "semi-apes, only one degree above the Jews. Those are the Fuhrer's own words from Mein Kampf." He initially tries to win the support of Johnnie the trapper by telling him that now his country (France) has surrendered, "the Fuhrer intends to liberate your people from the British tyranny. French Canada will be free. You will be free." He describes French-Canadians as an oppressed minority and promises that Hitler will give them "the freedom to speak their own language, to have their own schools and churches, to govern their own affairs." All of which gives Johnnie the trapper the perfect opportunity to respond with: "French Canadians have always our own school and church and the right to speak as we want and run our own affairs ... How about dem Poles, how about the French? Do you let them run their own affairs?"

When the dying trapper asks for his rosary and Hirth, who has declared himself proudly to be no Christian, denies it to him, he demonstrates that Mein Kampf really is his bible. One of his ratings makes the sign of the cross and is viewed with deep suspicion, his untimely execution as a traitor to the Nazi cause pre-figured by that gesture and that reaction. This emphasis on the anti-Catholic stance of Hirth might appear to be overdone, but there was good reason for stressing the Nazi ideology in opposition to the Roman Catholic faith in particular. In October 1940, this memorandum, detailing how the Nazis had been trying to obtain support from Catholics, was lodged in the Mol file entitled 'Roman Catholic Section: Counteraction of German Religious Propaganda'.

The propaganda began after the German Catholic bishops conference at Fulda, when the German propaganda service put it about in various countries that a joint pastoral was going to be issued and that the Catholic attitude towards the Nazi Government had undergone a decided change. Later it was suggested that the German bishops were sending a deputation to the Vatican and that the latter's policy in regard to Nazism was also about to be modified. The Vatican wireless denied this and said that German bishops had not visited Rome. No joint pastoral ... appeared. Nevertheless the German campaign persisted to countries of predominantly Catholic population, and there were signs that it was having some effect. Catholic opinion in several countries ... seemed to be returning to the view that, although the Nazis had persecuted the Church, this was over and now they could be regarded as a tolerable alternative to Communism. If this opinion is allowed to gain ground in countries such as Holland, Belgium, France - United States Catholic opinion should also be taken into account - the Allied cause would be deprived of an important element of potential resistance to Nazism. It is therefore urgent that counter-propaganda should be intensified.

Among the counter-propaganda measures that were advocated was the recommendation that leaflets emphasising the religious aspect of the fight against Nazism should be dropped on France, 'where the natural tendency of a predominantly Catholic Government to bring about

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11 These remarks were cut from the film before it was released in the United States, possibly because America's own race problems made them too sensitive (Emeric, p. 181, footnote).
closer relations with the Holy See may easily be exploited by Germany in Catholic circles everywhere, and cause dangerous confusion even in the British Empire, especially French Canada.' So, French-Canadian trapper Johnnie has to demonstrate not only that he is free to pursue his cultural identity within the confines of the British Dominion of Canada, but also that he is free to worship as a Roman Catholic under British rule, but would be denied that freedom under a Nazi regime.

But it was necessary to reveal that National Socialism was not merely racist and anti-Roman Catholic, but oppressive of any value system that could compete with its own. The Boulting brothers' film, *Pastor Hall* (Charter, 1940), which claimed to be 'based on authentic, verified facts,' showed that Protestant religious leaders in Germany had to toe the party line or face the unpleasant consequences. Originally planned before the war, the subject was deemed too sensitive to British/German relations and was not cleared by the BBFC until war was declared in 1939. It articulates the Nazi philosophy imposed on its own people: Germany must be great and feared; there is no place in the Third Reich for Jews, and their property can be destroyed without redress; children must be taught along the party line, which means no emphasis on the Old Testament in Sunday School; a girl raped at a labour camp cannot receive justice because her attacker is the nephew of a high-up official in the Party and, though only fourteen, she is biologically ready and able to fulfil her destiny, which is to be the mother of children for the Fatherland. Pastor Hall plans a sermon to denounce National Socialism and is put in a concentration camp, where a seventy-five year-old man is given twenty-five lashes for quoting St. Paul as he peels potatoes, another is left all day hanging by his wrists because he has been too slow in his work, and Pastor Hall himself is condemned to a similar fate for refusing to sacrifice his daughter. Dissent is not allowed under the Nazis.

In Pressburger's screenplay dated November 1940, there are two scenes where reference is made to concentration camps. The first is in the factor's house at Hudson's Bay, where Krantz tells Lohrmann of his previous experience working in a concentration camp: 'Ah! Dachau (As who should say "Ah Vienna" or "Ah Paris"). I wish I was there now. You don't have nearly

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18 'Counteraction of German Religious Propaganda,' INF 1/768, 24 October 1940.
19 Olivier gives a rumbustious performance as Johnnie. His accent seems improbable, but since he was coached by a genuine trapper (Cottrell, p. 180), and since Paul Muni's accent as a French-Canadian trapper in *Hudson's Bay* (1940) seems equally overdone, we may assume that it is close to the real thing.
20 *Pastor Hall* (Own Transcript).
21 James C. Robertson, "British Film Censorship goes to War," *Historical Journal*, 2 (1), 1982, p. 34.
22 Most of John and Roy Boulting's films were, like *Pastor Hall*, 'stories of reality, stories which face up to vital problems instead of evading them' (Catherine de la Roche, *The Director's Approach to film-making: John and Roy Boulting*. London: BBC, 1947, unpaginated). But in *Thunder Rock* (Charter Films, 1942) they experimented with steep camera angles and an expressionist distortion of figures in order to stress the unreality of the figures conjured up in the imagination of a novelist isolated in a lighthouse.
such a good time in the Navy. ... It's not so lively.' He then offers to tell Lohrmann yet again the story of the Pole whose tongue they tore out because he refused to say "Heil Hitler", and how they made 'the old professors crawl around and bark like dogs' ('1940 Screenplay', pp. 38-39). The scenes were cut, possibly because they were considered to be too strong for a then still neutral America to accept. There is a possibility, though, that a reaction to the script closer to home may have influenced their removal: 'Dr. Vaughan Williams [said] a friend of his couldn't read the script because he found it too horrifying' ('1941 Diary', Jan. 31st).

Pressburger also noted in his diary the oddity of encountering in Canada people and places that reminded him strongly of his native Hungary: 'Two paysants - seem somehow familiar. As they pass us I hear them talk Hungarian. How strange. They walk and talk as they did once in their native home village. Very sure and confident. Their jackets with fat spots are the same also'. When he arrived in Canada he started his research to find a suitable German settlement for the second confrontation between opposing ideologies. Having read about a hundred press cuttings he decided the most interesting of them were 'about the Hutterites. I would like very much to see them in the picture'. He arrived at one of the settlements, which looked to him, 'like a big Hungarian "Tanya". The place is full of geese', and the head of the settlement, 'smiles all the time, speaks straightforward and expects straight speech from others. He puts us questions, learns soon I am a Jew'.

Pressburger may have been attracted to a Hutterite settlement as the second area of confrontation because their history and that of the Jews in Europe had many similarities. He had read some of the old books that were kept in one of the larger of their settlements in Alberta, and noted they were 'Diaries from the 16th Century on. Handwritten pages, it looks like the leaders through the centuries have found it a joy to keep a diary' ('1940 Diary', pp. 36, 28, 58-59, 52). From them he would have discovered that the Hutterites originated in Germany in the sixteenth century as an Anabaptist sect. Religious and political enmity combined with envy of their thrift and efficiency had led to persecution, which drove them out of Europe to settle in America. They would serve as an ideal platform for a conflict between the ideals of freedom and compulsion, though their pacifist beliefs and christian-communist social organisation would hardly have endeared them to the more militantly anti-communist American patriots.

17 But he was puzzled as to why they had come all the way to Canada when there was, in England, a 'bigger and better-equipped settlement. This is the strange thing in the Huts. Here in Winnipeg nobody knows about them and we are coming from England and had no idea that there is a settlement there' (Ibid., p. 59).

18 J. A. Hostetler and G. E. Huntingdon, The Hutterites in North America. New York: Rinehart, 1967, pp. 2-6. Pressburger may have had to close his mind to the reason why many Hutterites moved to Canada from the U.S.; the treatment of a group of their young men who refused to fight in the First World War and were sentenced to 37 years in solitary confinement in Alcatraz. Two died from ill treatment, which included being hung by the wrists for nine hours a day (Ibid., pp. 8-9).
The opening confrontation was the principal platform for the exposure of the speciousness of Nazi propaganda against the British Empire and its newly declared respect for Roman Catholicism, but the next confrontation, with the Hutterites, was to be the climactic for demonstrating the evil nature of Nazi ideology and the capacity for these exponents of the ‘Master Race’ to make fundamental errors of judgment. When Hirth and his underlings encounter a group of German-speaking people living in an isolated community, they assume that their aims and sympathies must be the same. They also assume that their leader will be a dictator with followers who obey his commands, that anyone who dares to leave the community will be confined to a concentration camp if they ever return, and that they must all share the driving ambition of any German to dominate the area in which they live. Hirth shows his incomprehension of their way of life by uttering a rallying cry to the instincts of the German Bund: blood and soil. He addresses the assembled community with the *sturm und drang* of an electric storm as a dramatic accompaniment.

Where there is a question of blood, where one is governed by the deepest of racial instincts, then every other consideration is swept aside. People like yourself, German or of German ancestry, rise up with all the might and power of all the great German people behind you, conscious of the sacred duty that binds us all together. ... Yes, you, brothers - I call you brothers and proudly acknowledge you as such - there is a new wind blowing from the East, a great storm coming across the sea - a hurricane which will sweep aside all the old, outmoded ways of life. A new order, not only for Europe but for the whole world. Those who stand in its way will be crushed out of existence. You will have your share of the happiness and prosperity that is waiting for us all when the storm is over and the sun rises, that mighty sun which will give us everything we need in life. I'm talking of the greatest idea in history: the supremacy of the Nordic race, the German people. I'm talking of the being whose name I'm sure lives in every heart, whose name hangs on all our lips whether we can shout it to the world or only whisper it in one another's ears. Germans! Brothers!! I ask you to join with me in paying homage to our glorious Fuhrer. Heil Hitler!!

(Own Transcript).

The speech is delivered with the brazen edge of arrogant assumption that it will be received with rapturous assent. It is, however, received in shocked silence. Hirth has assumed he is the company of willing allies, but these are people who have fled before other winds of intolerance from the east and whose whole social and religious philosophy is based on the unchanged and unchanging form of pre-Lutheran language and logic contained in their ancient scriptures (Hostetler, p. 12). He has made a monumental error. Peter, the leader of this particular community of Hutterite brethren, disabuses him with a rejoinder that begins with slow patience but rises to its own contained passionate climax of refutation.

Someone has given you ... a completely false impression of us. We are only one of many settlements founded by people who left their homes in Europe because of famine, because of starvation, because of racial and political persecution, and some like ourselves, because of their faith. New land, new boundaries, a new world, but all have found here in Canada security, peace and tolerance and understanding which, in Europe, it is your Fuhrer's pride to have stamped out. You call us Germans - you call us brothers! Yes, we
are Germans, we older people. Our names are German, our tongue is German, our old hand-written books are in German script. But we are not your brothers. Our Germany is dead today. ... Our children grow up against new backgrounds, new horizons - and they are free - free to grow up as children, free to run and to laugh without being forced into uniforms, without being forced to march up and down the streets singing battle songs.

You talk about a new order in Europe ... The new order where there would not be one corner, not a hole big enough for a mouse where a decent man can breathe freely. We don't hate you, it is against our faith to hate. We only hate the power of evil which is spreading over the world. You and your Hitlerism are like the microbes of some filthy disease, filled with the longing to multiply yourselves until you destroy everything healthy in the world (Own Transcript).'

The speech celebrates freedom and tolerance and rejects compulsion and hatred. But more than that, it uses the very same analogy of a disease spreading from the east to pollute and infect all that is healthy that the Nazi propaganda film, *Der Ewige Jude* (Deutsche Filmgesellschaft, 1940), used in order to denigrate and vilify the Jews. Pressburger has out-Goebbeled Goebbels. This is, I believe, the heart of the film. Hirth speaks and struts with great charismatic power but is eclipsed by the restrained passion with which Peter carefully articulates a rebuttal of his inflammatory views. Hirth, the prophet of a false god who dreamed of his exploits being made the subject of compulsory lectures to the Hitler Youth, will now be on the defensive. His first decisive act after this confrontation is to order the execution of one of his own men; the gentle Vogel, who had defended a fifteen-year old Hutterite girl from the salacious intentions of his compatriots and had wanted to stay with the Hutterites. The six Nazis are now a depleted band of three (two having been lost in the flight from Hudson's Bay), and by the time they reach their next significant encounter with a representative of democracy they number only two (one having succumbed with terror before the penetrating gaze of an Indian chief).

This third confrontation is with Philip Armstrong Scott, an effete and decadent-seeming Englishman who is camping by a lake in the Rockies while writing on the tribal customs of the indigenous natives. He offers them hospitality, and Hirth sums up his typically English character while availing himself of part of that hospitality, a shower with the choice of hot or cold water: "They're rotten to the core - soft and degenerate all through - No, I'll have cold." He pulls

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19 In the middle of Peter's speech is the second reference to concentration camps in the November 1940 screenplay. 'The last of our people were driven out by Hitler only two years ago. The Storm Troopers came while they were at their midday meal. They were not allowed to finish it. ... Some were arrested, all the rest were given twenty hours to leave the country. Anna and her mother escaped to Switzerland. Her father was sent to a Camp. He died there, ten months ago' ('1940 Screenplay', p. 111).

20 'Comparable with the Jewish worldwide wanderings throughout history are the mass migrations of an equally restless animal, the rat. ... they spread disease. Plague, leprosy, typhoid, cholera, dysentery, etc.' (*Der Ewige Jude*, English translation quoted from the subtitled copy, IWMDF. See also R. Taylor, *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany*. London: Croom Helm, 1979, p. 193).

21 'Goebbels considered himself an expert on propaganda, but I thought I'd show him a thing or two' (Emeric, p. 166).
the cord, shudders and gasps and thereby proves himself to be comically inadequate. He and his sullen companion are then entertained with more than food and water; the writer is a man of wide cultural interests, who has a genuine Picasso and an original Matisse in his teepee to be shown and admired. When the response is less than enthusiastic, he turns to literature and reads a passage from a copy of Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* to them, but their reaction is equally muted. He then turns to his own work, which draws some unflattering comparisons between the habits of the Blackfoot tribe and a "modern European tribe".

Their small boys were trained in the arts of war, which they considered to be the only pursuit worthy of a man, but they preferred to attack by night rather than by day and wherever possible, to shoot the enemy in the back. Their smaller neighbours lived in constant danger from them. They also believed in first terrorising their opponent by covering themselves in war paint and beating loudly on their tribal drums. Familiar to you? What price Goebbels, eh? ... When a tribal leader really desired to drive a point home, he used that most terrible of public speaker's weapons, repetition. Constant and utterly wearisome repetition. Old man Hitler himself! (Own Transcript).

Even this does not seem to excite his guests; only when the helpers have retired for the night do the Nazis dare to attack their host and show their true feelings and real opinions. They insult his courage and patriotism, threaten him with his own gun and tie him up. His precious paintings are smashed and put on the fire, and Hirth informs him that Thomas Mann was a "swine who had been kicked out of the Reich years ago". *The Magic Mountain* joins the Picasso and the Matisse with the comment, "Be thankful we don't burn you, too", before the research notes on 'Blackfoot Tribal Customs' are also consigned to the blaze.

The decadent Englishman redeems himself by growing angry at the destruction of his art and his work. He grits his teeth and murmurs, "Grown up men behaving like spiteful little schoolboys." He pursues the fleeing Nazis and traps one of them in a cave. He refuses assistance from his helpers and approaches the cave alone, counting the bullets from his assailant's gun, one of which hits him in the leg. Nothing daunted, he enters the cave and we hear the sound of blows accompanied by "That's for Thomas Mann. That's for Matisse. That's for Picasso. That's for me." He then emerges and declares, "He had a chance. One armed superman against one unarmed decadent democrat." He has struck four blows for democracy and against the enemy's propaganda broadcasts which had dubbed the pair heroes: "Two brave Nazis against 11 million Canadians."

But it is faintly ridiculous. The entire Leslie Howard sequence disturbs the quasi-documentary style of the rest of the narrative, and fails to convince on the grounds of relevance to the theme of the Nazi ideology as a threat to Western democracy. That Nazi propaganda peddled an image of the English as weak and effete was true; that the National Socialists were
averse to avant-garde art and literature was well-known; that they had banned and burned many works that they considered to be decadent was also well-known; but to label these two representatives of that ideology as gangsters, and react to their revelation of their true identity with the accusation that being Nazis explained their arrogance, stupidity and bad manners, seems a little tame in the circumstances. As Roy Armes has pointed out, 'His valiant and fearless response to their desecration of these symbols of Western culture is presumably intended to demonstrate the awakening of the dormant Anglo-Saxon will to victory, but it plunges the film into a melodramatic absurdity' (Armes, p. 220).  

One possible explanation for this lapse of credibility within the screenplay may be that the scenes as filmed departed a long way from their original conception. When Howard made his contribution to 49th Parallel, he was still filming his own production of Pimpernel Smith (British National, 1941). The idea for this film had come to him on a skiing holiday in Austria shortly before the Anschluss in 1938. A painter by the name of Alfons Walde told him disquieting stories of friends liquidated, and said that his own pictures, sketches and murals had been labelled as decadent by the Nazi clique and would certainly be condemned as Jewish bait.  

Pimpernel Smith is the story of the rescue of a newspaper editor from Nazi-occupied Austria by a mild-mannered, effete English academic, and it ridiciles the Germans as uncultured, humourless, ungentlemanly and uncivilised. Pressburger wrote in his diary, 'Arrived on set (Tee-Pee). Howard on it. They were shooting an entirely unknown text to me out of a bit of paper. Slow and bad. Then we rushed to see rushes ... the first scenes of Howard's work. Again new lines, twisted or the wrong way, hurried and bad' ('1941 Diary', 15 March). Howard apparently had 'a weakness for re-writing scenes shortly before they were put on film, sometimes improvising dialogues minutes before a scene was shot'. One of the screenwriters for Pimpernel Smith, Roland Pertwee, commented that 'it was rare for him to play a scene as written and in the final analysis what appeared on the screen was an amalgam of my stuff and his own improvisations' (In Search, pp. 88-89). Because Howard was a producer in his own right and a star whose performances were well-known in both Britain and the United States, it would have been extremely difficult for Pressburger to insist on the scenes being played as

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22 The Robsons considered that this character 'plays right into the hands of Dr Goebbels with almost every word he utters', and condemned the film as an example of the average 'Continental European film', in which it is 'always “they,” the forces of evil, who triumph over “us,” the good, the decent people' (M.M. Robson, "49th Parallel," Dumfries and Galloway Standard and Advertiser, 8 April 1942, p. 5). The publication of their views provoked a fairly lively discussion in their local newspaper. Powell and Pressburger were sufficiently concerned for Powell to respond to it, saying that 'the film was and is the exact expression of the truth; and our intention was that it should be seen and heard by the widest possible audience and provoke sincere discussion and thought' (Michael Powell, "49th Parallel," Ibid., 29 April 1942, p. 4).

they had been written. He may have attempted to counter the stylistic inappropriacy of the sequence by reworking part of it as a 'dream', but it was abandoned, and only Vaughan Williams's atonal piano accompaniment to this part of the film still indicates a dream-like quality. Howard, in a wartime broadcast to the North American continent, had pronounced that:

Democracy to survive at all, must be as militant as autocracy, and what the world needs now is ... the outspoken, militant and ringing democracy of Roosevelt, representing the righteous anger of the free people of the world aroused against the cynical arrogance of the totalitarian feudalists.

The last two encounters in 49th Parallel, those involving Howard and Massey, both end in violence, the easy-going and hospitable attitudes of both men turned to righteous anger by the criminal acts and the arrogant rhetoric to which they are subjected.

The final confrontation is staged in a box-car crossing the border from Canada to the United States, the 49th parallel. Hirth, the only survivor of the six crewmen of the German U-boat, is trying to slip across the border into the neutrality of the United States where he will be safe. The Canadian soldier (Massey), who has overstayed his leave by eight days, is anxious to avoid the attentions of the military police. Not suspecting the identity of his companion in the freight car, he complains about his life in the army, the duties to which he has been assigned (guarding a canal in Canada rather than being sent overseas to "knock hell out of the Nazis"), and the food he has to eat (beef three times a day and no parsnips). Hirth knocks him unconscious with his own gun, takes his uniform and forces him to cross the border against his will (thereby making him a deserter), declaring, "We've beaten these dirty democracies, these weaklings. ... What do you know of the glorious mystical ties of blood and race that unite me with every Aryan German. When I step on American soil I will not be alone. Adolf Hitler and all the great German people will go with me". The Canadian pours scorn on these sentiments and declares that as a democrat he has the right to complain about anything he pleases. The American customs officials initially feel that they must allow Hirth into the country since that is the law, but are persuaded by the Canadian to send the car back to Canada on the grounds that it contains two items not listed on the manifest: the Canadian and the German. The soldier orders Hirth to "Put 'em up" and proceeds (we are left to assume) to give him a thrashing. He gets his chance to "knock hell" out of one Nazi after all. End of film.

The end of the film, however, was shot at the beginning in Canada and was rewritten at least twice. Raymond Massey, not happy with the way his part had been scripted, 'wanted to change practically every line in the scene' (Life, p. 374). A compromise was reached, and

24 'Worked on the end of Howard's scene again. They shot the scene where Howard woke up. Eric rather cruel about the idea of the "dream". Fred defended it' ('1941 Diary', 21 March).
Powell concluded that they had a 'great finish to a great picture'. Pressburger, however, was not happy with the ending, and neither was Vaughan Williams when he was shown the sequence preparatory to scoring the music. But neither of them expressed their dissatisfaction as strongly and publicly as Rodney Ackland, who had helped to write the screenplay. In his autobiography he describes the final sequence of the script as decided upon by Powell, Pressburger and himself.

The whole meaning of "49th Parallel" as Emmerich, Micky and I had worked it out, was contained in the final sequence of the script: Eric Portman, as the one surviving Nazi, so misunderstood the meaning of democracy that, crossing the 49th parallel (the frontier between Canada and the United States) expecting to find barbed wire, sentries and machine guns, he did not realise he was actually in neutral America - so, re-entering the cattle-truck in which he had been hiding, he was shunted back into Canada again.

He then gives his opinion of that scene as it was played in the finished film.

Raymond Massey as a Canadian farmer, the spokesman for democracy, now advanced on Portman, a hunted figure, starving and at the end of his tether, and rolled up his sleeves with the intention of beating him up (Ackland, pp. 102-103).

Which, he protested to Powell, was sheer Fascism. And he has a point. If democracy can only defeat totalitarian regimes by using their methods, can it still claim the moral high ground? This adoption of the methods of the enemy for use by Britain and her allies was to be central to Powell and Pressburger's most ambitious production of the war years, *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (The Archers/Independent Producers, 1943), where the necessity for the allies to abandon gentlemanly rules of conduct for the enemy's strategy of total warfare would be explored in more depth but with equal ambivalence. Many critics of *49th Parallel* focused on the natural tendency of audiences to side with the hunted man rather than with the hunters, and years later an American told Powell his feelings about the film.

I end up admiring Eric Portman's German officer. He does make it to the U.S.A. but he's brought back to British territory by very unfair means. There are characters supposed to represent the best of Allied ideals but I find them very difficult to believe in - Olivier's obnoxious French-Canadian, Walbrook's weak Huttite [sic] and Leslie Howard's silly Englishman.

Powell's response was, 'People are complex. They're not just black and white'. He defended the ending to Ackland by saying: 'We were told that for Canadian audiences you've got to have action at the end of the picture'. In his autobiography he claimed that 'the scene in the boxcar in *49th Parallel* sums up all that we have learnt about Nazism and democracy. [There is] a duel of words between the Nazi and the Canadian soldier, and although there was some violence, force didn't come into it. The opponents were of equal stature but different creeds'.

The truth may be that the needs of the writers, the director and the actors had to be balanced.

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27 Ackland, p. 103; *Life*, p. 375.
in order to complete the film. And Powell was the director, on whom the responsibility for completion principally rested.

There were accusations made that he behaved like a dictator. Ackland waxed furious over his treatment of the actors who accompanied him to Canada. In the name of realism, Powell had decreed that the crew of the U-boat should sail up the St. Lawrence river in a replica submarine, much to the dismay of the actors involved. Their protests were ignored and the safe completion of that sequence was followed by a similarly uncomfortable mock-up of the actors escaping from the fuselage of the crashed plane in Lake Louise.

A specially constructed fuselage containing the unhappy actors was shoved out into the water. The actors were instructed to break out of it, dive under it and come up on the other side looking properly panic-stricken. The unfortunate Raymond Lovell could not swim [and] somebody at the last moment threw a stink-bomb into the water to add to the terror and confusion [so that] even the strongest swimmers found themselves momentarily in difficulties. Eric Portman ... realised that poor Lovell was literally drowning.

All of which left Portman 'choking with rage and lake-water' and Powell 'pale and shocked' (Ackland, p. 102). But it was not only the actors who complained of Powell's attitude. Pressburger himself made this note in his diary, 'He has dictator ambitions and I don't like dictators. Even if they are called Michael Powell' ('1940 diary', p. 59). Powell acknowledged that the first time he had full responsibility 'for very big decisions at high level, was on 49th Parallel, dealing with Governments, and pushing whole countries around in the cause of films and a really epic idea conceived in epic terms', and declared it an unforgettable experience, 'having an epic that size over a great country and getting everybody cooperating down from the Arctic Circle to Niagara Falls, it was a wonderful business of generalship' (G-Y, 1971, p. 5). And 'getting everybody cooperating' is the crucial phrase; he could not merely dictate.

Shooting the exteriors for 49th Parallel provided Powell with the opportunity to do what he enjoyed most, leading a group of men on an epic adventure. He was conscious of following in the footsteps of previous explorers of the territory. 'We reached Wolstenholme and put in - like Henry Hudson and Robert Flaherty before us', and when the ship completed its voyage back to the warmer climes of Newfoundland, he declared, only slightly tongue-in-cheek, that the 'voyage With Powell to the Arctic was over' (Lite, pp. 368-371). Powell always disputed his debt to Flaherty, but the comparison between the two men was inevitable since their films sometimes covered similar territory and themes and they both enjoyed the dual roles of explorer and recorder.\footnote{Flaherty had filmed Nanook of the North (Reville Frères, 1921) in Hudson's Bay. Powell was given a contract by Korda on the strength of The Edge of the World, which bore a conceptual similarity to Flaherty's Man of Aran. The first projected production that Korda assigned to Powell would have again followed Flaherty's film, Elephant Boy (London Films, 1937), since Burmese Silver would also have been set on the Indian sub-continent.} Powell had dreamed of making The Edge of the World for seven
years, and (while making quota quickies at Gaumont-British), found himself sharing the cutting rooms with Flaherty, who was slowly and laboriously editing his film, *Man of Aran* (Gainsborough, 1934). Powell told him about St Kilda,

and we had endless arguments about the way to film such a wonderful event. He would strike the cutting room table with his great fist, sending everything falling into the bin and roar: "'Tis God's pity, Michael, that you were not there with even a Kodak on the day the event took place. 'Tis a crime. .... Facts are facts, you cannot beat Nature. You can't invent the evacuation of an island, you can't ignore the death of a people! Ya' should have been there when it happened! With half a dozen cameras".

Which, Powell noted, was 'fact against fiction, the eternal argument between the liar and the journalist, between "I was there", and "this is how it must have been"' (Life, pp. 237-238). But Flaherty was not really a journalist; he sometimes recorded life as it had been, not necessarily as it was, to suit his own romantic vision of the islanders' lives. Powell was more pragmatic in his approach and when St. Kilda proved unavailable he began to analyse his story: 'Its appeal was a universal one. Its theme was just as vital, its story just as timely, on any Scottish island' (Edge, p. 48). The actual location was not important, only the concept, which lay,

not in the faithful record of externals ... It emerged from emotion, debate and conflict, which are the stuff of drama. A filmed record of the actual St. Kilda evacuation would not necessarily have been more effective in conveying the significance of this watershed in a traditional way of life than a fictionalised drama filmed on a different, still-inhabited island. Cinema, after all, is illusion, although it is the illusion of reality ('intro, Edge, p. xii).

Powell argued that his own film would not be like *Man of Aran*: "This is a Drama! an Epic! About people!! I want to dramatise it and use actors mixed with real people." He didn't want to make a documentary because documentaries were for "disappointed feature film-makers and out-of-work poets" (Life, p. 241).

Powell claimed to distrust documentary.

I have no interest in what people tell me is the truth - how do I know it's the truth. I'd rather make up my own truth. The documentary boys are always saying it must be better because it's true. I question this assertion. I just don't believe it. Well, any painter will tell you that or any poet. The trouble is I have a poetic approach too. I have to find a theme or something which appeals to my imagination and work on it from there (G-Y, 1971, p. 3).

Even so, he did share some of the documentary film-makers' aims. One reviewer of *The Edge of the World* observed, perceptively, that he was 'capable of grasping the opportunities which reality offers, and moulding them to form the foundations for his stories', and that Powell, 'though not closely allied with the documentary movement, is a supreme documentalist. Throughout his films there are touches revealing his understanding of reality in

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29 He was 'far from averse to "inventing" what his noble primitives should be seen to do' ('Intro', Edge, p. xi). Harry Watt witnessed part of the filming of *Man of Aran*, and noted that the islanders no longer hunted the basking shark for its oil, but did breed horses for sail on the mainland, an activity Flaherty was unwilling to include because he 'didn't want to show that the islands were serviced by a steamer! This was cheating.' (Harry Watt, *Don't Look at the Camera*. London: Elek Books, 1974, pp. 55, 58).
relation to the screen'. And the filming was on location, where the cast and crew shared the rugged terrain and the isolation from the comforts and necessities of the mainland that had shaped the islanders' lives. The dramatic climax was, literally, orchestrated by Bill Williamson, who invented sprightly music for the rounding up of the sheep and for the love scenes; and when it came to the final sequences and I explained what I wanted, how the audience must slowly become aware that they are witnessing, through the death of one man, the death of a whole community, he took the bit between his teeth and composed ten minutes of opera without the voices' (ibid., pp. 258-259).

It was a man's world of action and adventure that attracted Powell most, and he thrived as the leader of an expedition: 'I have a habit of surrounding myself with people whom I like and of dragging them with me into an adventure. I look on my films the way an explorer surveys an empty portion of the map and vows to fill it'. His apprenticeship with Rex Ingram had convinced him that 'the best way to make a work of art was to surround yourself with a band of brothers, master craftsmen, who would give you of their best, and who would expect you to lead them to triumph' (ibid., pp. 242 and 309). Powell and his 'band of brothers', who also travelled under the *nom de guerre* of the 'Foula Regulars', were reunited for the location shooting in the Orkneys on *The Spy in Black* in 1939, and some of the band were called upon again for the location shooting in Canada on *49th Parallel*. It is, perhaps, unfortunate that a 'band of brothers', an élite group following the direction of a charismatic leader, could be misconstrued as very similar to an élite racial group of men giving unquestioning devotion to a charismatic leader who promised to lead them to triumph: the German bund. Powell, however, had instituted a parliament on Foula while making *The Edge of the World*, and he had declared his principles in *200,000 Feet on Foula* (1938), the book he wrote on the making of that film: 'No one man ever made a film. He can inspire it. He can stamp his personality on it. But in the long run it is good team work that makes a good film' (*Edge*, p. 327).

The democratic parliamentary tradition was revived for the making of *49th Parallel*, and the Foula Regulars were mustered to range over the great expanses of Canada. Powell had decided to 'give it a rough appearance, as if it were a real war picture, shot off the cuff. I wanted the compositions to look accidental and sometimes almost as if they had been grabbed by a hand camera in the middle of the action' (*Life*, pp. 356-357). He was responding to the immediacy of the wartime situation, and probably aware of the success that the German film-

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31 *The Edge of the World* was reissued in 1947, and John Huntley observed that, in its original form, 'the music lasted for eight minutes fifteen seconds - claimed as the longest single section of background ever recorded in this country; the whole reel contains no more than ten words of dialogue (John Huntley, "Critical Survey," *PFR*, 4, October 1947, pp. 18-19).
32 They were Finlay Currie, Niall MacGinnis, Bill Paton and John Seabourne.
makers were enjoying with their newsreel footage of countries occupied and armies defeated.
The film conforms to documentary requirements in many ways: using real locations and real
people in their native habitats; dealing with working people going about their normal work; and
incorporating events that occurred during the course of filming (e.g. the fall of France). The
location photography was important. It establishes the vast expanses through which the
characters travel and in which the Canadians live (thereby making the band of marauding U-
boat brothers seem small in stature and narrow in outlook), and dramatically exemplifies the
freedom of choice available to its fortunate inhabitants, as opposed to the total lack of freedom
accorded to the potential invaders and to the peoples that they subjugate. It also had to be
real and credible enough to appeal to the capacity for sympathetic identification of North
American audiences.
Pressburger's original screenplay has an opening and an ending that visually and narratively
demonstrates the scope and variety of landscape embraced by the border between the
USA and Canada. It opens on a map of the western half of the USA with its northern border
visible at the top, superimposed on a shot of a vast, restless crowd of people. The camera
then pans up the map to the western half of Canada so that the

strongly-marked Border-Line is at the bottom of the map emphasising the fact that the
Northern Border of the USA is the Southern Border of Canada. Beneath the surface of the
map the vast, restless crowd vanishes and is replaced by an Air View of the Rockies,
lonely and impressive.

The main title, 49th Parallel, appears along the line of the border and,

as the CAMERA starts to move along the line of the 49th Parallel, across the map of
Canada, the Air View of the Rockies disappears to be replaced by: foothills, prairies,
prairie-towns and cities, endless railways, winding rivers, a thousand lakes and forests of
spruce and pine, the great cities of the East, the grain-elevators, the massed shipping of
the St Lawrence and the Lakes, and the Gulf of St Lawrence.

The map disappears, the sea fills the picture and a superimposed title reads:

'IF ONE DAY A GERMAN SUBMARINE APPEARED IN THE GULF OF ST LAWRENCE ... '. Canadian Press.
The word 'IF' at the beginning, and the words 'Canadian Press' at the end are faded out so
that the title is no longer a hypothesis but a reality ('1940 Screenplay', p. 1).
The ending circles back to the beginning, with Hirth walking across the border at Niagara Falls
from Canada into the USA, 'battered, bruised and defeated'.

Let him go home and tell everybody what he has seen and heard. He has seen the
whole of Canada - lucky devil! Let him tell the others about it! Let him describe the prairies
and the mountains and the rivers and the lakes and the people whose country it is: who
intend to keep those prairies and mountains and rivers and lakes (Emeric, pp. 176-178).

33 And the extras playing Hutterites were, for the most part, genuine refugees from Hitler's Germany.
Very clever, but the Mol were unhappy with its ambiguity. In the end, neither the original opening nor closure were filmed. The words of the opening were superfluous since the camera reveals, and the orchestral score underlines, the landscape in all of its variety, and the camera pans along the map’s frontier from west to east with a voice-over narrative that emphasises the nature of that frontier and of the peoples that border it.

I see a long straight line athwart a continent. No chain of forts or deep-flowing river or mountain range but a line drawn by men upon a map nearly a century ago, accepted with a handshake and kept ever since. A boundary which divides two nations yet marks their friendly meeting-ground: the 49th parallel; the only undefended frontier in the world (Own Transcript).

It is a border that has no need of defence unless either country that borders it is invaded; that is its strength and its weakness. As Pressburger had surmised, ‘the Americans would certainly know that anything which can happen in Canada could also happen in the USA’. The border symbolises unity as much as division, and that unity extends, symbolically, beyond the borders of each country to embrace the United Kingdom.

It was important to show American audiences that the tolerance and individual respect for law and order enshrined in America’s constitution were shared by her neighbouring country to the north and, by implication, the U. K. Within the film’s narrative, as Marcia Landy has pointed out, unity within diversity became a significant feature of the message.

The trajectory of the film functions to portray the stage-by-stage elimination of the Nazi menace. It also provides the narrative with the opportunity to develop, in different contexts, the collection of diverse attitudes that is antithetical to the monolithic and obsessive attitudes of the Germans. Each episode presents a different personality, a different perspective, and a different set of attitudes, as if to demonstrate unity in diversity, but the irony is that the diversity is representative of unity, whereas the totalitarianism of the Nazis is revealed as fragmented and disintegrative (Landy, pp. 147-148).

It is the paradox of rigid control leading to the loss of what has been so jealously possessed.

The authentic locations, the topicality of the subject and the use of ‘real’ people as well as actors conformed to the realist principles of the documentary movement but, essentially, it is a series of parables on a common theme, which are more successfully coherent at the beginning of the narrative development than at the end. The six crewmen of the U-boat embark on a strange pilgrimage, on which they are burdened by errors of judgment, an inflexible devotion to a misguided ideology, and callous indifference to the rights of others. They are humbled but, with one exception, not saved. Kuhnecke, the practical man, dies because he failed to check the petrol in the plane they use to escape from Hudsons Bay.

Footnote:

The documentary film maker, Arthur Elton, claimed the battle between documentary realists and feature film makers had been won by January 1941. "The realist school then prevailed and has influenced film making to an extent ever since. The Pressburger pictures were deeply influenced by our realist techniques" (Elizabeth Sussex, The Rise and Fall of British Documentary. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975, p. 121). Powell is not mentioned.
Kranz and Jahner fall victim to the inferior races they despise, one shot by an Eskimo in retaliation for the innocent men and women the crewmen had shot, the other frightened into self-disclosure by the implacable stare of an Indian chief. Lohrmann, who holes up in a cave after stealing Scott's gun and spitefully destroying his most precious possessions, is tracked to his hiding-place by 'Indian George' and knocked unconscious by the man he had abused. Hirth witnesses the disintegration of the group as they are eliminated one by one, and is humiliated by those remaining when they refuse to obey his orders. At the end he is a hunted man, alone, hungry and fearful. He demands of the U.S. customs officials the protection of the law that he has denied to Canadian citizens; the right to life and liberty. He has reached his desired end but it is snatched away from him he is sent back to Canada, cowering in fear.

Vogel is the exception, the one who does achieve redemption. The first encounter in Hudsons Bay reveals the struggle for his soul. He surreptitiously gives the dying Johnnie the rosary denied to him by Hirth, but then immediately expunges that generous gesture by tearing down the portrait of Le Roi et La Reine that Johnnie had so proudly pinned to the cabin wall, viciously carving a swastika in its place with his bayonet. When Kuhnecke dies in the plane crash he sketches another cross, thereby revealing his repressed Catholic faith to a suspicious Hirth. At the Hutterite settlement he protects Anna from Lohrmann and Kranz, and listens attentively to the baker's account of the Hutterite social structure and beliefs. He begins to audibly question the ethics of National Socialism ("The ships we sank with women and children aboard. The lifeboats we shelled. Mm, we were good at that."). He fails to give the Nazi salute after Hirth's brazen speech to the assembled Hutterites, and disobeys Hirth by escorting Anna back to her home after she has threatened to reveal their true identities to the police. Questioned by Peter, he reveals how he, a simple, good human being, could "get mixed up with such a lot of gangsters". When Peter asks him to stay he is overjoyed, even though it would mean years in an internment camp. He is out of hell and facing purgatory; his doubts have been removed and the burden lifted from his back. It is with this hope of redemption before him that he is executed by his leader for desertion and treachery.

If money is the root of all evil, the Nazis are shown as dependent on that commodity. They demand money from the Factor of the Hudsons Bay Company, and are dismayed to find there is none, all trade being conducted by means of barter. They are disappointed that all the money the Hutterites gain from the sale of geese and wheat is spent on agricultural machinery. They kill a stranded motorist for his money, and empty the contents of Philip Armstrong Scott's wallet. Their vaunted strength is heavily dependent on the money-dominated form of capitalism that their leadership had condemned as zionist-western decadence.
Money, however, was as necessary to a struggling film-maker as it was to a group of Nazi escapees. The principal actors had agreed to appear in *49th Parallel* for the nominal fee of £2,000 each. Even so, the initial budget of £68,000 was seriously overrun, and the Treasury refused to send more dollars to Canada for completion of the location work. An injection of cash by Arthur Rank and Oscar Deutsch, however, saved the film from extinction, and a distribution agreement between the Rank-owned General Film Distributors and Columbia Pictures allowed the Treasury to bow out of the production. But as a commercially viable proposition, with big distributors financing it, the money problems came in a different guise.

Christopher Mann had negotiated a proper contract for the two of us, which gave 5 per cent of the profits to Emeric and 10 per cent to me. ... Leslie Howard took violent exception to our 15 per cent, and insisted on sharing it, which left Emeric, the author of the original story, in possession of the smallest royalty. He never let me forget it. And in return I have never let Emeric forget that Leslie Howard, the archetypical English gentleman, was in fact Hungarian-born (*Life*, pp. 382-383).

Powell’s explanation for Howard’s lack of generosity was that, as a producer and director with his own company, he would be sensitive about percentages.

In 1940, soon after arriving in England from America, Leslie Howard had written to Lord Halifax enclosing his ‘Notes on American Propaganda’ and, together with Anthony Asquith, had submitted to the Ministry of Information a memorandum entitled *The Film Industry in Time of War* (Powell was one of the signatories). While he was shooting his scenes in *49th Parallel*, Howard had discussed with Powell and Pressburger the possibility of setting up an association of film makers, a possible United Artists’ (*1941 Diary*, 17 March). By May, however, Powell and Pressburger had decided to form their own independent production company, which would be owned and managed on a fifty-fifty basis.

> We are going to pool our talents and show the film industry we know where the priorities are. We are going to share the final title in the credits, and it is going to read ‘Written, Produced and Directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger’. ... The story and the script are the most important thing. Then we have to find the money and boss the show - that’s the ‘produced by’ bit - and then I have to direct it (*Life*, p. 386).

Pressburger objected to Powell’s proposed name for their company, ‘Michael Powell Productions’ (*1941 Diary*, 13 May), and eventually they decided to call themselves ‘The Archers’, with a target as their trademark. The contract was signed on August the sixth.

Meanwhile, the post-production phase of *49th Parallel* continued. The editing was as much of a problem as for *The Edge of the World*. Then Powell had demanded ‘an editor with the eye of a hawk, the memory of an Indian and a heart of granite’, and Derek Twist had come to

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* Pressburger received an Oscar for the original story of *49th Parallel*. After their separate contributions were covered by the combined credit, neither Powell nor Pressburger received an Academy Award.
his rescue; this time he was saved by David Lean. ‘I gave David carte blanche, and he dived into that sea of film like Johnny Weissmuller into a jungle pool full of crocodiles.’ Out went scenes that had cost time and money to procure and in came alternative shots for those that had been missed or shot from the wrong angle. Close-ups vital to narrative continuity were shot by Lean with Rawnsley’s help, and shots of a submarine surfacing taken from some captured German film at the Mol gave the opening extra punch (Life, pp. 258; 379-380).

During the protracted editing and post-production process, Pressburger was involved in the technical niceties of cutting, and had at least one long discussion with Lean about the final form of the film.\cite{Emeric, pp. 183-184} He also took a keen interest in the musical score composed by Ralph Vaughan Williams and its recording by Muir Mathieson, the music director for the film. But one of the projects that he had written, together with Patrick Kirwan, on the wartime tribulations of the London Symphony Orchestra, remained only a project and was never even started (Emeric, pp. 183-184). It is, therefore, ironic that the first film to bear the Archers’ trademark gave him little opportunity to discuss orchestration. Leslie Howard’s next production, The First of the Few, was released in 1942 with a score by a famous classical composer, William Walton, and finance provided by J. Arthur Rank. Powell and Pressburger’s next production was also released in 1942, but with no score by a famous composer and with no finance from Rank.

One of Our Aircraft is Missing

When Powell returned from location shooting in Canada he was struck by the BBC’s slightly melancholy way of announcing aircraft losses to its listening public: ‘One of our aircraft has failed to return’. This was the notion that inspired Pressburger’s next script treatment and the title that appeared on the script outline which they showed to J. Arthur Rank. The head of General Film Distributors, C. M. Woolf, decided it was too defeatist, so Rank declined to finance it. One of Our Aircraft is Missing (The Archers/A British National Films Presentation, 1942)\cite{Life, pp. 387-388} was the somewhat less downbeat title adopted for the film that was finally financed by Lady Yule and John Corfield at British National, and which went into production at Denham Studios in the late summer of 1941 (Life, pp. 387-388). Powell maintained that it was Pressburger’s idea to ‘turn the story of 49th Parallel inside out, which is a typically Hungarian manoeuvre’, just as the script for

\cite{Pressburger Diary, 24 July} ‘Talked long on phone to Dave Lean about “49th”’ (1941 Diary, 24 July). ‘Saw new cut of “49th”. It seems all right now’ (Ibid., 25 July).
\cite{Life, pp. 387-388} And the production credits continue ‘with cooperation of the Royal Air Force, Air Ministry and Royal Netherland Govt., London’.
The Spy in Black had been typical of Pressburger.

Well you know it's the way the Hungarians see the world. They always see the world inside out. All their jokes are reverse jokes. They deal in paradoxes, that's why Chesterton is to them a revered writer. The man who is able to write, you know, brilliantly paradox after paradox ... It's very much in the Hungarian line of thought' (G-Y, 1971, p. 4).

And he thought it an interesting idea to show 'how one of our bomber crews got on in occupied territory' (Badder, p. 10).

By 1941 the Crown Film Unit had been established by the government to supply documentary films for the Ministry of Information. Target for Tonight (The Crown Film Unit, 1941), directed by Harry Watt, is a 48 minute film which tells the story of a routine RAF raid over Germany. According to Roger Manvell, it 'hit the note needed; this was Britain "dishing it out" not in terms of crude newsreel coverage or pedestrian documentary, but in terms of understanding the kind of men who had to make these dangerous missions as a nightly exercise in their dark Wellingtons' (Manvell, p. 84). C. A. Lejeune praised it for its factual accuracy and entitled her review in The Observer, "History in the Air".

The film in question is history, new style. It details like a log-book, the planning and execution of a bombing raid over Germany, from the moment when the reconnaissance plane drops the negative of the target, to the grey dawn when the last Wellington - F for Freddie - limps home to its base. It is not make-believe, this film, but fact - brief, grim, and laconic. The actors are real men [going] about their everyday jobs. Our great-grandchildren, watching Target for Tonight - which should certainly be sent to Washington or somewhere to be preserved - will be able to learn just how our airmen looked and behaved in the battles of 1941 (Chestnuts, p. 59).

But Lejeune was not an uncritical supporter of the documentary movement's agenda. She put her journalistic finger on a point that many ardent followers of documentary realism preferred not to notice: history is made up not merely of dry facts, as she explains in this review of Coastal Command (Crown Film Unit, 1942) entitled "The Documentalist's Dilemma".

In common with other documentary producers, however, Crown has one characteristic that chills me. There is a detachment in much of its work, an almost scandalized mistrust of showmanship, an effort, it would seem, to avoid, not only melodramatics, but any form of human appeal or persuasion. ... It is this fallacy [presenting history, not drama] that has helped to make the past, in the main, such a dead letter. All records, even photographic records, are a matter of selection and viewpoint. There must always be the individual choice behind the viewpoint, and into every record of fact the liveliest historians are those who can convey the feeling of a scene to later generations. ... Without some hint of this intangible quality, some ghost of a message from one human heart to another, no record, however factual, can be either truthful or complete (ibid., pp. 83-84). 39

One of Our Aircraft is Missing begins in the documentary style of Target For Tonight: the crew briefing; the take-off to strict timing; the long flight over the south-eastern counties of England, the Channel, and the western countries of Europe; and the eventual dropping of their

39 The music for this film was composed by Ralph Vaughan Williams. Perhaps it was impossible for him to compose two film scores in one year and that was why Powell and Pressburger opted for no score at all.
bombs on the selected target. But it quickly establishes warm and identifiable characters and relationships among the crew of "B For Bertie" even during this initial phase. Whereas *Target for Tonight* had been concerned only with the completion of the bombing mission and the tense wait for the one missing plane to limp back to base, *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* is more concerned with the crew of that one missing plane and the risks taken by the local people to hide them and return them home to Britain. It is a drama that uses documentary methods when convenient, in order to establish a feeling of authenticity and immediacy.

For the bombing raid, Powell profited from his experience on *The Lion Has Wings* and reconstructed the raid with models. David Rawnsley and Syd Streeter, had created the models that Powell had demanded for *49th Parallel*: the full-size mock-up of a German U-boat capable of doing five knots (when towed by a couple of tugs), and the crashed airplane fuselage that caused so much grief to the actors in Lac du Bonnet. The two of them were art director and unit manager respectively on *One of Our Aircraft is Missing*. Powell described Rawnsley as the sort of young man you wanted to be shipwrecked with on a desert island.

He was tall, broad-shouldered, good-looking, considerate of others - in fact, too good to be true. Then you discovered he was an architect and an engineer of genius and imagination. When you add to all these qualities the gifts of tact, diplomacy, patience, pertinacity and a love of his fellow men, you will agree that I should have mentioned him earlier. Every now and then, in our extraordinary, heart-breaking, back-breaking business, a man or woman appears or disappears upon whom you look back with regret, because they were made of too fine a material to be wasted on ordinary storytelling. David Rawnsley was one of these.

For *One of Our Aircraft is Missing*, Rawnsley designed and built a model of Stuttgart, which filled the floor of the Riverside Studios in Hammersmith. It ‘was all wired up for explosions and lighting effects, and flak coming up towards the camera, and you name it’, and Powell described as ‘a boy’s dream come true,’ adding, ‘If only my brother John could have lived to see it’. Powell has said that his relationship with his elder brother, ‘was to be the pattern of the partnerships and collaborations that later on shaped my life’ (*Life*, pp. 359, 391 and 32). Rawnsley would appear to be another manifestation of the elder brother that Powell constantly needed to replace. At Denham studios they had the complete shell of a Wellington bomber (courtesy of the RAF), which was wired up so that the gun turrets worked and all the essential parts moved. It was reconstruction, not actuality. David Lean was again their editor, and he brought with him Ronnie Neame as cameraman (who was immediately commandeered by David

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By 1944 Rawnsley was Rank’s art director, and began to develop Independent Frame, which Powell promoted to Rank as an anti-naturalistic revolution that would look back to the great days of silent films, using process backgrounds and foregrounds ‘in the way they should be used, combining actors, settings and cartoons, setting free a whole new world of possibilities in design and startling theatrical effect’ (Michael Powell, ‘Memorandum on a New Design for films’. February 1945. Quoted in Geoffrey Macnab, J. Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry. London: Routledge, 1933, p. 122).
Rawnsley to work exclusively on his model).

Some of the Canadian location photography which enhanced 49th Parallel immeasurably was supplied by Osmond Borrodaile, who also shot actuality material in London and Amsterdam for Hitchcock's Foreign Correspondent (Walter Wanger, 1940).41 By 1941, however, it was no longer possible to obtain actual shots of Dutch locations, so Powell and John Seabourne went to

scout out our own Low Countries in East Anglia, and found perfect Dutch locations in King's Lynn and Boston, and, of course, the Wash in Lincolnshire. ... They were full of houses built by traders who intermarried between families and between the two countries. Then there were the Fens, reclaimed sea marshes, which stretched for miles and dated back six hundred years. They were full of lock gates and canals and windmills and roads raised high against the tide. We only had to change the appearance of the windmills (Life, pp. 388-389).

A realistically-staged bombing raid and authentic-seeming locations were not enough; Powell decided have only authentic sound and no music unless justified by a source within the narrative. There may have been a reason beyond naturalism to account for the complete absence of extraneous music. One possibility might have been the desire to distance the film from the propaganda style of Nazi documentaries, which relied on actuality material gathered by cameramen on the front line and which reeked of authenticity. But Nazi newsreels were not informative, they were impressionist, emotive, all-conquering - a blitz in themselves of sound and image. The enemy always appeared to be humiliated to the point of absurdity, or at least utter, frozen inactivity - he was merely a gaping observer of the all-conquering armies which rolled swiftly and unopposed along his roads, his streets, or crept hideously on caterpillar tracks over his fields. Meanwhile music, bombastic, Wagnerian, hymn-like or merely gay and tuneful, mocked the civilian and soldier alike who failed to stem this onslaught by the Führer (Manvell, p. 93).

For Powell and Pressburger it may have seemed desirable to avoid the irrational and emotive trickery indulged in by the Nazi newsreel directors, while making use of the appeal to authenticity that those newsreels enjoyed. For them it was important to win the argument by means of rational debate and exposition, and music has the power to circumvent the rational and logical functions and appeal directly to the emotions.

In 49th Parallel Vaughan Williams's music does colour our reactions to the German U-boat and its crew. It starts with the guttural, menacing growl of the chords that accompany the surfacing of the submarine in Canadian waters, based on 'Deutschland, Deutschland uber Alles' but, interestingly, stopping short of 'Alles' (a motif that is repeated when Hirth sees Vogel make the sign of the cross). The Nazis' walk from Winnipeg to Western Canada is presented as a tedious trudge rather than a glorious triumph of the will, and when the hungry men are gazing into the well-stocked window of a Winnipeg delicatessen, they are mocked

41 Manvell, p. 36. Borrodaile took the opening shots of 49th Parallel: 'they are there in the film under the main title and as a heroic background to the names of the stars' (Life, p. 352).
by the Viennese-style waltz on the sound track. In *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* there is no music to mock or inspire except that which is generated by the narrative, but within that constraint it is used to telling effect. First, in the church, the organist softly plays a few bars of the Dutch national anthem in order to distract a German officer from his intention of observing and possibly questioning the congregation that contains five escaping British airmen (their parachutes concealed under the long skirts of five Dutch women). When the officer retreats, the whole congregation joins the organist in a full-throated rendition of that symbol of national identity and loyalty. Later, when the Germans play the records supplied to relieve their tedium by the Quisling and delivered by the Burgomaster’s son, their expectations of foxtrots and tangos are mocked, yet again, by the Dutch national anthem. On the way to the church one of the escaping crewmen whistles ‘Onward Christian soldiers’, and one member of the crew hears his wife singing on the radio in a BBC broadcast on the night of their escape. There is music, and it is manipulative, but it tickles rather than blasts our emotional responses.

The ‘authenticity’ of music and location was matched by the ‘authenticity’ of language: ‘Dutch was used throughout and very carefully supervised and written and rewritten by Sluyser, to give authenticity. When it was necessary for an English actor playing a Netherlander to speak English, we had to find a reason for it’. Meyer Sluyser, a Dutch publicist and journalist who brought them invaluable material from the Dutch Government in Exile, had become involved in the venture through Jack Beddington, Kenneth Clark’s replacement as head of the Mol Films Division. Powell was enthusiastic about the story because it ‘would give us an opportunity to show how people in the Low Countries and France were risking their necks every night to help such crews get back to their own country’. Sluyser had told Powell and Pressburger how Netherlanders had been tortured or shot for helping or hiding RAF officers who had turned out to be Gestapo men in disguise. ‘In our story, when the crew of “B For Bertie” were collected by the villagers and brought to a central point, they would have to be interrogated by someone intelligent. Were they what they said they were, or were they part of a cruel deception?’ (*Life*, pp. 389; 385).

The question of which country to choose in order to demonstrate how a British air crew could escape from enemy-occupied territory was simplified by respective political situations. The French government had signed an armistice and remained in France, governing the southern half of the country from Vichy. The country was split in two and there was no united response.

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42 The cruel deception was played out in Holland from March 1942 to May 1943. A Dutch intelligence radio telegraphist was captured along with the radio contact codes which allowed for the German infiltration of the whole Dutch-British Resistance apparatus, leading to the counter-intelligence game which they christened ‘Englandspiel’ (Jorgen Haestrup, *Europe Ablaze*. Odense: Odense University Press, 1978, pp. 293-294).
to the 'enemy'; many did resist but, equally, many more willingly or unwillingly collaborated with the Third Reich and the policies of Vichy. In The Foreman Went to France (Ealing, 1941), the collaborators are all middle-class and the heroes of resistance are all working-class, which may not have been strictly accurate but was a perceived truth at the time. Belgium was a possibility, but the King of the Belgians did not escape from his country and could not therefore be an effective rallying point.

Almost from the beginning, the great majority of the Dutch people had said "no" to the Nazi system. Most of them realised that armed resistance was pointless (Holland is far too densely populated and far too flat), but they could resist in other ways.

Six weeks after the start of the German occupation there were demonstrations in the streets of Holland's big towns on the birthday of Prince Bernhard. The leaders of the traditional democratic political parties had refused to compromise on the points of Holland's independence and the sovereignty of the House of Orange. A new political movement ... was joined by a million Dutchmen, and the Nazi party itself, despite all propaganda and silent blackmail, saw its membership increase from a meagre 30,000 to an equally meagre 50,000. ... This collective "no" to the Nazi ideology was spoken by all classes of Dutch people.42

In the film the local children who first find the stranded airmen are wearing safety-pins, the symbol of their resistance to Germans and Quislings and of their determination to stick together and keep their mouths shut. The house they are taken to discreetly displays its loyalty to the House of Orange by having orange blossom on top of a dresser and a portrait of the queen concealed beneath it. The Dutch government and Royal Family did not stay in Holland to be used as pawns by the Nazi invaders, but were in Britain as a focus for their people's loyalty. The people of Holland were, to a large extent, united in their moral resistance to the Nazi political system. Nonetheless, the Netherlands did have its share of collaborators, a fact reflected in the film by the character de Jong (played with dapper insolence by Robert Helpmann). He profits from the enemy's need for 'friends' within the local community to further his own need for power and financial gain.

The Silver Fleet (The Archers/ A Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger Presentation, 1943), like One of Our Aircraft, explores the theme of collaboration and resistance. Based on a twelve-page treatment for a short film entitled 'Remember Jan de Wit!', which Pressburger wrote in three days, it is 'the tale of a Dutchman, persecuted by his own countrymen because they think he is a Nazi collaborator. while in reality he is a patriot who martyrs himself by sabotaging the Dutch U-boat on which he is travelling, to avoid it being requisitioned by the Nazi enemy' (Emeric, p. 200). The Dutch hero is played by Ralph Richardson, his loyal but

long-suffering wife by Googie Withers, and the schoolmistress by Kathleen Byron. It was directed by Vernon Sewell, Powell's friend from the days of *The Edge of the World*.

Sewell's eyesight had deteriorated due to a nasty head injury during his naval service, and he declared that when he was directing Esmond Knight in the film, 'it was the blind leading the blind'. Knight had become totally blind as a result of a direct hit on his gun turret while serving on board the Prince of Wales during the pursuit of the German pocket battleship Bismarck. Within a few months, said Powell, 'he was back with us, playing a big part as an SS officer in *The Silver Fleet*, and has been with us off and on ever since'. Alfred Junge (newly released from an internment camp) was the designer, Allan Gray (also fresh from internment) was the composer, and the cinematographer was Erwin Hillier.

In *The Silver Fleet* there is a real Quisling who betrays the workers at the shipyard and his own uncle so that he can inherit his uncle's shop (the patriot reveals the traitor's true nature by chalking a large 'Q' on his back). In *One of Our Aircraft*, too, there is a real Quisling, and a patriot who pretends to be a friend of the Germans only in order to defeat them: Jo de Vries, the final link in the underground chain which spirits the bomber crew across the countryside to the Dutch coast and then to the North Sea. Powell had 'begged Emeric to write some decent parts for women', and he had obliged (*Life*, p. 391). The first person who interrogates the airmen (to establish if they really are who they say they are and not Gestapo agents in disguise) is a woman. It is a group of women, lead by Pamela Brown, who decide whether or not to believe them. It is a woman, played by Joyce Redman, who poses as the fiancée of one of them in order to get a permit to travel further across the countryside, and it is Jo de Vries, played by Google Withers, who hides them in her house which has been commandeered by the Nazi High Command. Powell did not need to beg, however; this was a not unrealistic depiction of events, since 'evaders often found they had to trust themselves entirely to women; and without the courage and devotion of its couriers and safe-house keepers, nearly all of them women, no evasion line could keep going at all. Several lines...

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44 *Life*, p. 413. Sewell removed all references to the brutality and racism of the Nazis. 'Out went the window-smashing and the execution of innocent civilians and in came Esmond Knight playing the Nazi commander as a humorous buffoon.' Pressburger withdrew his name from the credits (*Emeric*, pp. 200-201).

45 Powell had wanted Knight to play Hirth in *49th Parallel*, because 'his performance as the Angel in Tolstoy's *What Men Live By*, the little film that I wrote for Vernon Sewell in 1937, convinced me that he had that extra something that a good actor needs to dominate the screen' (*Life*, p. 358). But Knight had joined the Navy.

46 Gray wrote the music for *Emil and the Detectives* (1931), *Billy Wilder's Mauvais Graine* (Compagnie Nouvelle Commerciale, 1933), and *The Challenge* (1938). Hillier was a camera operator on *The Man Behind the Mask* (Joe Rock Studios, 1938), 'always dreaming up new angles, new movements for the camera to make, which would intensify the atmosphere and the action' (*Life*, p. 442).

47 Rather like the 'M' scrawled on Peter Lorre's back in Fritz Lang's *M* (Nero Film, 1931) or, later, the small boy who chalks a swastika on his father's back in Billy Wilder's *A Foreign Affair* (Paramount, 1948).
had women as their leaders'.

Leadership was an important question to be examined and determined in the context of escaping and evading capture in enemy-controlled territory. In 49th Parallel the crew of the U-boat had quarreled over who should be leader, and the group had fragmented under the pressures of their situation, refusing to obey the man who had arbitrarily assumed the position of command. In One of Our Aircraft is Missing the question of leadership was resolved in a very different way; by debate and acceptance that leadership was a transferable commodity. In the air, the responsibility is shifted from skipper to navigator and, in turn, other members of the crew, to show how this disparate group of men has become a team that works together without friction or dissent, working like one man. Once on the ground, however, the situation is different and, for most of the crew, without precedent. Pressburger explained why the elderly rear-gunner, Sir George Corbett, was ideally placed to be the leader of the group: 'Airborne, they are the professionals. On the ground, he is. For them it is a new and frightening experience. But he is an old soldier. He has been lost before' (Life, p. 392). So, when they find themselves stranded in occupied Holland, Sir George takes over: "I've been lost dozens of times, sometimes alone, sometimes with other men, several times with a whole regiment, so I know this much; either we separate and it's each man for himself or we stick together and somebody must command." They choose to stick together, and Sir George assumes the position of leader.

Leadership shifts also between the aircrew and the resistance workers who are helping them. George is sensible of the point at which the leadership position must be conceded to someone with more authority to assume it. When Jo de Vries asks him, "Are you in command?", he answers, "No. You are." She knows the particular situation they are in at that moment better than any of them, as had all the others who had guided them through the countryside and advised them how to behave. All of which finds an echo in the real-life situation of the creators of the film. In an article written for Variety (January 1944) Powell and Pressburger described the position that British film-making had achieved.

British production, the best of it, is based upon creative independence. We, the authors of this article, made some time ago a film which you called The Invaders. In this a Nazi asks a baker: 'Does your leader tell you what to do?' 'No', says the baker, 'we tell him what we want to do!' To which the Nazi gasps: 'Then how can he be your leader?' This is exactly what is happening to British production. All kinds of craftsmen are taking responsibility for making the current list of films: writers, actors, directors, cameramen, editors - and we mean sole responsibility for conceiving and delivering the film to the distributor each one on his own and in his own way.

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At the moment of making *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* they were almost, but not quite, in that enviable position.

The Netherlands and the United Kingdom both had political systems based on a constitutional monarchy and, more importantly, both were tolerant of religious dissent. The reaction of Dutch religious leaders to the New Order of Nazi Germany was to unite in condemnation.

From 1941... the Church declared itself in definite opposition to the actions of the Occupying Power. Here the three most important religious denominations - the Roman Catholic Church, the Dutch Reformed Church and the Reformed Church, ... were in agreement with each other. ... In January 1941, the Catholic Church promulgated a pastoral letter repeating an earlier prohibition against any Catholic joining any National-Socialist movement, and the Protestant Churches took the same stand (Haestrup, p. 86)." When the airmen are told that they are to be taken to a Roman Catholic church, it gives two of them a moment or two of doubt. They then declare themselves to be "chapel", and expand on that with, "Independent Methodist" and "Baptist". This gives the schoolmistress the opportunity to enquire if these are "your English Reformed Churches?", thereby reminding us (hopefully) of the similarly mixed Christian faiths in both Holland and Britain. Tom Earnshaw declares, uncomfortably, "If this gets back to Halifax I'll never hear the last of it", but he is persuaded, for the good of the whole group, to make an accommodation with his conscience. By making the church they travel to Roman Catholic rather than Dutch Reformed, it not only demonstrates that Roman Catholics in Holland were actively opposed to the Nazi creed but also, by implication, that those members of the crew who make no objection to a Catholic church are of that faith or in sympathy with it, as are most High Anglicans.®

There was another aspect of religion that would have made Holland a more appealing location for the film than France: the treatment of Jews by the local population. In February 1941 there were mass strikes in Amsterdam, in which practically the whole adult population took part as a protest against two German *raziass* in the centre of Amsterdam.

Over 400 Jewish men and boys were arrested and maltreated in full view of the population before being transported to Mauthausen camp from which there was no return. A few months earlier the churches and some of the students had protested against the exclusion of all Jews from official positions, but .... to have seen this happen, was more than the people of Amsterdam could stomach, and they downed their tools and shut their shops and businesses (De Jong, p. 140).

® When, in the summer of 1942, some fifteen thousand Dutch Jews were deported to death camps, the Catholic bishops combined with the Protestant Churches to send a telegram of protest to the Reichskommissar, threatening widespread Christian protest (John Cornwell. *Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII*. Harmondsworth: Viking, 1999, pp. 286-287).® In Hitchcock's *Foreign Correspondent*, Westminster Cathedral is established for the audience as Roman Catholic by nuns in coifs at the beginning and end of the sequence, and by an organ playing a Requiem Mass. There must have been some reason other than its nice, straight, tall tower for choosing this particular church; possibly it was to establish that Roman Catholicism was alive and well and thriving in the heart of London, where Hitchcock (a Roman Catholic) was born and raised.
In the film there is only one reference to the treatment that the Jews were experiencing under Hitler's regime: a glancing reference to a song, 'I kiss your little hand, Madam', and the German girl who sang it so much in England because she was not allowed to sing it in Germany. "The composer was a Jew, I believe." Pressburger decided on Stuttgart as the target for the bombing raid because he had lived there and that was the city in which he had first experienced German anti-Semitism.

In 49th Parallel the crew of the German U-boat sought to exploit the national, racial and religious diversity of the Canadian population but only succeeded in fragmenting their own tenuous unity. In One of Our Aircraft is Missing the crew of the British bomber are dependent on the unity of the Dutch population, and through it are able to sustain and reinforce their own unity. Despite the publicity slogan used to sell the film to an American audience, 'Now We are the Invaders', the real invaders are unmistakably the Germans, and the British are represented as potential saviours (even as they are being saved).

The mechanics of the plot demanded that the crew of the bomber should escape from Holland, and there lay a problem. Of all the German-occupied countries, the one facing Britain with the full length of its coast was the one most isolated from it. Because Germany's long-term aim was to incorporate Holland into the German Reich, it became more completely cut off than any other country in the north or west. During the whole war, only about 200 Dutch nationals succeeded in reaching Great Britain by crossing the North Sea. Some hundreds of British and American prisoners of war were helped to escape, but to Belgium and France and, from there, to Spain and Switzerland (Haestrup, p. 164). For the film, however, the route through France and Spain would have been too long and would have diffused the concentration on one country's contribution to the saving of British lives and liberty, so the direct sea-route was decided upon.

A nice escape boat from one of the smaller Dutch ports is easy to stage and arrange, but the English Channel was too wide at that point to cross in the hours of darkness. From dawn onwards, German patrol planes met their English counterparts over the channel and our heroes would undoubtedly be shot to pieces.

They learnt from the Admiralty that a number of steel platforms were going to be anchored out in the North Sea as a refuge for airmen who had been shot down. If they could get their bomber crew to these lobster pots,

we could have them picked up by the fast patrol boats which visited them regularly. The question was, would we be allowed by the powers-that-be to mention them, and would

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82 The song first became popular in Germany when Pressburger was pursuing a doomed love affair. Fritz Rotter, the song's composer, was his neighbour when he first lived in London (Emeric, pp. 53 and 121).

83 One of Our Aircraft is Missing, publicity material aimed at the American market, B F I. The U.S. title for 49th Parallel was The Invaders.
we be allowed to send a camera unit out to one of them to take establishing shots with doubles?

John Seabourne went out to one of the lobster pots on a patrol boat, and directed 'some of the most atmospheric shots in the picture. The Ministry helped us to get permission to use the lobster pots and our main difficulty was solved' (Life, pp.389-390). Amazingly, since the subject of escape from enemy-occupied territory was, in theory, prohibited by the Mol. The film passed the Ministry's censorship department and was released uncut by the BBFC in March 1942 (BBFC, p. 120).

Six months later, in October 1942, the BBFC released, uncut, another film on the subject of the escape of RAF personnel from occupied Europe. This film also contained scenes of an actual escape mechanism (shot with the assistance of, in this case, the Air Ministry), and had also been approved by the Mol's Films Division. Squadron Leader X (RKO, 1942) is based on a story written by Pressburger in 1941, entitled 'Four Days in a Hero's Life'. The hero is a German agent, who (equipped with an RAF uniform, an English accent, a photograph of his wife and a packet of Players) is parachuted into occupied Belgium to create anti-British propaganda, unfortunately choosing a night when the Belgian resistance are smuggling the crew of a British bomber home across the Channel. Eric Portman (again!) has to attempt an escape in reverse; from England back to Germany (Emeric, p. 195). C.A. Lejeune, impressed by 'its spanking good script', commented, 'Mr. Pressburger, as you may have noted if you are a smart reader of credit titles, wrote the story for 49th Parallel and One of Our Aircraft is Missing. His speciality is escape'. Which was hardly surprising in the circumstances.

Pressburger had escaped from Germany in 1933 and had escaped from France in 1935. Once in Britain he had contemplated escaping to America, but had remained to work with Korda and Powell on The Spy in Black (1939). When they had filmed 49th Parallel in Canada they had been accused of being an 'escapist film unit', an accusation reinforced by the defection of Elizabeth Bergner. Pressburger, since the entry of Hungary into the war, was classified as an enemy alien, and most of his compatriots were interned or on slow boats to Australia. It is quite probable that escape was at the forefront of his mind, possibly because he had no intention of making any attempt to do so. Britain had become his home and he wanted to defend it in any way he could. There was a strong feeling in some quarters that if you were not actively engaged in the war effort in Britain itself, you were by implication an escapee. There was 'a great wave of defamatory attacks on British citizens who had moved to America to avoid the war or who were still out there almost a year after hostilities had begun. ...

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"Gone With the Wind Up" was the scurrilous label attached to them.56

In Britain there was also a debate on what the public should be shown in their cinemas; should it allow them to escape from the realities of the war, or should those realities be the subject of feature films? Powell declared himself on the side of reality in an article published in Ernest Betts's column in the *Sunday Express*, in which he rebuts the opinion of the cinema managers that the customers want their reality in newsreels and Ministry of Information films rather than in feature films, with a spirited promotion of *49th Parallel* as a film that would be both timely and popular. And to the contention that filmgoers want to be escapist because they don't know if they'll be alive the next day, he declares that films have to be in touch with present-day life and that the people who make the films do not want to provide escapist fare.

As things are now you won't get technicians to work on some twopenny ha'penny subject about blondes and jazz and what happens down Argentine way. They would sooner be doing war work - many of them are [but] give them a film that's real, that means something in times like these and makes them feel pictures are helping the war, and they'll go to it.57

As Powell and Pressburger were moving into the territory of the documentary film makers, the documentary film makers were invading the territory of the feature film producers. Paul Rotha attributed this cross-fertilization to Jack Beddington's ideas committee, instituted in 1942 and consisting of writers and directors from both feature and documentary film making. Launder and Gilliat were inspired to make their feature film, *Millions Like Us* (GDF/Gainsborough, 1943) after seeing *Night Shift* (Paul Rotha Productions, 1942), about women working in a factory in South Wales.57 Alberto Cavalcanti had left The Crown Film Unit in 1940 for Ealing (initially to supervise production of a number of shorts for the MoI), where he directed *Went the Day Well?* (Ealing, 1942). Harry Watt joined Ealing in 1942, but *Target for Tonight* was an indication of the direction his work was already taking.

*Target for Tonight* was the first feature film to show the Americans that Britain

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56 Cottrell, p. 169. The "Gone With the Wind Up" smear reached its crisis point on August 25, when the *Sunday Dispatch* published a 1,500-word attack by producer Michael Balcon on British stage and screen workers who remained in America' (Ibid., p. 170).
58 Paul Rotha, quoted in Sussex, pp. 140-141. But, for some film makers, it was service in the armed forces which led to a more documentary style of film making. At the outbreak of war, Thorold Dickinson and Michael Balcon offered to make films at the request of the War Office and, in December 1940, were asked to make a film on Army security. The result was *The Next of Kin* (Ealing, 1942), made with £30,000 funding from the Treasury and the rest from Ealing. By this time Dickinson was in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps (RAOC), where he formed the Army Kinematograph Services Production Group (David Badder and Bob Baker, "Interview with Thorold Dickinson," *Film Dope*, n. 11, January 1977, p. 10). When Carol Reed became an acting captain in the RAOC in June 1942, Dickinson (effectively his producer) assembled a talented team of film-makers, including film editor Reggie Mills and cameraman Freddie Young, for Reed’s *The New Lot* (Army Kinematograph Service, 1943) (Nicholas Wapshott, *The Man Between: a Biography of Carol Reed*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1990, pp. 159, 161). John and Roy Boulting joined the RAF and Army Film Units in 1940, and made *Desert Victory* (British Army Film Unit) and *Tunisian Victory* (British and American Service Film Units) in 1943, *Burma Victory* (British Army Film Unit) and *Journey Together* (RAF Film Unit) in 1945.
could not only 'take it' but 'dish it out' too.

All propaganda had been geared to encourage us to bear up, to stay cheerful and optimistic under bombs, mines, torpedoes, rationing and cold, while a constant stream of success stories came from the other side. ... Then came this film, actually showing how we were taking the war into the heart of the enemy, and doing it in a very British, casual, brave way (Watt, p.152).

Those 'success stories' poured scorn on Britain's ability to defend herself, never mind attack Germany. The Nazi film, Feuertaufe (Reichsluftfahrt Minesterium, Hauptfilmstelle, 1940), gives us an aerial view of a bomb-blitzed Warsaw, and a commentary that simultaneously blames England for Poland's catastrophe and threatens her with the same fate.

Here you have the results of your unprincipled war politics. All this is your work, yours is the guilt, and you will have to answer for it one day at the last judgment. And remember one thing: this is what happens when the German Luftwaffe strikes. They will also know how to strike at the guiltiest of the guilty.

The film ends with the Luftwaffe singing: 'Forward against the British Lion, for the first decisive blow. We sit here in judgment, an Empire is crumbling.... Forward at the enemy! Onward! Onward! Bombs on England!'®

It was not only Britain, however, that was threatened by this particular piece of Nazi propaganda; other countries were intimidated by it as well. The Biter Bit (Coombe Productions, 1943) begins with a social event; a party given by the German Embassy in Oslo, where the entertainment is a special screening of Baptism of Fire (Feuertaufe). The intention (so the commentary spoken by Ralph Richardson assures us) is to terrify neutral countries into submission. The assembled diplomats and their wives are shocked into silence as they see the result of twenty-seven days and nights of bombing accompanied by 'The Song of the German Airman': "We blitz, burn, bomb Warsaw." Then we are told that the film had been shown to other neutrals in Rotterdam and Belgrade and that there was now only one answer: British people should build up their air force and redeem the skies; together with the U.S. Air force and the forces of the USSR they should launch a massive attack on the Axis powers.® By that point in the war, 1943, the U.S. was an active participant, but in 1941 it was still necessary to convince America that Britain would be a worthy ally who could do more than just grin and bear it. In the 1941 Spring issue of Sight and Sound, Richard de Rochemont (managing editor of March of Time) pilloried the ineffectual nature of British film propaganda.

We Americans are an excessively violent people, and when we get confused and irritated we are likely to sock somebody on the jaw. We don't much care who it is. The nearest person mostly. This is a definite katharsis for us, and we feel better after it. And we like to see others acting in the way we consider normal. We have seen all types and conditions

® Feuertaufe, English transcript, IWMDF, pp. 14-16.
® The Biter Bit, Own transcript. It was produced by Korda in 1943 for the Mol, but 'Korda kept his name off the credits out of discretion over his wartime association with Churchill' (Kulik, pp.282-283).
of men smiling amid inconceivable ruins. We have seen them do "thumbs up". We have heard them sing. And we feel, more and more, that if we were in the same boat we would not feel that way about it at all. ...Therefore, America needs now films from Britain which will show the nation on the offensive, both on the war fronts and the home front. .. if we are to judge by the films you send us, we feel entitled to say "Wipe that silly grin off your face and get in there and punch!"

49th Parallel does, literally, get in there and punch, and a couple of Germans do get knocked out in One of Our Aircraft is Missing, but the latter film also shows Britain on the offensive on the war front. The Luftwaffe had bombed England and England had not capitulated. Now the bombing was being returned, aimed not only at Germany but also at the countries that Germany had occupied. Now France, Belgium and the Netherlands were in the position of 'taking it' from a Britain that was 'dishing it out', and here was a quandary: how could the inevitable loss of life among the population of those countries be justified? Towards the end of One of Our Aircraft is Missing, there is a British air raid on the small town where the six members of the crew of "B for Bertie" are being hidden by Jo de Vries. She assures them that it is seen by her and (by implication) most other Netherlanders, not as an act of aggression but of liberation.

That's what you are doing for us. Can you hear them running for shelter? Can you understand what that means to all the occupied countries? To enslaved people having it drummed into their ears that the Germans are masters of the earth? Seeing those masters running for shelter, seeing them crouching under tables and hearing that steady hum, night after night, that noise which is oil for the burning fire in our hearts (Own Transcript).

Which is perhaps a little too glib.

The film ends with the announcement "Right! The target's Berlin!" and we are encouraged to believe that the war is being taken to the heart of the enemy. The film begins with a raid on the Mercedes Benz works in Stuttgart, and all the bombs are seen to hit their target with commendable precision. This was a comforting fiction, but a fiction shared by other British war films released in 1941 and 1942.

The subject of indiscriminate bombing had been discussed in a scene showing a press conference in Ealing's The Big Blockade (1942), ... A bombing sequence in the same film gives the impression, as Target for Tonight had done, that the RAF could strike specific objects in the dark with ease. In fact, at the time of the release of The Big Blockade early in 1942, Bomber Command had despaired of being able to hit anything except a whole city. ... only one small film, The Biter Bit (1943) directed by Alexander Korda, gave a hint of its more drastic effects on civilians while also providing a justification for such action.

Whereas in 49th Parallel the Germans had been the central focus of the plot, in One of Our
Aircraft is Missing they are kept in the background. ‘One of Emeric’s very best ideas was to hear Germans everywhere but only see them in the distance, if at all’ (Life, p. 389). We hear them barking orders, singing and making fatuous announcements on a loud-speaker, but when we see them it is either at a distance or in silhouette or as a shadow on a wall. In the church scene a German officer enters in long shot, and the only medium shots are of his boots or of his figure partially masked by the church organ, and it is in the mirror of that organ that we see him at full-length but in miniature. The Germans are reduced in importance to a potential threat and a focus for the resistance of the Dutch people, who seem to cope with the inconvenience of their presence by attempting to bore them to death and by interpreting their orders in such a way as to reduce them to imbecility. At the end of the story our heroes share a ‘lobster-pot’ with two German airmen. Frank’s enquiry, “What are we going to do about Rosencrantz and Guildenstern?” sums up their importance: they are expendable. Like Hamlet’s dubious companions, they too may find that a trip to England in a ship may not have a happy ending, but we do not concern ourselves too much with their fate since they are merely extras.®

The stars are the British air crew and the Dutch people who help them (or threaten to betray them). The first Netherlanders they encounter are children, who innocently accept them at face value. The adults of the community, however, are more circumspect. As early as May 1940 there had been stories (baseless, as it happens) of German parachute troops tricked out as nuns, Red Cross nurses, monks and tramcar conductors, descending from the skies.® The film exploits ‘the ambiguities of people’s roles and identities - not only the tension between what people seem to be and what they are, but the tension between what they might be and what their actions seem to reveal them as’.® The film also explores the different roles that the actors have to assume, presenting us with layers of reality. They are actors who are pretending to be men and women from different backgrounds who are performing roles thrust onto them by the exigencies of war and who must assume yet other personae in order to outwit the enemy. Acting and performance are important and reflexive elements of the plot development.

Of the three women who played prominent roles in the film, only Googie Withers (Jo de Vries) had appeared in films before; Joyce Redman was an Irish stage actress who had played at the Old Vic, and would appear with Olivier and Richardson in their 1944 season at the New Theatre (Life, p. 391), and Pamela Brown had already played Juliet at Stratford and

®® But some of the other extras in the film were really stars. Pressburger was not content to use ordinary extras in the football match, but ‘gathered together a team comprising some of the best professional players in the country, including his own hero, Arsenal’s top goal scorer, Cliff ‘Boy’ Bastin (Emeric, p. 192).


®® Peter Hogue, "One of Our Aircraft is Missing," Film Comment, 26 (3), May 1990, p. 30.
Bianca to Helpmann's Gremio in the 1939 Old Vic production of *The Taming of the Shrew.* Powell declared that anyone looking at the 'cast list of *One of Our Aircraft* today must get a topsy-turvy feeling. The supporting cast now are all well-known names' (*Life*, p. 394). They were Alec Clunes (the organist), Robert Helpmann (the Quisling) and Peter Ustinov (the priest). Clunes was a stage actor (much admired by Powell for his work at the Sadler's Wells), who had appeared in only two films, *Convoy* and *Saloon Bar* (both for Ealing, 1940). This was Helpmann's first film role, but he had appeared in several stage productions, beginning with the part of Oberon in Tyrone Guthrie's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Old Vic (with Vivien Leigh as Titania and Ralph Richardson as Bottom). His extraordinary (and possibly apocryphal) account of how he was offered the part in *One of Our Aircraft is Missing,* was published in an Adelaide newspaper as the story of a young man who arrived home from a bottle party with the milk.

There's nothing unusual in that, you'll say. But on this occasion the milk was manifest, not metaphorical, and it was 'borrowed' from the doorstep of an unknown's house on the corner. So when, later in the day, the kitchen window of that same house was flung open as the young man walked past, and a baldheaded man peered out, the young man expected the worst. He certainly did not expect the baldheaded man to cry, 'Do you want a part in my new film?' Disconcerted, he stammered, 'Yes' (*ibid*, p. 137).

The plot depended on the crew keeping together, which involved a fair amount of ensemble playing, and led to some jockeying for positions of advantage within the scene. Peter Ustinov relates in his autobiography how he coped with the pressure from the other, more experienced actors.

I had so often been warned by well-meaning elderly actors of the dangers of overacting, most especially on the screen, that I approached this important first serious venture into film acting with enormous circumspection. ... Hugh Williams watched me rehearse my Dutch priest with an acuity which made me singularly uncomfortable. Eventually he came up to me, and asked, with commendable politeness, 'Excuse me, young man, what exactly are you going to do in this scene?' I struggled to find words to adequately express my devotion to this school of acting. 'I don't really know, Mr. Williams,' I replied, and added, hopefully, 'I thought I'd do nothing.' A trace of hardness entered his eyes and voice. 'Oh no you don't,' he said, 'I'm doing nothing.'

The six crew members are characterised by their provenance, coming as they do from both the north and south of England and from Wales, and their peace-time occupations, which cover a spectrum from garage-owner to diplomat. The football player inspires the reunion of the group at a football match, the Yorkshire businessman looks forward to selling woollen cloth in

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Europe when the war is over, and the actor enjoys the opportunity to perform in an unexpected arena.

Casting an actor as an actor allows for reflexive banter between the crew members, the most paradoxical being the exchange between Sir George Corbett (played by Godfrey Tearle), and Frank Shelley (played by Hugh Williams), when they realise that they will have to don disguises and pretend to be Dutch citizens. When Sir George asks Frank what sort of disguise he intends to wear he is told: "My boy, you're going to see a series of perfect Dutch character sketches. Real little cameos. But what'll we do for boots?" The answer, "Klompen!", signals a dissolve from Frank's boots to a pair of Dutch clogs, and the revelation that above them he is perfectly clad in traditional Dutch women's clothes. The time lapse is both a costume and gender change. Sir George comments admiringly that he had never hoped to co-star with the great Francis Shelley in a Dutch epic, only to be informed by this female impersonator that he was, perhaps, over-valuing himself. "Well, George, you're doing quite well, really quite well, but" (as he smooths his lace embonpoint and straightens his voluminous skirt), "Co-star. Really!". It is mock-vanity, an actor playing a Prima Donna who is playing the role of Dutch matron. But he is not the only member of the cast who has to assume the characteristics of the opposite sex and whose name is capable of being perceived as either masculine or feminine.

One member of the crew refers to Jo de Vries as a man, only to be corrected. "Not 'Joe', 'Yo' - it's a woman, not a man". But Jo is dressed like a man (with her hair bundled into a bandanna and no make-up), and she manages her business in a mannish way, thereby reflecting the men's roles that women in Britain were increasingly taking on in order to release men for military work. Beneath the superficial masculinity, however, there is an inherent femininity that reveals itself on the last night the crew are with her. The crew have discarded their disguises (though Frank toys with the idea of continuing his series of cameos, experimentally using his rolled-up uniform to simulate pregnancy) and are again in their RAF uniforms. Jo de Vries has curled her hair and put on make-up, an evening dress and jewellery, saying "It's good to be a woman again". For all of them it is a chance to be themselves and discuss the roles they have to play. Frank compliments Jo on her acting ability with the Germans, and she equates the danger of her position with the danger that they experience when flying: "I was afraid when I first started, just as a pilot is afraid the first time he goes solo". They are equals. But in this company of equals there is a hero who is the focus of the film's story.

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83 Sir George may well be still clad in the silk stockings that rear gunners wore to protect their legs from the intense cold of their isolated position.
Powell has stated that the inspiration for the film came from the BBC’s recurring announcement,

but the plot came from a statement made by Sir Arnold Wilson in Parliament when France fell, to the effect that he for one did not propose to shelter behind the bodies of young men, but was joining the Royal Air Force to be trained as a rear gunner at the age of fifty-one. Sir Arnold was a genuine English eccentric, a hero of the last war, an explorer, a writer, a troubleshooter and a troublemaker (*Life*, p. 392).

Pressburger decided to focus on the basic disparity of attitude and experience between the young crew members and this old eccentric. Seen as a bore at first, he would prove his worth when they were stranded in enemy-occupied Holland. The novelisation of the film, written by Pressburger in 1942, is the first-person narrative of ‘Pilot Officer, Sir George Corbett, K.C.I.E., C.M.G., D.S.O., F.R.G.S., M.P., and Rear-Gunner of “B for Bertie”’. This establishes him as the dominant member of the group, whose story is told from his point of view. Only when he is injured as they escape from Holland does the narrative pass to his alter-ego, ‘Flying Officer John Glyn Haggard, Skipper of “B for Bertie”,’ who immediately acknowledges the debt. ‘You know, it’s a funny thing, but we only realised how much we’d been depending on old George after he got knocked out in the boat. ... Of course, he’d been our leader from the moment we landed in Holland, and he was so darn tactful about it!’

There is ‘a playful symmetry to the film’s juggling of its own shape’ (Hogue, p. 31). The film begins with ‘documentary’ evidence: an official typewritten announcement by the Netherlands Government Information Bureau which states: “In the Summer of 1941, five Dutchmen were executed for assisting in the escape of a British Air Crew.” It lists their names, ages, occupations (all farmers or farm labourers) and their village. The drum roll that accompanies the announcement is drowned by machine-gun fire. The film ends with the Dutch Royal Crest and a motto in Dutch which, translated, reads: “The Netherlands Will Rise Again”. Enclosed within this tribute to the people of Holland is a prologue and an epilogue, both concerning the crew of “B for Bertie”. At the beginning we are told that it is 04.26 on a Sunday morning at an operational station somewhere in England, and we see RAF personnel waiting, as in *Target for Tonight*, for the last plane to come back to base. But “B for Bertie”, unlike “F for Freddie”, does not make a successful return. Instead, we see a plane flying home pilotless, ‘abandoned by its crew like the famous abandoned ship Mary Celeste, only to crash into an electric pylon

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70 Emeric Pressburger, *The Story of the Film of One of Our Aircraft is Missing*. London: H M S O, 1942, p. 31. It gives us an intimation of Jo de Vreis’s fate: ‘She was a brave woman, a very brave woman. God grant she is still alive’ (*Ibid.*, p. 30). An entry in Pressburger’s diary would appear to acknowledge Powell’s assistance in the writing of the book: ‘Miss Page is going to type the story of “One of Our Aircraft”. Micky has done a nice job’ (*1942 Diary*, February 2), just as an entry in the previous year would seem to indicate that the final version of the film script was Powell’s: ‘Mick finished script, Miss Curtis typing it (*1941 Diary*, July 10).
and come down in flames', accompanied solely by the drone of aircraft engines (Life, p.391).”

We are left wondering what has happened to the crew. At the end we are again in an operational station somewhere in England, and the crew of “B for Bertie” is waiting to take off on another bombing mission.

After the plane crashes at the beginning, a radio announcement informs us that, “from this and other operations, one of our aircraft is missing”, before the title materialises on the screen as if it was blown over the audience’s heads by an aircraft’s slip-stream, fading into the distance like a vapour trail. The only point of view from which this could be seen in reality is from the cockpit of the rear gunner, which establishes George as the narrator of the story before he even appears. The credits continue to fly over our heads, “With the crew of B for Bertie”, and then we are introduced to the actors.

Most of the public had no idea what a bombing mission was like, or what the individual members of a bomber’s crew did. These things had never been seen on the screen, so before the actual story of “B. for Bertie” and its crew started, we had the members of the crew introduce themselves and their jobs, playing directly to the camera, with the name of the actor who played the part superimposed on the film (ibid., p. 393).

At the end of the main story the film breaks all the rules of escapist drama by reminding us of the people who had created it. A title card informs us, “That was going to be the end of our story BUT -” and we are given the actors’ credits and then the technicians’ credits and told, “All of them wanted to know what happened afterwards to the crew of ‘B for Bertie’. So - three months later -", and we move into the epilogue, which tells us what happened next. We are not allowed to forget that this is a story which, in spite of using many of the trappings of documentary realism, was constructed for our entertainment. It is not a documentary, but a portrayal of contemporary events that could be real by men and women who are, for the most part, actors.

The film celebrates the unity of disparate elements in the face of danger from a common enemy, but it has another underlying theme: age and youth and what each can give to the other. It is a plea for tolerance and understanding across the generation gap. As Powell puts it, ‘Our story told how six individuals became united as a crew, to the point where the five younger members were prepared to risk their lives and liberty to save the crusty old bastard who up till then had been a pain in the neck to them’ (Ibid. p. 396). It was not the only film to exploit the presence of an older man in a bomber crew; Desperate Journey has a man who had served in the First World War, who shows that he is still capable of tackling the enemy and of sacrificing himself for the sake of his companions. In One of Our Aircraft is Missing,

71 Billy Wilder’s Five Graves to Cairo (Paramount, 1943) begins in a similar way. A British tank is seen weaving its way over the North African desert until it crashes. The difference is that the crew are all dead.
however, this becomes a central theme. The scene that articulated the similarity of character between Sir George and John Haggard was ruthlessly cut from the final edit by David Lean.

The young pilot is thinking of the wit and courage of the Dutch schoolmistress who has helped them, and whom they have now left behind, and is astonished to be approached by his elderly rear gunner with the remark “Nice girl, wasn’t she?” The old man goes on to tell him that they are very much alike. They are two editions of the same man (ibid., p. 399).

David Lean argued that it had nothing to do with the plot and was the sort of idea they could make a whole film about.

So they did.
The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp

Colonel Blimp and the Men from the Ministry

On January the 15th 1941, a certain Lieutenant Colonel Bingham published a letter in *The Times*.

I note with sadness that the middle, lower-middle and working classes are now receiving the King's commission. These classes, unlike the old aristocratic and feudal (almost) classes who led the old army have never had 'their people' to consider. .... Man management is not a subject which can be 'taught'; it is an attitude of mind, and with the old school tie men this was instinctive and part of the philosophy of life.¹

He was quickly removed from his post.

On February the 14th 1942, a Labour M.P., Mr F. W. Pethick-Lawrence, stated in a commons debate that if 'the Government are to carry the country with them in their war effort, they must set about abolishing “Blimpery” in all fields of life', and he hoped that the newly appointed Secretary of State for War, Sir James Grigg, would 'prove equal to the task of getting rid of “Blimpery” wherever it manifests itself in the Army'. In reply, Stafford Cripps invited one and all to 'the funeral of that person whom I hope we may now describe as the late and not lamented Colonel Blimp'.²

David Low, the cartoonist employed by the *London Evening Standard*, had created Colonel Blimp in 1934 to typify 'the current disposition to mixed-up thinking, to having it both ways, to dogmatic doubleness, to paradox and plain self-contradiction'. The choice of a military man to personify these characteristics was purely fortuitous.

In the newspapers that morning some colonel or other had written to protest against the mechanisation of cavalry, and insisting that even if horses had to go, the uniform and trappings must remain inviolate and troops must continue to wear their spurs in the tanks. Ha! I thought. The attitude of mind! The perfect chiaroscuro! Colonel Blimp, of course!³

The character continued to appear in the pages of the *London Evening Standard*, to the delight of some and the enrage of others, until the wartime paper shortage led to his demise in 1941. But Low resurrected him in 1943, perhaps as a result of his immortalisation in

¹ Lieutenant Colonel Bingham, *The Times*, 15 January 1941, p. 5.
³ David Low, *Low's Autobiography*. London: Michael Joseph, 1956, p. 264. Low also claimed that Duff Cooper, who, as War Minister, had introduced the 1936/7 army estimates and apologised for the mechanisation of the cavalry by saying, 'it is like asking a great musical performer to throw away his violin and devote himself to the gramophone', was one of the inspirations for Blimp. (Russ Karel, "Low and Churchill: Blimp's naked truth and Churchill's cover-up," *The Listener*, 12 December 1985, p. 14).
Powell and Pressburger's *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943).

When they asked Low for permission to use the name and character that he had created, he stipulated that Blimp should be proved to be a fool in the end. They agreed, since, according to Powell, that was their intention.

Emeric proposed to open the film in the present day - early in 1942. In the course of a war game, a callous young commando leader captures Blimp and his whole staff in a Turkish bath, by using Hitler's strategy of attacking before war was officially declared. After a violent argument between the young soldier and the old one about the ethics of total war, we would go back to the year 1902, when our Blimp was an enthusiastic, ruthless soldier himself. Our film would then trace his life over the past forty years, ending up in the present day again, when after a night of doubts and self-torture he admits that there is no such thing as a gentleman's war, and that we have to fight dirty if we are to beat the Nazis. It was a classic comedy that Emeric was sketching out and very timely, but even Low, the arch iconoclast, could foresee how difficult it would be to get such a theme through the Ministry of Information and after them the War Office (Life, p. 399).

The Ministry of Information played a very important part in the propaganda war that was waged in tandem with the military manoeuvres of the British Army. It also played an important part in the careers of British film makers from the declaration of war in 1939 until well after Armistice Day. A multitude of new regulations were introduced for the control of morale. 'Any film which appeared on British cinema screens during the war could only do so if it had secured the approval of the British Government, and in so far as the specific official body responsible was concerned, this meant the Ministry of Information.'^ Jeremy Croft and Nicholas Pronay maintain that by 1942 the MoI was operating such an effective system of censorship that practically all images were being controlled by the government, principally through its control of film stock, which was allocated to film companies by the Board of Trade after consultation with the Films Division of the MoI. 'The Board of Trade required the submission of the proposed scenario and then acted upon the recommendation of the Films Division relating to it.® In this way the Films Division of the MoI had virtual control over commercial film production as well as over its own ‘information’ films. But James Chapman argues that it ‘did not follow that the Board [of Trade] would refuse film stock for projects opposed by the MOI’, and that the decision to make The Archers' next film in Technicolor was taken early in 1942, when the MOI was pleased with *One of Our Aircraft is Missing*. The application for Technicolor stock would have to be made some considerable time before the film started production, and so it may be that the necessary licence had been granted by the Board of Trade before Grigg and Churchill knew of the film and raised their objections to it. Then, the Technicolor stock allocation could only have been revoked through a politically embarrassing volte face, which was the last thing that Bracken and the MOI wanted.®

It was not only independent commercial films, however, that were controlled by the allocation of material in short supply. Brendan Bracken, who became Minister of Information in 1941, was an astute politician and ex-journalist. Knowing that there could be no substitute for a free yet patriotic press, he trusted those who ran the country's newspapers, relying on their sense of patriotism to prevent them from misusing the information at their disposal. But he relied not only on patriotism but also on their need for paper, since the 'control of official advertising and the supply of paper gave the government some additional leverage.' This control is well illustrated by the MoI's dealings with the weekly illustrated magazine, *Picture Post*, launched in 1938 by Stefan Lorant, a Hungarian refugee, and the property of Edward Hulton, a radically-minded liberal. A report entitled 'Notes on Special Publications: Home and Overseas' exemplifies the MoI's relationship with the two leading illustrated magazines in Britain. It recommended that they should be encouraged to extend their coverage still further by ensuring a continuous supply of first-class photographs, stories, etc.

In effect, therefore, the Ministry of Information will largely control both magazines; so gaining in that

a. The magazines will be published through existing channels and will, therefore, appear to be entirely disinterested and free from propaganda.

b. The Ministry of Information will have virtual control of two powerful, ready-made media of propaganda.

And a letter from the MoI to the Raw Materials Department of the Ministry of Supply states: 'It has been agreed to supply "Picture Post" with paper facilities for special numbers, and in return for this concession the Ministry should be allowed to discuss with "Picture Post" what materials should be published'.

After Lorant left for America in 1940, Tom Hopkinson took over as editor and the magazine began to take a strong line on post-war reconstruction. Both Hopkinson and Hulton were founder members of the '1941 Committee' which, under the chairmanship of J.B. Priestley, was a network of progressive intellectuals who wanted to give the war effort a leftward turn. Priestley's popularity as a broadcaster rivalled that of Churchill, but his series of *Postscripts* soon gave the government cause for concern, as the message conveyed by 'the man of the people' became increasingly radical on the question of war aims and domestic social policy. In 1941 he was ousted from his second series of talks and replaced by someone more amenable. 'The Ministry of Information told him that the decision was the BBC's. The BBC explained that a directive had come from the Ministry of Information' (Calder, p. 247).

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8 'Notes on Special Publications: Home and Overseas,' INF 1 234, 12 November 1939, 17 March 1940.
Priestley's most famous Postscript had been on Dunkirk, and even while that retreat was taking place, Guilty Men (1940) was being written by three Beaverbrook journalists using the pseudonym 'Cato'. It established 'the left-wing myth of the thirties in its classic form', placing the responsibility for the defeat of the British Army squarely on the shoulders of the 'appeasers' - Chamberlain and his Conservative colleagues (ibid., p. 86). After Dunkirk, public opinion began to swing to the left, helped by the covey of left-wing intellectuals who, in their various capacities as journalists, broadcasters and film makers, dominated the domestic media during the war. Beaverbrook's London Evening Standard, which was edited from 1938 to 1944 by Frank Owen and Michael Foot (both passionate left-wingers), had from 1934 to 1941 carried the cartoons of Low, one of the finest propagandists the Left ever produced. And the Mirror, whose 'fundamental line was populist agitation against "Colonel Blimp, the Old School Tie, Vested Interests" and other archetypes of radical demonology', was, in February 1942, threatened with suppression.® The Films Division of the Mol was dominated by the documentary film makers, who were committed to left-wing policies, and although its head, Jack Beddington, was largely apolitical, his assistant, Sidney Bernstein, 'was a dedicated member of the Labour party and a passionately committed man of the Left'.¹⁰

The feature film makers were financed by private backers, the principal among them being J. Arthur Rank.¹¹ The Mol censorship files demonstrate that 'some British feature films might have received unofficial Mol backing or that official interest proved a prelude to financial investment in prestige productions from influential film personalities like J. Arthur Rank' (BBFC, p. 144). While Powell and Pressburger were completing One Of Our Aircraft is Missing at the beginning of 1942, they had accepted Rank's unusual offer, which was that he would provide the finance and leave them virtually free to make any film that they chose.¹² Their first choice was The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp, Rank only stipulating that its theme and title should be approved by the Mol.

The Mol did not immediately disapprove of either theme or title, but Jack Beddington requested a full shooting script in order to reach a decision. A detailed and perceptive report on the script (entitled 'The Life and Death of Sugar Candy') came to this conclusion:

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¹² By the end of 1941, Rank had acquired both a controlling interest in the Odeon circuit and control of Gaumont-British, which included Gainsborough Studios. This meant that his only serious rival was Balcon at Ealing Studios.
¹² Pressburger noted in his diary, 'Mick and Chris and I went at 4 to Odeon's Central Office on Park Lane to meet Woolf, Rank and Woodham-Smith. It was a triumph! We agreed on making 2 pictures for them in the next year. Subject to our discretion (first "Blimp") with £15,000 per picture plus 10% from the net profit' ('1942 Diary', 27 January).
Only if the writers have a passionate belief in our cause and character can they avoid falling into the traps which paradox and the drama of ideas often set. ... if they can see this point and are willing to clarify their intentions and weigh their words we should do all in our power to help them, as the greater part of the film is of very high quality and capable of containing an important message.

(signed) R.B. 8th June 1942


The Archers had offered to change the title of the film after receiving a letter from Sir James Grigg, in which he indicated a strong doubt that the War Office would give its support to the film, based on the fact that the chief character was more fictitious than real: 'After all Colonel Blimp is only a caricature!'. The War Office refused to release Laurence Olivier from the Fleet Air Arm or allow the provision of Service facilities for the production. The Mol had to support the stance that the War Office had taken, and an appeal to Brendan Bracken proved fruitless. He wrote that 'It would make an amusing and very entertaining film [but] that it would not make the sort of film which this Ministry could properly support' (Bracken, 7 July 1942, C B, p. 41).

Despite these setbacks, The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp (no need to change the title now) went into production. But the War Office had not fired its last shot. In September, Grigg wrote to Churchill asking that the ‘Blimp’ film which was then in production should be stopped. He described the theme of the film to be ‘the struggle of a junior officer in the Army against the obstructiveness of the Blimps at the top and his subsequent metamorphosis into a Blimp himself’. He acknowledges the producers’ claim that the film was intended as a tribute to the toughness and keenness of the new Army in Britain by showing ‘how far they have progressed from the Blimpery of the pre-war Army’, and that it would therefore be ‘valuable propaganda for the USA and the Dominions’. But his third and fourth points reveal why this production was causing him grave disquiet.

3. The War Office have refused to give their support to the film in any way on the ground that it would give the Blimp conception of the Army officer a new lease of life at a time when it is already dying from inanition. ... it focuses attention on an imaginary type of Army officer which has become an object of ridicule to the general public. In the opening scheme [sic] Candy is shown as Blimp himself complete with towel and everything. [It] has made a character built up by twenty years of brilliant cartooning into a figure of fun.

4. There is the further objection that the Germans in the film are depicted as stiff and over-regimented in peace and as little more than intense realists in war. ... the suggestion is that if we were exactly like the Germans we should be better soldiers

('Note', C B, pp. 42-44).

That Grigg should react so negatively to a film that he perceived as reinforcing the public perception of the British army as being riddled with Blimpery and incapable of waging war
with the efficiency of the German army was understandable. Churchill's reaction was equally strong: 'Pray propose to me the measures necessary to stop this foolish production before it gets any further'.

But Churchill's reaction was possibly more complex. In *My Early Life* (1930) he had complained, 'War, which used to be cruel and magnificent, has now become cruel and ugly'. He blamed Democracy and Science.

Instead of a small number of well-trained professionals championing their country's cause with ancient weapons and a beautiful intricacy of archaic manoeuvre ... we now have entire populations, including even women and children, pitted against each other in brutish mutual extermination.

With this romantic vision of warfare, and prickling from the Blimp-baiting attacks of the Left, he was hardly likely to view a film that debunked 'Blimps' with any favour. Moreover, a study into the state of public opinion which had been conducted by Home Intelligence in the Spring of 1942 had revealed that the public blamed vested interests for the 'ills of production', with most criticism directed against the Conservative party, in so far as 'this represents the so-called "Men of Munich", "the old gang", "Colonel Blimp" and similar die-hard types' (Addison, pp. 162-163). On July 17th, Bracken submitted one of his regular reports on the state of public morale to the Cabinet, and found it his painful duty to record that public confidence had fallen to a new low. 'Blame was freely distributed among a wide number of recipients among which "the generals" and "our leadership" were certainly the commonest' (Lysaght, p. 222).

Churchill, as both Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, was under enormous pressure, both from the left-ward political swing in public opinion and the continuing defeats suffered by the British Army. September and October 1942 were the most anxious months of the war. Bracken confided to Churchill's physician: 'There may be trouble ahead. The Prime Minister must win the battle in the desert or get out. ... If we are beaten in this battle, it's the end of Winston'.

Bracken, as Minister of Information, assured Churchill that he had no power to suppress the 'Blimp' film, 'unless the Government assumed powers of a very far-reaching kind, i.e., the power to suppress all films on grounds of their expressing harmful or misguided opinions'. He added that 'it would be illogical for the Government to insist on a degree of control over films which it does not exercise over other means of expression, such as books or newspaper

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14 Personal minute from Churchill, 10 Sept 1942, *CB*, p. 44. Sidney Bernstein recalls that one weekend 'Churchill asked for a recently finished naval film called *San Demetrio London*. [1943] ... not a subject or a film liable to please Churchill and [one] that the Films Division had already gone to some lengths to keep away from him. On the Monday the print was returned, together with one of Churchill's long strips of paper, bearing the words: "Pray who is responsible for this dastardly film? It must be stopped"' (Caroline Moorehead, *Sidney Bernstein*. London: Jonathan Cape, p. 149).


Since the Government did have the power to suppress films deemed unhelpful to the war effort, and since it considered film to be a more powerful means of disseminating propaganda than most other forms of expression, neither statement was substantially true. It would seem that he took a more enlightened view of the film's theme than either the War Office or the Prime Minister.

**Stereotype to Character**

Powell insisted that Pressburger's screenplay for *Colonel Blimp* 'should be in every film archive, in every film library' (*Life*, p. 409), and his argument is very persuasive. Its extraordinary readability was probably the result of the close working partnership that had developed between Pressburger, Powell and the rest of the Archers team.

Because he was now involved in a production from start to finish, and could communicate his ideas directly to Michael and to the composer, cameraman and designer, he no longer had to put every little detail in writing. Instead, he concentrated on producing something that would read smoothly, and, above all, give the reader a genuine sense of what the finished film would be like (*Emeric*, pp. 213-214).

The screenplay, dated 19th of June 1942 and entitled 'The Life and Death of Sugar Candy', initially presents a series of stereotypes that border on caricature. If this was the script that that Grigg had seen, his objections to the portrayal of the film's hero as a stereotypical Blimp, closely resembling Low's creation, would have been well-founded. It introduces us to Major-General Sir Clive Wynne-Candy (V.C., D.S.O., C.B., late of the Wessex Light Infantry) in Colonel Blimp's favourite setting: a Turkish Bath. He is described as:

so like Colonel Blimp in appearance that he must certainly have been the model who inspired David Low. He IS Blimp. Here is the great face, the sweeping moustaches, the ivory-domed head, the noble belly, even the little crease on his fat chest.

In BLACK AND WHITE, Colonel Blimp is an awe-inspiring figure; but in TECHNICOLOR!

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17 Nicholas Pronay maintains that 'the cinema had been placed under the most comprehensive and effective system of censorship operating anywhere outside the totalitarian parts of the world. ... anyone was free to make a film about anything they wished - but only films which, in the opinion of of a full-time professional body of long experience, did not carry political messages conflicting with those of the government in any fundamental way could be shown to the "great audience."'. (Pronay, "Peace Aims," *Film/Radio Prop.*, p. 55).

18 Reed's *The New Lot* also upset Churchill and the War Office. The Directorate of Army Psychiatry wanted a morale-boosting film for new recruits, and Peter Ustinov came up with the idea of a film which was 'modern in approach and candid about out-dated military bull'. It contains a training film in which Robert Donat plays an officer 'whose archaic military advice on screen causes Reed's new recruits to burst into laughter'. A committee of generals branded it unhelpful and possibly subversive. The idea was rescued, however, by 'psychiatrists within the DAP, members of the Adjutant Generals office, the Public Relations Directorate and above all by Brendan Bracken' (Wapshott, pp. 160-162).

19 Grigg's initial objections were based on the 'scheme' or 'narrative' (possibly the 'Analysis' produced in May 1942). By September, he must either have seen the screenplay or received information about the film, to know that 'Candy is shown as a Blimp himself complete with towel and everything' ("Note", *C.B.*, p. 43).
Naked, apart from the towel that had become as much his trademark as the drooping walrus moustaches, and therefore totally vulnerable, he is an easy target for Lieutenant Spud Wilson and his ‘merry men’, who, looking ‘strange and alarming in their battledress in the incongruous setting’, invade the sacred precincts of The Royal Bathers Club six hours in advance of the official start of an army exercise. And when wakened he is likened to one of the characters from Kipling’s Jungle Book.

Do you remember in Kipling’s ‘The White Seal’, when the diminutive Kotick by his barking, wakes Sea-Catch, the great Walrus; how Sea-Catch starts awake, banging his neighbour with his flipper and coughing and stuttering “Eh? How? What?”

Even so wakes General Clive Wynne-Candy (Ibid., pp. 89-90).

The setting, dress (or rather, undress) and confrontation reinforce the impression of an army officered by reactionary old Blimps, who attempt to frustrate the efforts of younger and more practical men to respond to the necessities of modern warfare. To make the situation even worse, Candy is revealed as both ridiculous and impotent; an emperor with no clothes and powerless behind his stentorian roar.

The single-handed contest that ensues between the enthusiastic, no-nonsense, practical, rule-bending young lieutenant (sweating with heat and embarrassment in his uniform) and the dyed-in-the-wool, reactionary old General (fuming with anger in his towel) ends with both plunging into the pool. At this point the screenplay reinforces the identification of Candy with Blimp by feigning a slip of the typewriter just before the transition from 1942 to 1902: ‘Blimp’s - beg pardon - Candy’s last words sound hollow and faint. Already they are no longer real’ (Ibid., p. 94). But it could also be the signal for the imminent deconstruction of the image of the irascible Colonel that this part of the screenplay had so carefully established. Spud Wilson, in aggressive pursuit of his idea of fighting for his country, which involves ignoring the advice given to him by his elders and betters, is in fact like the youthful Candy, who, in pursuit of his idea of defending his country, will find himself similarly ignoring the advice given to him by his elders and betters.

When Candy emerges from the pool we have flashed back forty years to when he was full of impatience and enthusiasm. That he is neither particularly intelligent nor quick-witted is demonstrated by his dialogue with his friend Hoppy: their voices are loud; their delivery is clipped upper-class idiot; and their style is reminiscent of music-hall badinage. Their spirited rendition of the Titania Aria from Mignon immediately brings them into conflict with a ‘Period Blimp’ who is only mollified by the realisation that this is the young Clive Candy who has been awarded a V.C. in the Boer War.

As a headstrong and rebellious young officer on sick leave from the Boer War, Candy tries
to persuade his superior at the War Office to allow him to go to Berlin to counter the anti-British propaganda being spread in Germany. He mentions that he has had an article on the subject printed in *The Times*. Arthur Conan Doyle had, in the columns of *The Times*, fought a long campaign to make the people of Britain aware of how their country's reputation was being treated in Germany. 'So rancorous is the feeling in Germany against us that we have been unable, so far, to find a publisher who dare publish a moderate account of the British case. ... Could anything be more suggestive of the complete absence of fair play which has marked all this monstrous agitation?' Colonel Betteridge, ignorant of Conan Doyle's identity as well as his efforts to stem the anglophobic tide, advises Candy to keep out of the papers ('Still. *The Times* - a bit different'), and only shows animation when he is told that Conan Doyle is the author of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, which was currently running in the *Strand Magazine*.

He also instructs Candy to 'leave politics to the politicians'.

Clive, whose inspiration is a letter from a young Englishwoman living and working in Berlin pleading for someone to 'TELL THE TRUTH', ignores his superior's advice and goes to Berlin to counter the worst of the stories; those put about by Kaunitz (a 'skunk' who was spying for both the British and the Boers). He discovers, however, that the diplomats at the British Embassy in Berlin are even less inclined to countenance any overt rebuttal of the propaganda excesses, which, the Second Secretary explains, are just party politics - a slogan for the *Alideutscher Verband* - and officially condemned by the German government. The effect of this propaganda on the German people could safely be ignored, since there was only one man in Germany who counted and that was the Kaiser, who desired only friendly relations with England. Clive is persuaded to take no action that would mar the coming visit of the Prince of Wales to Berlin and is advised, in future, to take advantage of the experience of age: "Experientia docet, you know".

But Clive's temper had already been severely tried by a young Embassy official, an old school friend called Baby-Face Fitzroy, whose lowly position is more than compensated for by his own sense of self-importance.

There is a pile of letters which he is hastily reading and stamping with an Embassy stamp (not, of course, signing or initialling). He contrives to make the simple action look portentous. When he pauses, scrutinises a letter, puts it aside for consideration, it seems the unfortunate subject involved has practically forfeited his national status.

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21 Powell has described how they researched for this sequence. 'You know all this business of Sherlock Holmes, all the details were mine but actually I would know all that, I was brought up on *The Strand* magazines. You see the first thing that we would do would be to dive back into *The Times* of 1901, you know, went through the files and then we discovered that *The Hound of the Baskervilles* was coming out at the time and all that sort of thing. The first thing you do is go into the files of *The Times*. This is the great source for everything'. (G-Y, 1971, p. 6).
Clive, after waiting patiently, finally mentions the reason for his visit: the crowd of people in the waiting-room who have lost their jobs because of the anti-British propaganda. The sheer quantity of indifference and ignorance displayed by Baby-Face gradually stokes up Clive's anger until he loses his temper. When he uses his considerable lung-power to order him to shut up and stand up, 'Baby-Face shoots to his feet as if he'd been kicked from below, revealing that, below desk, he is wearing a pair of heavy tweed knickerbockers ... thick stockings and heavy boots with skates attached to them'. The higher echelons of the embassy staff are better informed but just as indifferent to the fate of their compatriots, and dismissive of the power of public opinion. The diplomats cannot conceive that the problems of ordinary people should be any concern of theirs, and decline to deal with anything below the level of governments or rulers. As Candy leaves, he has to pass through the waiting-room.

Three rows of benches, all crowded with people, mostly professional classes, businessmen, schoolteachers, governesses, people who have been compelled to give up their jobs because of the anti-British feeling. They are a lost-looking bunch of people. [Clive] gives the impression that he does not dare to look these people in the face.  

Clive is caught between his need to defend his country and the undertaking he has given to the Second Secretary at the British Embassy not to take any action that would interfere with diplomatic relations. In the event, he fails to take advantage of the experience of age and acts with the impetuosity of youth. When he knocks Kaunitz down at the Café Hohenzollem he is expressing a sense of frustration that had been growing through a series of fruitless interviews with embassy staff. Since, however, almost none of this material is included in the finished film (which skates over Clive's battles with the diplomats and goes straight to the battle in the café), Clive's behaviour appears to be based more on offended national pride and less on his desire to defend the unprotected victims of German propaganda.

Our first encounter with Prussian officers is designed to reinforce the impression of a race and class obsessed with meticulous efficiency and mindless regimentation. We are introduced to them through their footwear: 'Two pairs of jackboots, wonderfully polished, snugly fitting, beautifully in step, marching firmly down the corridor of the Embassy'. The boots seem to have an identity of their own, and it is only after they have established their independent existence that we see their occupants. 'The owners of the jackboots are two very smart officers in the uniform of the second regiment of the Ulan's' ('S C', C B, p. 133). They have come to the Embassy to arrange the details of the duel that Clive must fight to expunge the insult he

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22 'S C', C B, pp. 116, 117, 121. This scene was considered unacceptable, in that 'the British people who have lost their jobs in Germany are seen cluttering the British Embassy 'they are a lost looking bunch of people'. This is the kind of visual impression which tends to put the Germans on top' ('Report', C B, p. 35).
had offered to the officers of the German Imperial Army. The Prussians produce a slim brown volume, the *Ehren Codex*, which contains the protocol of duelling, and respond with offended rigidity to the suggestion that a duel between two men who do not know each other and have no personal reason for fighting might be unnecessary.

Oberleutenant Theodore Kretschmar-Schuldorff (who does not approve of duelling) is the officer who has been selected by lot to defend the honour of his regiment by fighting a duel with Lieutenant Clive Candy. When he enters the Gymnasium of the Second Ulan regiment on the morning of the duel, we see him through Clive’s eyes, at the full length of the hall. ‘Theo salutes smartly, clicks his heels each time before he shakes hands.... He looks a tall and ominous figure in a slightly fantastic uniform, he has, as yet, no personality beyond being the chosen representative of eighty-two serious-minded, indignant Ulan officers’ (*S C*, *C B*, pp. 143-144). Just before the duel begins, however, when Clive and Theo confront each other face to face, Theo allows a small sign of surprise and puzzlement to cross his features; it is the first hint of his individual identity.

But, in terms of original conception, it is the woman in Clive’s life whose individual identity was most in danger of being viewed as nothing more than a ‘type’. In their ‘Analysis of the Idea behind the Story of Blimp’, Powell and Pressburger state that she has to represent the changing role of women over a forty year period, particularly in the realm of professional employment.

During the last forty years other events of importance happened in the world. WOMAN, used for centuries by men as one of their chief slogans for fighting, emerged as a fighter herself. Nowadays this is regarded as a commonplace, in the First World War it was an exciting novelty, in 1902 it was unheard of.

Clive Candy falls in love three times with the same type of girl:

The first was a Governess, one of the half-dozen women who dared to leave their own country to get a job. The second was a nurse, one of the thousands of women who went overseas in the last war. The third was an A.T.S. Transport Driver, one of the millions of women in the Services today (*Analysis*, *C B*, p. 312).

The screenplay’s cast list strips her of individuality by denying her even a name. Her three roles are described as: ‘The Governess, 1902; The Nurse, 1918; The A.T.S. Driver, 1942’ (*S C*, *C B*, p. 75). Even when she acquires a name, it could be said to reinforce her status as a series of types: Miss Hunter is hunting for freedom and independence; Miss Wynne is won by Candy as a prize and has her name tagged on to her husband’s; and Miss Cannon is a soldier.

23 ‘The duel is fought under the strictest German rules of duelling. Burrowing in the British Museum, Emeric had discovered a little book in German on the etiquette of duelling. It contained every one of the points which we used so effectively in the debate between the seconds before the duel. It is grimly funny, and we went to town on it’ (*Life*, pp. 404-405).
Wendy Hiller (the first choice for the triple role of the woman in Candy's life) was replaced by Deborah Kerr. It is perhaps futile to speculate on what differences of tone and emphasis Wendy Hiller would have brought to the part, but Kerr's youth (she was only twenty years old when she started filming *Blimp*), rather like that of Glynis Johns when she was chosen to replace Elizabeth Bergner in *49th Parallel*, would probably have influenced the way she was directed, if not the way her parts were written. Even the most experienced of actresses might have had some difficulty in establishing viably authentic personae for each of WOMAN's manifestations. Kerr said that the only way she could approach the task of playing the three separate roles was to imagine that each of them were in completely different films, and her characterisations are clear-cut, differentiated and emotionally complete.  

Originally, Pressburger had merely been concerned with providing for Candy a series of credible romantic attachments, but was unsure how to develop them. There may have been a purely practical reason for the extraordinary decision to have Candy's three loves played by the same actress: to ensure continuity in a film that was by its very nature in danger of being too disjointed and episodic. Structural necessity may have dictated what later became an artistic conundrum, but it is tempting to see the three women as a tripartite personality, a transferable identity that may exist only in Candy's mind. He confesses to Theo that Edith was his ideal and that he had been romantically pursuing that ideal throughout the forty years since it had first manifested itself in the wintry Berlin of 1902. She is rather like the obsession with an ideal woman pursued over a period of forty years by the hero of a Thomas Hardy novel: 'To his Well-Beloved he had always been faithful; but she had had many embodiments. Each individuality ... had been merely a transient condition of her.'  

Clive does not see the individual, only the ideal embodiment of woman as a complement to himself. When he briefly attains it, in the person of Barbara, it is clear that he wants a woman who will complete him rather than existing in her own right. Before they marry he shyly bows his head and asks her to tell him yet again her reasons for wanting to marry him. She patiently and lovingly gives him the answer she knows he wants to hear. "I'm marrying you because I want to join the Army and see the world. I'm marrying you because I like seeing you play polo. I'm marrying you for fifty reasons that all mean that's how I imagined my future husband". Clive's response is,

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24 It was mainly due to her sense of differentiation between the personalities involved that the ladies not only avoided being stock figures, but gave the film the fairly high degree of emotional appeal it possessed (Eric Braun, Deborah Kerr. London: W H Allen, 1977, p. 70). Wendy Hiller had become pregnant. Among the other actresses approached to take her place was Anna Neagle. 'We tried to get Anna Neagle for Blimp but Wilcox wouldn’t let her play the part' (‘1942 Diary’, 4 April). Deborah Kerr had her first experience of filming with the small part of a cigarette girl in a nightclub scene in *Contraband* (but her role ended up on the cutting room floor).

"Same here! That's how I imagined my future wife!" It is a touching insight into how an intelligent woman ensures that the man she loves is happy and secure.

The ideal changes but remains eternally youthful. While Candy ages, the object of his obsession is reincarnated each time as a young woman. We, like Candy, see her as the same woman while others in the film seem unaware of the resemblance. Only once does another character recognise the similarity; Theo glimpses Johnny Cannon's face in the momentary glare of car headlights and realises why Clive had chosen her out of seven hundred other possible drivers. Clive perceives only what he has been trained to perceive and what he wants to perceive. But when in 1918 he notices a girl among a group of nurses who is strangely like Edith Hunter, he asks the Matron, "Have you ever seen the Indian Rope Trick?" and adds, "but I never met anybody who saw it unless he first heard that he was going to see it. ... You hear about a thing. You hope to see it - and you see it". It is an oddly perceptive remark for an imperceptive man to make but, by then, he had been seeing young women who resembled Edith for a considerable period of time, if Murdoch's comment, "Must be a very common sort of girl," is anything to go by.

Woman is a necessity for Clive, in all her incarnations. She is his eyes because he lacks perception, his nurse because the hunter and warrior needs his wounds dressed, his translator because he has no skill in communication, and his driver because his exalted position demands that he be carried from place to place. She is also his prize, and it is surely no accident that her portrait is given pride of place on the wall of his den, flanked by the heads of his other trophies. Miss Hunter, in the shape of Barbara Wynne, has been hunted down, bagged and displayed. But finally she is the reason that he fights, and for Candy (and Theo) the active involvement of women in armed conflict seem to undermine the very nature of the exercise. Theo sadly remarks when both of them are older, if not wiser, "Our armies are fighting for our women, our children and our homes. Now the women are fighting beside the men. The children are being trained to shoot. What's left is the home. But what's a home without women and children?"

The most dramatically successful of the three roles that Deborah Kerr was called upon to play was the first. The character of Edith Hunter is the most fully developed, probably because more time is devoted to the Berlin sequences, and the narrative centres on the love triangle between Edith, Clive and Theo. But its success may also be accounted for by the two possible role models for Edith Hunter: Anton Walbrook's English governess from childhood, Edith Williams, whom he always brought to the set to help him with pronunciation (Emerc, p. 218); and someone who would have had more historical relevance: Emily Hobhouse.
In order to break a stalemate in the course of the Boer War, Kitchener had ordered that the Boer women and children should be concentrated into camps where they could be cared for and, most importantly, would not be able to provide their men with sustenance. He did not foresee the consequences of the plan being put into action with minimal forethought. Emily Hobhouse observed the conditions in the camps and reported back to England what she had seen: a population deprived of clothes, semi-starvation, fever-stricken children lying on bare earth, and appalling rates of mortality. The screenplay describes Edith Hunter (at that stage a nameless 'Governess') as the 1902 version of the "New Woman", who intended to live her own life, and knew her own mind. She has the character to back it up; and brains ("S. C", CB, pp. 111-112). Miss Edith Hunter is a hunter after 'The Truth', both like and unlike Miss Emily Hobhouse, whose initials she shares. Miss Hobhouse was a dumpy, forty-one year old spinster whose first-hand reporting of the conditions in the South African 'refugee' camps shocked public opinion at home in England and offended other observers. Edith Hunter is a very attractive young woman with a low opinion of the state of matrimony whose opinions and attitudes give grief to her family at home in England, and offend and mystify Clive Candy in Berlin. She sees the effects of political propaganda on the civilian population in Germany and the suffering it causes ordinary British people, including herself, who are forced to leave the country as a direct consequence.

Emily Hobhouse's letters home castigated the incompetence of the military authorities.

Crass male ignorance, stupidity, helplessness and muddling. I rub as much salt into the sore places of their minds as I possibly can, because it is good for them; but I can't help melting a little when they are so very humble and confess that the whole thing is a grievous mistake and a gigantic blunder (Pakenham, p. 506).

Edith Hunter rubs a good deal of salt into Clive Candy's mind and she, also, melts a little in the face of his embarrassment and confusion. He is shocked by her dismissal of marriage as the only suitable career for a woman, and astonished by her claim that in the Boer War, "good manners cost us Magerfontein, Storinberg and Colenso. Six thousand men killed and twenty thousand wounded, and two years of war when, with a little common sense and bad manners, there would have been no war at all". But the frost of this determined defender of women's

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27 Conan Doyle, who observed (and was more interested in) the military conduct of the war rather than the plight of the civilian population, commented: 'Some consternation was caused in England by a report of Miss Hobhouse which called public attention to the very high rate of mortality in some of these camps, but examination showed that this was not due to anything insanitary in their situation or arrangement, but to a severe epidemic of measles which had swept away a large a large number of children' (Arthur Conan Doyle, The Great Boer War. London: Smith Elder and co., 1900, p. 634).
28 In response to the Mol Report on the film, the Archers said they would cut this speech ('Memo', CB, p. 39). When cooperation was unforthcoming from the Mol, it was retained.
rights is capable of melting, and this particular suffragette loses her prized independence and
her country, and dies unmourned by her children.29

Clive Candy’s lack of ability to penetrate beneath surface impressions is established in the
screenplay by his initial mental reaction to Edith Hunter: ‘This girl is a bit of a blue- stocking. Pity.
She’s pretty’. He is a little shocked by her open and detached reference to sex-attraction, and
her unashamedly superior knowledge leads him to the conclusion that she is ‘a horrid girl’ (‘S C,
C B, p. 114). These first impressions may have masked from him his own increasingly warm
feelings towards her, which are only fully revealed to him when he knows he has lost her
forever. Like the Sleeping Princess, he is awoken by a kiss, but it is a kiss that leads not to a
happy-ever-after life with his first love but to a perpetual search for a replacement for this, his
ideal of womanhood.

Theo is Clive’s superior in perception; he watches that kiss and, the screenplay implies,
understands what is happening.

It is an important moment. It is a brotherly and sisterly kiss; but for a fraction of a second
both close their eyes. When Clive’s eyes open his whole expression has changed.
Suddenly he has realised the truth. ... Clive turns to Theo and takes his hand. He still holds
Edith’s hand. He is just a little drunk. ... Theo has an inkling of how the land lies. He looks
gaily and tenderly at them both (ibid., p. 171).30

The offering of hands is an important theme of both film and screenplay. In 1919, Theo
refuses to take the hand of friendship offered to him by Clive in the prisoner-of-war camp, and
mocks his reassurances of support for a defeated Germany. The notion of war as a game of
cricket played according to the rules was dealt a death blow by the senseless loss of life in the
trenches of World War One, but Candy, who believes in chivalry and fair play, continued to
think of his profession as based on public-school, game-playing morality long after it had
ceased to have any relevance to reality. One scene in the screenplay (though not the film)
prepares us for the shortcomings of that attitude in the modern world. In the British POW camp
commandant’s office, Major Davies tells Clive that Theo’s refusal to speak to him is based on
wounded honour, or rather, ‘dignity’. Clive is non-plussed. ‘What “Dignity”, what “Honour”? ...
They lost, we won. What of it? We’ve been defeated too sometimes. Fortune of war! ... I
was taught to be a good loser’ (ibid., p. 227). But losing is no longer the name of the game.31

29 In the first outline it states that ‘Edith has killed herself because she, an Englishwoman, was hindering
Theo’s career’ (‘Outline,’ C B, p. 13).
30 When Clive confesses to Theo in 1940 that he loved Edith, Theo declares that he “had no idea”. But that
could be a diplomatic evasion to protect Clive’s feelings or merely that he had forgotten.
31 This scene was cut. The MoI report criticised the scenes at the PoW camp for subtly putting the Germans in
a superior psychological position by showing ‘their love of music and their refusal to fraternise with the British’
(‘Report,’ C B, p. 35). The only part of the scene that survives is Barbara’s speech about the Germans
committing atrocities, which was inserted into an earlier scene.
In 1939 Theo reveals to the Aliens Registration Board that he had arrived in England on the
6th of June 1935 as a refugee from Nazi Germany. In those four years he had not contacted
Clive but, it becomes clear, the feeling of friendship had survived. Theo's loyalty to his country
had militated against his leaving Germany when his wife had wanted to come home to
England. His present self-imposed exile is a kind of pilgrimage and an honouring of the old
debts of love and friendship. Because he thinks that he has lost everything that is important to
him, he dares to tell the truth to the Aliens Tribunal. "I have not told a lie. But I also have not
told the truth. A refugee soon learns that there is a great difference between the two. The truth
about me is that I am a tired old man who came to this country because he is homesick". Only
when facing the possibility of being sent to an internment camp or, even worse, forced to
leave the country, does he contact the one friend he has left: Clive Candy.

As Theo and Clive sit in companionable silence after dinner on the evening of the Aliens
Tribunal hearing, the screenplay describes their respective positions.

There is an enormous difference between the two men: for CLIVE very little has changed;
for THEO everything: he has seen less than CLIVE during the years but he has
experienced more. He is a wise man now. He speaks with a little smile about the most
important things. His attitude is that of a man very little concerned with life's troubles. He
has nothing to lose because he has lost everything ('S C', C B, p. 254).

On the fateful evening when Clive's broadcast is suppressed and he is told by the War Office
that there is no place for him in the British Army's fight against the enemy, Theo is his main
comforter. Theo, who knows better than anyone what tragedy this means for his friend, 'holds
out his hand to seize his friend's' (ibid., p. 267). The hand that was taken by Clive at the moment
of his first emotional loss in 1902 and refused by Theo in 1919 is offered to Clive at the
moment of his greatest professional loss in 1942. Theo, too, knows what it means to have the
skills and yet be denied the opportunity to use them. As an enemy alien in a Britain at war in
the confused and panic-stricken months of early 1940, he is not allowed to practise his
profession, to enter sensitive areas, to possess a car or a radio; he has to obey a curfew and
can count himself lucky that he has neither been deported nor sent to an internment camp. 32

Clive Candy is emotionally and mentally changeless. Standing by the emergency water
tank that has been built where his house once stood, Candy contemplates the water and,
smiling ruefully, says "Now here is the lake, and I still haven't changed. Hopeless!" In their
'A
analysis of the Idea behind the Story of Blimp', Powell and Pressburger stated that 'a man
becomes a Blimp, not by acquiring bad qualities but by failing to acquire good ones' ('Analysis,'
The cast list in the screenplay still names Laurence Olivier as Clive Candy. Powell maintains that Olivier would have brought a biting edge to his portrayal of the old soldier. The only change was instead of having a vicious, slashing, cruel merciless Colonel Blimp we had a dear old bumbler and of course everybody loved that. It blunted the message a good deal' (G-Y, 1971, p.6). But just how vicious, slashing, cruel and merciless was Candy ever meant to be? There is one reference in the screenplay to him turning a ‘terrifying eye’ on a B.B.C. assistant in 1942 before walking innocently into the office of the Director (who tells him that his talk will not be broadcast), and the ‘vicious’ reaction after the even more shattering news that the War Office no longer requires his services is ‘a murderous assault’ on the cold chicken that is served for dinner. These two relatively mild eruptions, and a justifiable loss of temper with an embassy official, are all the evidence of a vicious nature the screenplay provide. If Olivier had delivered the performance that Powell claims he intended to give, it would, I believe, have been a distortion of the character as written. Roger Livesey’s performance, with its gravel voice concealing a heart as soft as butter-candy, was probably as close to the screenplay’s conception of the nature of Candy’s personification of a Blimp as was intended. There is the possibility that the screenplay may have been rewritten to accommodate some of the criticisms made by the War Office and the MoI, but it is more likely that Powell’s recollection of Olivier’s conception of the role was guided by just one small part of the letter that Olivier wrote to him on May 28: ‘Perhaps shortly after his first disappointment, you might see him striding down the Mall - ticking off a soldier for not saluting properly - and doing it very well, and striding off through the sunny morning, feeling much better. “After all there’s nothing so jolly fine as being a jolly fine soldier”.’ But in that letter Olivier seems more concerned with complacency than with downright viciousness. He argues that the film should show ‘how English constitutional complacency has re-set the English nature time and time again simply by various attitudes of good taste, etc.; and of Candy, that it should reveal that ‘Through all his life he shows himself to be lulled into feeling everything’s alright’ (‘Olivier,’ C B, pp. 22-23).

The character whose casting remained unaltered was Theo. Walbrook, like Pressburger, was an exile from his homeland who wanted more than anything else to fight for the country that was sheltering him in the most effective way he could. He, too, had the courage to ‘tell the truth’ to a man who in some ways could be said to resemble Clive Candy. At the same time as playing the part of Theo in *Blimp*, Walbrook was performing in *Watch on the Rhine* in the

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33 Powell had cast Livesey as Candy because he knew that there would be no problem getting him out of his war work (in an aircraft factory) and because he had been thwarted by Michael Balcon when he had tried to employ Livesey on *The Phantom Light* (1935). He claims that it ‘was probably one of the happiest inspirations I have ever had’ (*Life*, p. 404).
West End. In the interval of one performance, Winston Churchill invaded his dressing-room and took him to task for taking part in The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp. Walbrook is reported to have replied, ‘No people in the world other than the English would have had the courage, in the midst of a war, to tell the people the unvarnished truth’.

Powell, in this letter to Wendy Hiller, describes how Pressburger first had the idea.

Let us show, he said, that Blimps are made, not born. Let us show that their aversion to any form of change springs from the very qualities which have made them invaluable in action; that their lives, so full of activity, are equally full of frustration. We will show his youth and his youthful dreams; and we will show, through his eyes, the youth of today: the changing world of the last forty years through the eyes of one unchanging man; a man who has fought in three wars with honour and distinction and has not the slightest idea what any of them were really about; a man who, in his youth, fumblingly puts one woman, quite against her will or inclination, on a pedestal; and when she jumps off into another man’s arms, is always trying to fill the vacant niche with women of the same size and shape. A comic, a pathetic, a controversial character.

It would appear that they had planned to shoot Blimp on location in countries which would have demonstrated Candy’s career in parts of the British Empire. Powell details how later,

I tried to push ‘Blimp’ out altogether, saying that with the state of the world today any location work as we had at first envisaged, was impossible. But he came back again, more firmly established than ever, by a remark of Emeric’s that if he were to write a play of ‘Blimp’, it would be in one set: the home to which he returns from his various campaigns. Once seen in this way, the real importance of the subject begins to emerge: it was to be much more a picture of London in three wars, of the home to which he returns, of his club, his friends, his relations, than a picture of sahibs at work and play. ... The development of the characters became the important thing, the love-story of the three women, the completion of their circle of development (Emeric has a beautiful scheme for this), the relation of the young officer at the beginning of the film to events at the end, his relation to the third of the women (ibid., pp. 17-19).

London, then, was to take a central role in this film, and it is London’s vulnerability as well as Candy’s that is underscored by Spud Wilson’s daring invasion and conquest.

Home, for Candy, is London. When not on active service, he divides his time between 33 Cadogan Place, SW1 (first seen as the home of his aunt) and The Royal Bathers Club, St James’s Street, SW1. Christie points out that:

Throughout Blimp, with its curious transitional devices that elide time and space, while also reiterating experiences (coming back to an empty house that’s never quite home; the club that is more home-like than home, while actually recalling the ambience of public school; the War Office, shown like a headmaster’s study), there accumulates an acute sense that Clive has never held on to anything, perhaps never really experienced anything.

(‘Intro’, CB, pp. xvi-xvii).

55 Powell to Wendy Hiller, CB, p. 17. It is unsigned, but refers to Pressburger in the third person and was found among Powell’s papers. It is also undated but, in his diary for 1942, Pressburger noted on February 26th, ‘The story of Blimp goes well but I can’t get on with the woman’s part. Pity’. On March 15 he wrote, ‘Very bad news from Wendy Hiller. She can’t play in Blimp because she is getting a baby’. The letter to Wendy Hiller would seem, then, to have been written between February 26 and March 15, 1942 (‘1942 Diary’).
Clive Candy has no strong family ties that we see, only his elderly aunt. His parents are never mentioned and he leaves no offspring, so that he seems to exist in a strange state of limbo. Basically a lonely man, the army is his mother and father and provides him with a series of temporary homes, but London is his base.

Like a play, this is a film in three acts. It focuses on three separate periods of history, each with its appropriate war: 1902, the Boer War; 1918-19, the end of the First World War; and 1939-1942, the first half of the Second World War. To bridge the years between these wars there are two separate montages of sounds and images that represent Clive Candy’s favourite peacetime occupation: hunting. A series of gun shots are accompanied by the instantaneous appearance of animal heads on the wall of his Den, each with a caption indicating where and when the trophy was acquired. The second montage was scripted to be an almost exact repetition of the first. Only later was a montage of invitations and press cuttings superimposed on the turning pages of a scrapbook, inserted to represent the social side of Candy’s married life. The announcement of his wife’s death is the signal for the recurrence of the original montage (to show how Candy consoled himself after his wife’s death) and her portrait is then hung in his Den, along with his other trophies, as his most precious possession.

The three acts of this drama are completed by a prologue and an epilogue. The prologue begins with the typewritten notice of ‘Operation Beer Mug’ being carried by motorcycle despatch riders, one of whom delivers the message to Spud Wilson’s battalion headquarters in a barn. Spud announces his decision to ‘make it like the real thing’, and they set off in three trucks to penetrate the defences of London six hours before the official start of their war manoeuvres. They stop at ‘The Bull’, Spud goes in and his men wait. Johnny Cannon comes out and sneaks to her car. Spud, with a head injury, rejoins his men and they chase after Johnny as far as The Royal Bathers Club. Inside the club Johnny, holding a telephone, dives under the porter’s desk when Spud and his men enter. They go into the hottest room of the Turkish bath, and Spud’s encounter with Candy ends with both of them falling into the pool.

When Candy’s head disappears beneath the water, in a flash of time he relives forty years of his career, rather like a drowning man seeing his life passing before his eyes before he dies. The screenplay describes a loop from the few hours before that climactic event in 1942 back forty years into the past, then forward to the day after the invasion of The Royal Bathers

36 Jack Cardiff recalls the difficulties of lighting these montages. ‘Michael Powell was nearly finished with Colonel Blimp and I was doing inserts for this picture on another, tiny, stage. This particular insert was more interesting than usual. It was a drawing-room wall, on which there was a collection of stuffed animal heads, all with large branches of horns. It was difficult to light without casting multiple shadows, and I spent more time than usual arranging the lights’ (Jack Cardiff, Magic Hour. London and Boston: Faber, 1996, p. 83).
37 In Billy Wilder’s Sunset Boulevard (Paramount, 1950), the hero has already drowned and we see how he ended up in this predicament from the memory of a corpse.
Club. The past is seen through Candy's eyes, not viewed objectively. When it traces Candy's love life and career forward through time we share his subjective view, but we are also allowed to see the view that others in his story take of him. Edith, Theo, Murdoch, the American army officers, Barbara, Van Zijl, Major Davis, all of them perceive what Candy cannot perceive. The degree to which Candy's point of view is marginalised, and we become more detached from it (though not, necessarily, from him), increases as we progress towards the opening time period of the film.

When we see again the initial race into London and invasion of Candy's club, it is from the perspective of Johnny Cannon, who had played a restricted and somewhat puzzling part in the prologue. As Andrew Sarris has commented, 'Quite properly, the picture begins with the jarringly jazzy images of war-time England in the process of becoming Americanized,' but, he adds, 'The film is unpleasantly noisy at this point, and the plot zips along without establishing any of the characters'. In the epilogue we see what happens when Spud enters 'The Bull' roadhouse, and understand the relationships between Spud, Johnny Cannon and Clive Candy. We also realise that the jazzed up march that accompanies the headlong rush of Spud's militia is not only the film's commentary on the action but has an identifiable source within the narrative: the jukebox in the roadhouse where Johnny tries to dissuade Spud from his ungentlemanly enterprise. We can re-evaluate our impressions of the protagonists in light of the knowledge that we now possess about their backgrounds. We know now that Candy has lost almost everything: his home at 33 Cadogan Place; his first love; his wife; his army command position, and his loyal friend and servant, Murdoch, who fulfilled the role of general factotum in his household. All he has left is his new career as General in the Home Guard, his home in the Royal Bathers Club and his driver, Johnny Cannon. We also register something that we may not have really noticed the first time we see the film; Johnny Cannon is played by the same actress who appears again as Edith Hunter and Barbara Wynne, 'a mystical reincarnation-before-the-fact of Deborah Kerr' (ibid., p. 33). The loop of time is completed on the morning after the immersion in the pool, when Candy is resurrected - again.36

34 Christie identifies it as 'a fantasy of history ... a "collective" fantasy which allows the spectator, like Blimp, to "plunge" back into the history of the previous half-century, and selectively rework its themes and material' (Christie, "Blimp, Churchill and the State," Powell/Press. p. 117).
36 Andrew Sarris, "The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp," Film Comment, 26, (3), 1990, p. 33.
40 There was a great interest in 'playing with time' in the 1930's. Priestley wrote several 'time' plays, including *Time and the Conways, Dangerous Corner, and I Have Been Here Before. And Johnson Over Jordan* concerns a man at the moment of his death reliving moments from his past. Cocteau experimented with time in his plays and films. 'A chimney stack begins to fall in the opening sequence of Cocteau's first film and completes its fall in the last shot; meanwhile, the whole action of *Le Sang d'un Poete* has taken place. Just as a whole lifetime can unfold before the eyes of a drowning man, in *The Infernal Machine*, Anubis explains to the Sphinx that man's time is a fold of eternity' (Carl Wildman, "Introduction," Cocteau, pp. 14-15).
The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp carries a great deal of personal emotional truth. Walbrook can be identified with Pressburger, as an Anglophile European Jew and a refugee categorised as an enemy alien, who is desperate to contribute to Britain’s war effort against Nazi Germany. Powell has said that he identified completely with Clive Candy and that lots of things about the character were exactly like him: ‘I was sentimental and loved women and dogs. I’d always felt enormously sympathetic to that kind of man. Honourable, puzzled, innocent and doing a great deal of harm with his puzzlement and his ignorance and his innocence. I see myself as very much like that’. He also had a Murdoch figure in the shape of Bill Paton.41

Pressburger stated that one of the reasons he created a multiple role for the woman in Candy’s life was that he himself used to be like that. ‘I think that many people have a certain type that they are always chasing through their lives, trying to find in their lives again and again and again. So we made the decision that Blimp was one of those’ (G-Y, 1971, p. 10). Johnny Cannon is the last embodiment of Candy’s obsessive pursuit of his ideal, but her real name, Angela, is the name Pressburger gave his daughter, born on 10 December 1942 while Blimp was at the editing stage. This third manifestation of the ideal woman seems to occupy the position of surrogate daughter for Candy rather than a romantic attachment. She is the child he never had, just as Barbara had been the wife he lost, and Edith the first love he never attained. When Powell was asked to say what he thought was most exemplary about the script, he replied, ‘I think the love story’ (South Bank). It was, in fact, a double love story. Apart from Candy’s love for three women, all of whom he loses either to another man or to death, there is the love story of Clive and Theo, which could stand as a synonym for the loving friendship that existed between Powell and Pressburger.42

The shared credit of director, producer and writer, means that it is difficult to attribute individual responsibility for the creative input of Powell and Pressburger’s films. There are, however, indications (mostly from Powell) of how this screenplay was written. The initial idea, story-line and most of the research would appear to have been Pressburger’s. When it came to the dialogue for the film, it would make sense that the German dialogue would have been entirely Pressburger’s, but that Powell’s input would have been invaluable for the English dialogue. He maintains that the shape of the scenes was Pressburger’s, and that he always got the

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41 Michael Powell, interviewed by Melvyn Bragg, The South Bank Show. LWT, 1986. ‘A film director, like an impresario, has to have somebody in his unit who is solely devoted to his interests. Bill Paton had been that man for me ever since I beckoned him down from the Shetland Islands after The Edge of the World. In our case it was a two-way devotion’ (Life, p. 645).

42 ‘Michael often said that their partnership was like a marriage - instead of being of different sexes they were of different backgrounds and temperaments’ (Emeric, p. xviii).
shape right, adding ‘You can’t have higher praise, really. ... He always saw the whole thing at
one moment. I often had to discover it.’ It was Powell, however, who made them ‘what they
were in the way of the Englishness. You know, the revealing things, the little things about
English men and women. And, naturally, in writing the scripts, the final English dialogue script
was mine’ (South Bank). And he describes how they worked together on the final version of
the screenplay.

I would pull out of this ragbag of reminiscence enough coloured patches in Blimp’s life to
make a crazy quilt of Technicolor. Emeric would query some allusion. I would explain it, and
he would embroider it. And so the script grew until it had all the beautiful inconsequence of
the life and death of a typical English gentleman (Life, p. 419).

The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp, a film that emphasises universality by its use of
readily identifiable types, also contains a multitude of personal and particular references. In this
resides much of its charm.

Patterns

The credits for the film of The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp (1943) roll over a heraldic
tapestry, which depicts an almost naked and distinctly rotund knight seated proudly on his
charger and holding a lance, in a pastoral setting under a tree that bears leaves with the names
of the principal actors. At his feet are his two faithful hounds (cocker spaniels), on either side of
his coat of arms, which is ‘quartered with a flowing moustache, red tape, a cricket bat (for
playing straight with), and a glass of port’. The motto, ‘Sic Transit Gloria Candy’, conveys the
central theme and the tapestry, woven of coloured threads, is both a reminder of more
chivalrous times and a mockery of outdated attitudes. The present owes a debt to the past
that it cannot afford to acknowledge. The interweaving of various patterns in the finished film
and the 1942 screenplay demonstrates the complexity and, sometimes, ambiguity of the
ideas that were explored by this production.

This was the first film that Powell and Pressburger had made together in Technicolor, though
Powell had worked on Korda’s Thief of Bagdad. Powell maintains that he decided to make it in
colour for a number of reasons: he had never directed a feature film in colour on his own;
Technicolor film stock, laboratory and technicians were still available; and Georges Pèrinal, 'whose lighting on The Thief of Bagdad had staggered the Americans and the Technicolor Company itself, was available too'. Alfred Junge was put in complete charge of the art department, 'that is to say all the art direction, the sets and props and also all costumes and accessories, including make-up'. For Kerr's 'Three Ages of Woman', Powell wanted complete naturalism, 'i.e. make-up so delicately put on that it looked like no make-up in 1902, a slightly more open-air look for the girl in 1919, to the full street make-up of the modern girl, Johnny, in 1942'. Technicolor, however, insisted on supervising the make-up because of the pigments already in the skins of the actors and actresses. Their make-up reduced the faces of all actresses to a deadly conformity: sticky, cherry-coloured lips, all character in the face smoothed out by the dreaded use of pancake, rouged cheeks, and eyes staring hopefully through a fringe of mascara.

The Archers refused to be constrained by Technicolor's iron control of their colour process. To have presented women of the Edwardian era in such make-up would have disturbed the period authenticity that this production was aiming to achieve, and, according to Powell, it was the question of how to present the three heroines that determined the use of colour.

The beginning of the century saw the hourglass figure, the heavy material of the dresses and skirts, the enormous hats and all the paraphernalia to make a woman feel decorative and useless. The 1914 war freed a woman's body from corsets which went into the dustbin. It was the time of ugly serviceable clothes, drab colours, cloche hats, skimpy skirts, and low heels. Finally, there was the Second World War with women in uniform beside their men (Life, pp. 536, 406-407)."

In 1902 the women are certainly presented as decorative. Edith Hunter's first outfit is liberally trimmed with fur and her hat sports an entire stuffed bird swooping down from crown to brim (hardly consonant with the screenplay's description of her as neatly and not extravagantly dressed, but marks her as both hunter and prey). In 1919 Barbara, released from her Red Cross nurse's uniform, is seen 'dressed in what, in 1918, was considered a ravishing creation: rather like a badly tied sack ('SC', CB, p. 213). And in the Second World War, Johnny Cannon is only ever seen in uniform khaki. The screenplay notes how colour can evoke the past.

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48 This was Junge's first Technicolor film, which necessitated a change in the way he designed his sets. 'The work of the film designer, up to a very few years ago, was carried out in black and white, as it had to conform to ordinary photographic standards of tone. This applied not only to the sketches prepared as a guide to those who had to build the sets, but to the actual sets, which were produced in black and white, as colour would have introduced many needless troubles for the cameraman' (Sureiwic, p. 15). Pressburger seems not to have been impressed by Junge's early colour sketches for Blimp. 'To Micky to meet Junge who has shown us some Phantastically ugly drawings for Blimp's sets in colour' ('1942 Diary', May 3rd).

49 The last costume we see Edith Hunter wearing (when Clive learns that she is going to marry Theo) is a red and white blouse with a blue skirt. It would seem to support Ian Christie's contention that the woman in Clive's life is a 'recurrant a-historical figure' and 'an allegorical representation of "Britain" (Britannia?)', a reading also supported by 'the "heraldic" image of the credit sequence (a tapestry of Blimp) and the insertion of the mythological play Ulysses' (Christie, "Blimp, Churchill and the State," Powell/Press, pp. 117-118). Edith would appear to be wearing (if not quite waving) the flag.
The principal reason up to this point for making the picture in colour is because colour is more successful in evoking a period which, although some time ago, is still fresh in the memories of many people. ... Sights, sounds, but above all, colours, make up the memories of a generation: more so in the case of the period with which we have dealt. 1902 was the commencement of the Edwardian era, full of charm, prosperity, spaciousness and leisure, to which it seemed there could never be an end (Ibid., pp. 181-182).

The past is seen through rose-tinted Technicolor spectacles, and the men and women are clothed as befits this fairy-tale past. But as the film progresses through its set periods, the clothes lose colour and appeal as decorative qualities are sacrificed to freedom and equality.

It is not only the women who are fashion-conscious; the men are just as careful of their appearance. In 1902 Clive and Hoppy leave the Turkish Bath in regimental splendour, 'very pleased with themselves, in colourful smart uniforms, their great-coats over their shoulders, their caps and swords at a dashing angle, looking as if they had just stepped out of a bandbox' (Ibid., p. 99). Both German and English officers are shown to be aware of the importance of the effect that their appearance creates in the eye of the beholder. In front of all the visitors gathered in the vestibule of the nursing home near Berlin there is a clash, not of arms but of uniforms.

Suddenly there is quite a stir. There is a sound of marching boots. All heads turn towards a corridor which debouches on the left of the hall: a group of officers of the 2nd Regiment of the Ulans of the Guard appears. Conscious of their fine appearance and of the sensation they are causing, they cross the hall in a solid body, making a good deal of noise.

And then,

A new commotion arises from the corridor which debouches on the right of the hall. All heads turn in that direction. A group of officers of a famous English Regiment are emerging, also in full regimentals. They are also conscious of the stir they are creating. (Ibid., pp. 155-156).

That Clive is vain of his appearance even when dressed as a civilian is made plain by the screenplay just before his first meeting with Edith Hunter; he 'glances sharply, and with secret approval, at his manly figure in a full-length mirror' (Ibid., p. 112). He is, however, conscious of the extra power conferred by a uniform. When Theo enters the gymnasium, dressed in his fantastic one, Clive ruefully remarks, "I wish I'd brought my uniform". When Clive loses his cool in the hottest room of the Turkish Bath and 'emerges from the foam like Venus' (Ibid., p. 94), it is a comparison made on the grounds of naked vulnerability rather than beauty. Spud declared that he was off "to see the Wizard", and Clive is revealed to be an impotent roarer, like the Wizard of Oz, when stripped of his military accoutrements. The uniform makes the man.⁷

⁷ 'Bandaged like the Invisible Man after his duel, he gestures in a parody of communication - but this is little different from his unbandaged self' ('Intro', C B, p. xvii.) Later, when the bandages leave his eyes, nose and mouth visible, Candy puts two toothbrushes akimbo on his upper lip and looks remarkably like the scarecrow from The Wizard of Oz (MGM, 1939). The scarecrow, we may recall, has no brain.
By then, however, that uniform was khaki. The colour was chosen by the military to protect their men from attack by making them blend in with the landscape, which, by the end of the First World War, was the colour of mud.

Our next use of colour is in the first part of the 1918-19 Sequence which we call, for convenience, the 'Khaki Sequence.' After four years of senseless trench warfare, all the colour and variety of Europe and its peoples had been reduced to a uniform dull colour by day and to blackness by night. Khaki was the colour of clothes, faces, official forms, everything: while the battle zone itself had been reduced to a consistency as featureless and as sticky as porridge. By this deliberate elimination of all colours except khaki, we hope to point this contrast (SC, CB, p. 182).

This careful control of colour, expressionist rather than realistic, is yet another indication that The Archers were more concerned with conveying their ideas, their 'message', by non-naturalistic means. 46

The wasted landscape is described in the screenplay as a paradise lost, 'once a pleasant avenue, now a dreary cratered embankment lined with splintered stumps,' and the habitations of men are contrasted with their former glory. The exterior of Major Van Zijl's headquarters has suffered from its change of use, since 'all distinguishing features of the Estaminet have either fallen down or fallen in long ago. It's gradually vanishing into the mud and nobody cares'. 46 The interior, however, has been allowed to retain some vestiges of its former estate. 'We can see vaguely that once it was a pleasant little café, just as with some filthy old tramp it is not beyond conjecture that he was once a young, attractive man. The contrast is as great' (SC, CB, pp. 182, 184-185). The contrast made with the past emphasises change, loss, waste.

In 1919 paradise is regained - in England. The shattered landscape and disintegrating buildings of Flanders are replaced by an English idyll. First, in the north, Barbara's family home: a large country mansion set in a spacious and beautiful garden with a great sweep of countryside visible beyond its yew hedge. Then, in the south, Theo's POW camp: a fine old Country House, a large and beautiful garden with smooth lawns that run down to a river, crossed by two bridges with an island in the middle. But there is a worm in this apple. 'There is a Guard House on the island and the bridge is heavily wired with barbed wire above and

46 They were not alone. For This Happy Breed (Two Cities/Cineguild, 1944), David Lean's subdued use of colour for the story of a suburban family was dubbed ‘domesticated Technicolor’. Time magazine's three page review of Olivier's Henry V (Rank/Two Cities, 1944) included these observations: 'Often as not, the brilliant Technicolor is deliberately anti-naturalistic ... Almost every shot of the French court is like a pre-Renaissance painting'; and the night before Agincourt was 'the most inspired sequence of the film. Olivier opens it with a crepuscular shot of the doomed and exhausted English as they withdraw along a sunset stream to encamp for the night. This shot was made at dawn ... against the shuddering objection of the Technicolor expert. It is one of many things that Olivier and Cameraman Robert Krasker did with colour which Technicolor tradition says must not or cannot be done' (John Huntley, British Technicolor Films. London: Skelton Robinson, 1949, pp. 55; 64-65).

46 Alfred Junge has the distinction of being the only Production Designer to have one of his pictures hung in the Royal Academy. This was a sketch of The Road to Estaminet du Pont from The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp' (Eric Warman, A Matter of Life and Death. London: World Film Publications, 1946, p. 117).
below and English sentries are stationed on the bridge' (ibid., p. 220). Even in England the
countryside has been touched by war.

Although it is this period just after the end of the First World War that is dominated by the
pastoral, the homage to rural settings is evident throughout most of the production. In 1939,
when Theo ‘tells the truth’ to the Aliens Registration Board, it appears to be nostalgia for rural
England (and its association with his wife and Candy) that is his main reason for deciding to
become an exile from his own land.

And, very foolishly, I remembered the English countryside, the green lawns where I
spent the long months of captivity, the weedy rivers and the trees which she loved so
much. And a great desire came over me to come back here to my wife’s country. And
this, sir, is the truth (Own Transcript).

And that memory had been triggered by accidentally seeing again the Nursing Home in the
countryside near Berlin where he and Clive had convalesced after their duel. The countryside
is both a healer and a reuniter. In 1942 the screenplay dictated that Spud and his ‘band of
merry men’ should be encamped in the open air and that Spud should be discovered
shaving under a hawthorn hedge. The eventual location, in a barn, is still a reminder of the
pastoral heart of England, but an England geared and mobilised for attack and counter-attack.
When they invade London it could be seen as the rough but honest virtue of the countryside
pitted against the sophisticated attitudes of the city. It is a bit like having your cake and eating it
to make the countryside both the cradle of eternal traditional virtues and of modern attitudes to
warfare, but most English rebels, including Robin Hood, have rebelled from rural fastnesses,
against the perceived or real abuse of power and privilege of a city-based central authority.

During the 1930’s, the quintessential England had been represented in poetry, prose and
film as a rural paradise, despite the fact that by then the majority of the population had left the
countryside for the towns and cities. In The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp, nostalgia for a
vanishing rural heritage vies with the reality of modern industrial life, and compromises by
representing both as an amalgam of all that was valuable in the England of 1942. A piece of
sleight-of-hand to combine the pastoral with the utilitarian is practised with the montage that
bridges the transition from France in 1918 to England in 1919. It shows a large and busy
Yorkshire cotton mill with the last lengths of khaki cloth vanishing off the looms, the khaki dyes
being emptied away, new and beautiful dyes appearing, and the looms busy again
producing gay patterns. The first length of cloth off the looms is for a bridal gown, and the
montage ends with a newspaper announcement of the engagement of Clive Candy to
Barbara Wynne. The owner of the busy mill is also the owner of the ‘The Hall’, set in its
beautiful garden and rolling landscape. A new breed, the industrial class, is vigorously buying
up the estates of the previously wealthy minor rural aristocracy. It celebrates the union of pastoral and industrial, of town-bred Clive and country-reared Barbara, of the north and the south. The social fabric of the nation is being rewoven before our eyes.

The motto that appears on the opening tapestry, 'Sic Transit Gloria Candy', prefigures the mock-heroism and satire which constantly undercut the tragic events in Candy's life. But the tragic theme of death runs under the comic encapsulation of his career. He proves to be sterile as well as (in the Turkish Bath) impotent. Regeneration could have been demonstrated through the birth of a new generation of children, but Clive has none, and Theo has lost his to the Nazi party. Theo comments that this is no world in which to bring up children, but that cannot comfort a man like Clive; his is a dying breed. This is the death of the title; not a literal death but the death of a type. He is mortal in the too, too solid flesh but has had immortality thrust upon him in the two-dimensional realms of paper and film.

Comedy is subversive, and this film is, quintessentially, a comedy. The careful research into social mores and historical events results in an effect more of fantasy than reality: 'The very fastidiousness of the observation, the overloading of it, gives the movie, paradoxically, a sense of unreality' (Emeric, p. 209). It is a national epic treated as a musical comedy from which the songs have, unaccountably, been mislaid. At the beginning of the film the column of motorbike despatch riders is choreographed like a Busby Berkeley number, and in the corridors of the British Embassy in Berlin the diplomatic corps performs an intricate sequence of dance-like steps. In the stage production of Ulysses that Clive sees at Her Majesty's Theatre we hear only faintly ridiculous lines of rhyming couplets, but the production is referred to as a musical. Martial pride is parodied by snatches of The Chocolate Soldier, and Clive's nickname is 'Sugar Candy'. Some of this stylistic treatment could be accounted for by Pressburger's experience working at Ufa, especially on the operetta Ronny (1931), but there is also the potential influence on The Archers' films of Robert Helpmann, who became choreographer at Sadler's Wells in 1941. His first production was Comus, 'a modification of an early English art form, the Masque, in which movement, music and the declamation of poetry are blended, usually in a pastoral setting'.

As the credit sequence confirms; two small letters spiral down from the tree to attach themselves to the 'mortal Colonel' and transform him into an 'immortal' one.

It was a musical. The screenplay introduces the sequence as the 'new musical play Ulysses' by Stephen Phillips' ('S C', C B, p. 173). And among the Pressburger papers is a transcript of a Times review of Stephen Phillip's Ulysses, published on 3 February (footnote, ibid., p. 167).

Arnold L Haskell, 'Ballet Since 1939,' Since 1939, p. 31. For Christie, both Blimp and AMOLAD are 'striking examples of the reinvention of the masque', a form of spectacle 'popular in aristocratic and court circles in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Masques were usually allegorical, with a mythological scenario which could also be read in terms of contemporary politics' (Christie, AMOLAD, p. 16).
When Theo enters the gymnasium for his duel with Clive, his entrance is given an edge of menace by being accompanied by Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*. The gymnasium is a vast, bare, brilliantly-lit place. It is the only music we hear in the scene until Colonel Borg says "Los!" to signal the beginning of the duel. The music then echoes and reinforces the thrust and parry of the men and the clash of their sabres. And from the moment the duel begins, we become detached from the action.

The movement of the camera quickens. It sweeps away from the fighters and high above them. They and their Seconds are small figures in the middle of the vast brightly-lit hall. The clash of steel becomes fainter.

Above the hissing gas-chandeliers the cross-trees of the roof are in semi-darkness. Then - without a break - the camera slips through the huge windows and we are out in the street ("SC, CB, p. 147").

The fight itself is not important; only the causes and the consequences matter, and the detail of the codes of conduct that it illustrates.

The Café Hohenzollern is described in the screenplay as a 'typical big Berlin musical café [with] two floors, an upper and a lower, connected by a very wide shallow staircase covered with red carpet'.

The Patrons of the Café are mostly from the middle class and upwards. Students are there in their coloured caps (each student organization has a different cap), artists, officers, one or two parties of society people, ordinary townspeople with their families - all sorts. They eat and drink; glasses of hot punch and mugs of beer are the favourites and there is a great bustle everywhere. On the upper floor, where the landing makes a big bay, there is an orchestra. But the more unusual feature is a wooden frame on a pole into which numbers can be inserted. Corresponding with the number in a little booklet placed on every table giving the name of the piece and its composer (ibid., pp. 121-122).^53

All of this, combined with music and movement, makes it seem like a scene from an operetta. At the beginning, the orchestra plays a polka at a cracking pace as people enter in a swirl of coats and furs. Students ritually toast each other by rising from their seats, raising their beer mugs, clicking their heels, bowing before and after drinking and then resuming their seats, all in strict tempo. Waiters bow as they pass each other, supporting their beer-laden trays with one hand, and all this bustling activity is reflected in, and enlarged by, the great gilded mirrors on the lower floor as the orchestra plays on, led by a perspiring conductor. We view the scene from the vantage point of Clive and Edith's position on the balcony, and it is from that position that the musical climax of the scene is presented to us. Clive, stung by Edith's disdain for his capitulation to the diplomatic staff, cannot resist the temptation to taunt Kaunitz before retreating from the field; he asks the orchestra to play the Titania Aria from *Mignon*.^54

^53 A note found among Pressburger's papers would seem to indicate that the model for the Café Hohenzollern was 'The Café Königsbau with orchestra (later used in *Blimp*)' (Emeric, p. 30).

The film is haunted by the leitmotif of the Titania aria. Candy sings it as he emerges from the pool in 1902 and his friend Hoppy completes the aria, establishing it as a symbol of male friendship and rivalry. Theo whistles it in 1902, just before informing Clive that he will have to fight another duel because Theo is in love with the woman he has assumed to be Clive’s fiancée, and he whistles it again over the telephone in 1919 (into a vacuum, since no one at that point was holding the ear-piece). It is last heard shortly after Theo has returned to the railway station, having been reassured by Clive and his distinguished guests that Germany’s defeat will not prevent them getting his country back on its feet again. When Barbara tells Clive not to hum, it is the Titania Aria he is humming. Powell has described this scene on more than one occasion. To Melvyn Bragg he stated that Clive’s attitude to the woman in the film is that of ‘blind worship’ and quotes a little scene I played at the fireside’ to support that contention (South Bank). He mentioned it to Eric Braun.

There was a scene [where she] has to disagree gently but firmly with her husband, putting him right with assurance. She played the scene so well and so truly that Emeric who, being Hungarian, had set ideas about woman’s place in the scheme of things, said “The scene’s all wrong! I wouldn’t let any woman talk to me like that’.’ (Braun, p. 69).

And in his autobiography he said they had rigged up a very small set, two easy chairs and a fireplace, in one of the big, empty, echoing Denham stages, for an intimate scene between Roger and Deborah. ... a lovely domestic scene of the two of them, plus my spaniels Eric and Spangle, by the fireside. I wanted something more intimate for the last glimpse of Candy’s beloved wife [so] I invented a bit of business which scandalised Emeric – the anti-feminist. Clive starts to hum the tune from the opera Mignon, which is one of the themes of the film. ... She laughs and loves him and stretches out her arms to him and he takes her in his arms. The spaniels snore at their feet.85

The composer for Blimp was Allan Gray, and Powell described Gray’s approach to writing film music: ‘He would read the script with great attention, find one or two plot themes and develop a musical theme to accompany them, keeping in close touch with the cutting room while the film was in production’ (Life, p. 532). And the publicity for the première details the epic proportions of the score he had to compose for Blimp.

He had to follow three different epochs in British history with a musical score true to each period. In fact it was three films rolled into one with a recurring theme to help the continuity of the story. The personal romances and adventures of all the principal characters, as well as the vast national issues involved, are all given their musical commentary. The result is a symphony of film music (Blimp Première Publicity).

The music that Gray composed to accompany the credit titles does, in fact, operate like the overture to an opera or musical comedy, encapsulating the leitmotifs that are to occur and recur within the film: romantic, martial, operatic and mock-heroic. And the modulation from the chivalric

85 Life, p. 411. They lean towards each other and hold hands but he does not actually take her in his arms. This obsessive recollection of his alteration to the narrative flow of a scene or sequence recurs with the Pamela Brown role in I Know Where I’m Going (see pp. 174, 176). In both cases he was in love with the woman in question.
tapestry to the opening of the film is accomplished via the staccato tapping of a typewriter, followed by the American jazzed-up march that accompanies the fleet of motorbikes.

The sequence with the American Army officers in the First World War establishes more than just a reminder of the previous occasion when British and American troops had fought the Germans as allies; it reveals how we are divided by a common language. It is not only the differences between British and American English that are highlighted but also the difficulties of communication between other languages: German and English in the scenes in Berlin; French and English in the convent scenes at Ami le Bon. There is also the problem of the refusal to communicate: the German prisoners who refuse to give Clive the information he needs, and Theo's refusal to speak to Clive in the PoW camp. But the importance of the spoken word is pre-eminent, above all in Candy's faith in the sanctity of the Englishman's word. For Clive, his word is his bond; Spud, however, takes a more pragmatic approach to its inviolability in the context of total war. The instructions he receives for operation Beer-Mug include a handwritten directive to 'Make it like the real thing', which he initially interprets to his men as 'prisoners must be bayonetted to death, women must be raped, our losses divided by ten and the enemy's multiplied by twenty!' (not in the film), and later as an invitation to break the agreement on the course of the exercise and to attack like Pearl Harbour, without warning. In the Turkish bath he defends his strategy by telling Candy that this is going to be like the real thing.

You say war starts at midnight. How do you know the enemy says so too? ... How many agreements have been kept by the enemy since this war started? We agree to keep to the rules of the game and they keep kicking us in the pants. When I joined the army the only agreement I entered into was to defend my country by any means at my disposal. Not only by National Sporting Club rules but by every means that has existed since Cain slugged Abel (Own Transcript).

Candy's first reactions are quite mild and reasonable, which tends to align our sympathies with Candy even before the flashback gives us ample reason to sympathise with his predicament.

Spud's behaviour in the Turkish bath scenes gave cause for disquiet even before the film went into production. Olivier said,

I think the statement of Spud's case in the Turkish Baths ought to be better done - I don't mean Spud should be any cleverer - but it's a damned important bit ... After all it does advocate hitting below the belt - I don't mean it should be sugar-coated exactly. I mean the audience shouldn't feel it's a pity at all if possible ('Olivier', C B, p. 24).

Anthony Aldgate points out that Spud is in danger of being painted as the villain of the piece.

His apparent philosophy of 'Might is right', his peremptory commands, his precipitate actions, his harsh demeanour and the accusations levelled at him by Candy all hint of Nazi methods and thuggery. Indeed, in a reprise of the opening scenes later in the film he threatens to teach Candy 'Total war ... Nazi methods, you know'.

But his character is redeemed. 'In their punctilious fashion Powell and Pressburger reveal his
saving graces. He is an able leader and has a close rapport with men'.\(^{56}\) He is also loved by the third incarnation of 'Woman' in the film: Johnny Cannon.

Christie analysed the Turkish bath scenes and concluded that ‘the mise en scène produces moments of 'direct address' (through sustained close-up and devices of symmetry) which by their similarity to other contemporary texts (official exhortations, testimonies by refugees, journalism, etc) would immediately connect with notions of propaganda'. But we are not encouraged to align ourselves unambiguously with one or other side of the opposing positions, since

the young officer is 'right' to denounce Candy's genteel sportsmanship in the context of total war, but his 'invasion' and armed threat have overtones of fascist aggression; again, Theo is 'right' to mock Candy's friends as he tells his fellow prisoners-of-war returning to Germany in 1918 that the British naively intend to 'have Germany on its feet again', but he is speaking of the post-war situation out of which Hitler and the Nazi party arose, etc.

(*Blimp, Churchill and the State,* p. 115).

As a contribution to Britain's wartime propaganda effort, *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* was to become something of a puzzle.

Propaganda

The second point made in the note Sir James Grigg sent to Winston Churchill gave the Archers' view of the value of propaganda.

The producer claims that the film is intended as a tribute to the toughness and keenness of the new Army in Britain and shows how far they have progressed from the Blimpery of the pre-war Army. From this point of view he urges that it would be valuable propaganda for the USA and the Dominions because in showing that we are conscious of any faults which we may possess, we are telling the rest of the world that the faults are being eliminated (‘Note’, *CB*, p. 43).

The faults that were being eliminated had their roots in past campaigns, and it was no accident that the chronological story of Clive Candy's career should begin in the middle of the Boer War. Britain's current enemy, Germany, had taken the side of the Boers; much of the anti-British hostility in Germany during that war was fomented by an arch-patriotic German press.

One example of an Anglophobic cartoon was described in the *Daily Chronicle*.

In front of a scorched and blackened background, a huge cauldron is placed over a blazing fire. Two demons, naked, painted scarlet, are engaged at the cauldron, with horns, tails and vampires' wings. Lord Kitchener, who is represented with a particularly Satanic visage, is collecting children, and his arms are full of them. In the clouds of smoke arising from the boiling cauldron are the phantom forms of children, represented as cherubs. Above this horrible drawing are the words 'Twelve Thousand Boer Children'. Below it the words, 'How the devils are filling heaven'.\(^{57}\)

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\(^{56}\) Anthony Aldgate, "The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp," *Best ofBrit.*, p. 66.

This was the kind of propaganda that could have inspired Clive Candy's response to Edith Hunter's urgent appeal for someone to 'TELL THE TRUTH'. Kaunitz is a member of the Alldeutscher Verband, whose propaganda excesses caused so much distress to Edith and others in her position.

The Pan-German League (Alldeutscher Verband) nurtured a particularly repulsive type of nationalism, a mixture of anti-semitism and Darwinian racialism, crossed with crude expansionism. It preached hatred of France, Britain and Russia. ... Many of Hitler's ideas can easily be found in [its] pamphlets.®

Hitler maintained that his use of 'concentration camps' was based on the British prototypes in South Africa during the Boer War.® Powell and Pressburger argued that there was a need to counter the new propaganda that was being spread on the subject.

We agree that the Boer atrocity stories need handling with care, but in view of present German propaganda in South Africa it would be foolish to ignore the stories altogether; and good counter-propaganda to show the reactions of a typical British officer who has been there' (Memo*, 16 June 1942, C.B., p. 39).

Clive is portrayed as the witness who can 'tell the truth' not only to the German people in 1902 but also to the Americans and the people of the Dominions in 1942.®

Edith Hunter, like Emily Hobhouse, berates the British Army's muddling and incompetence but with an important distinction: she blames its good manners for the loss of battles and men. As she lectures Candy the points are made: the British are fair and accommodating; the Germans are unfair and prejudiced. The Mol report criticised this representation as an oversimplification that implied that there was no 'special efficiency which arises out of the British tradition' (Report*, C.B., p. 35), but the Archers were more concerned to emphasise the humanity of the British tradition rather than the efficiency, which was shown to be the province of the Germans. In an amendment to the screenplay they suggest that the British Embassy staff should be portrayed as relaxed and informal, like a big family, in contrast to the 'Teutonic heaviness' of the Germans.® Prussian military rigidity and adherence to a code that ignores the

®° By 1942 there was information about the real nature of Hitler's camps but few people could believe it, and some dismissed it as the kind of 'atrocity' propaganda that had been disseminated in the First World War.
® 'Memo', 16 June 1942, C.B., p. 39. Powell recalls that Beddington and the Mol took great pains 'to put us all in touch with the people who were doing documentaries and training films', and remembers seeing 'films smuggled out of Europe, two or three times a week sometimes' (Badder, p. 10). Pressburger notes in his diary: '7 pm to Mol to see German propaganda film. Silly - Churchill looking like Goering feeding a bull-dog with bacon and the same time women in concentration camps starving' ('1942 Diary*, 3rd March). It was probably Ohm Krüger (Tobis-Filmmusik, 1941), in which the concentration camp commandant does look remarkably like Goering. Kitchener is made to declare "No more sentimentality" and decree that "Women and children must be put in concentration camps" (Own transcript from subtitled copy in IWMDF). Jeffrey Richards comments: 'Pitiful, hollow-eyed, black-clad women, who look for all the world like inmates of Dachau, are beaten and starved while the brutal commandant, clearly intended to be Churchill, takes time off from gorging himself to shoot a couple of women who complain about the rotten food' (Visions, p. 350).
®° 'The Life and Death of Sugar Candy', amendment to screenplay dated July 5, 1942. BFI, p. 3.
causes of an affront for the punctilious enactment of the satisfaction demanded for it, make the
British diplomats seem eminently humane. The combination of their distaste for the rigmarole
and awareness of the necessity of going through with it, 'proves' that the British do not indulge
in combat just for the sake of slighted honour but are courageous when combat is inevitable.

Conan Doyle also clashed with Emily Hobhouse in the Letters Column of the Daily
Chronicle. 'Sir, - I observe that Miss Hobhouse, in a letter to the Daily Chronicle, throws doubt
on my statement that the child, Lizzie van Zyl, was the victim of her own mother rather than of
the British authorities.' Major Van Zijl is the Boer officer in the First World War whose tactics
make Clive's claim that "Clean fighting, honest soldiering" on the British side had won the war
look naïve. But his naïvety contrasts pleasantly with the Major's harsh manner and scarred
visage, and it casts our minds back to the conflicts already fought. We may conclude that the
treatment of the Afrikaners in the Boer War was closer to the account given by the British than
the Germans for them to be fighting as allies of Britain in the First World War, and the Boer
Major's unpleasant pragmatism and (duelling?) scar mark him as closer to the Germans in spirit
than to the decent though foolish British. Even so, The Archers had to defend (and finally cut)
the scenes that showed Van Zijl tricking the captured German soldiers into giving him the
information he wanted by false executions. 'Regarding “efficiency” in waging war combined
with the civilised qualities which are part of our tradition, this is exactly how Major Van Zijl
behaves in the sequence in question: the Germans would have shot the prisoners'.

In 1919 Clive's proffered friendship is pointedly and insultingly ignored by Theo, and the
beauty and apparent comfort of his surroundings in the POW camp leave us with the
impression that he and his fellow prisoners have been treated more than fairly by their British
captors. At the dinner party, Theo is treated well by the assembled diplomats, generals and
industrialists and assured by Clive, "We'll soon have Germany on its feet again". When Theo
repeats the phrase to his compatriots it is both a mockery of that promise and a reiteration of it
as a threat, so that 'We' becomes the German Army's determination to triumph at Britain's
expense.

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82 Arthur Conan Doyle, The Daily Chronicle, 1 February 1902, p. 3. A photograph of Lizzie van Zyl in an
advanced stage of emaciation, 'inspired a newspaper campaign in England, blaming the Boers for their own
misfortune' (Jonathan Lewis, The Boer War. Twenty-Twenty Television, Channel Four, 1999).
83 'Memo', CB, p. 38. Because the scenes are cut we are left with the unpleasant impression that Major Zijl's
treatment of the prisoners could be infinitely worse than that indicated in the screenplay, which paradoxically,
has the opposite effect to that which the MoI intended.
84 While writing this scene, Pressburger would surely have been aware of the less than perfect conditions
endured by the thousands of enemy aliens (Alfred Junge and Allan Gray among them) who had been
interred in Britain in 1940. Despite the stonewalling of the War Office spokesman, Sir Edward Grigg, during a
debate in the House of Commons on 10 July, a 'sorry picture of muddle, ignorance and lack of responsibility
was disclosed' (Francois Lafitte, The Internment of Aliens. New York: Allen Lane, 1940, p. 75).
Clive's promise may be held up to ridicule, but Theo's ugly resentment and declared opportunism are seen to be infinitely more culpable. Clive's values may be old-fashioned but they appear preferable to the values of both Boer and Prussian. The generous treatment given to Theo (and, by implication, other German prisoners of war) and the promises of reconstruction for post-war Germany, taken together with Theo's resentful dismissal of them, establish Britain as 'innocent' of provoking the Second World War (though perhaps, through complacency, guilty of failing to prevent it).

Theo is the propaganda prize. The next time we see him it is as an old and defeated man, pleading to be allowed to remain in Britain. 'We hold the British way of life in such esteem that we show a German, who has only briefly been brought into contact with it, become homesick for England because he met with sportsmanship and fair play there' ('Memo', CB, p. 38). He is shown not to have triumphed but to have been defeated, not by Britain but by his own country and the 'gangsters' spawned by his resentment. Theo is the witness who has seen Nazi crimes and can testify from personal experience and observation; a witness whose veracity cannot be questioned because he has nothing left to lose. He is also the friend who dares to lift the veil from Clive's eyes and tell him that his values are outmoded and defeatist. But while he is lecturing Clive on the realities of total war he is also detailing Nazi war methods, and contrasting their immoral attitudes with the chivalrous and ethical attitudes of Clive Candy.

You commented on Nazi methods, foul fighting, bombing refugees, machine-gunning hospitals, lifeboats, lightships, baled-out pilots, by saying you despised them, that you would be ashamed to fight on their side and that you would sooner accept defeat than victory if it could only be won by those means. ... If you let yourself be defeated by them just because you are too fair to hit back the same way they hit at you, there won't be any methods but Nazi methods. If you preach the 'Rules of the Game' while they use every foul and filthy trick against you, they'll laugh at you (Own Transcript).

We are left with the painful, even tragic, impression that the British will have to sacrifice something eminently civilised in order to win the war.

Clive's proposed broadcast, 'Dunkirk - Before and After', was due to be given in the Postscript series but was dropped at the last moment in favour of a talk by J. B. Priestley. 'Priestley did indeed do a Postscript on that date, relating to the Local Defence Volunteers. Two weeks beforehand, on 5 June 1940, he had given the first of what was to become many

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65 In the screenplay the repetition of the phrase is a bridge to the next scene: Theo says "He said" - but the actual words are spoken by Clive as he tells his wife the story of the evening's events ('SC', CB, p. 243).
Postscripts, an inspiring and patriotic talk about Dunkirk. Before Dunkirk it was still possible to think of war in terms of professional armies battling according to the rules of warfare; after Dunkirk, with Britain standing alone against the seemingly unstoppable advance of Nazi Germany, it became a 'People's War' and the old mores were abandoned. Clive, in fiction, was ousted by Priestley, but Priestley was to have the same experience, in fact, a year later. Total war has many casualties.

Among those casualties was Stefan Lorant. On the 11th of June 1940, Sir Kenneth Clark pleaded to the Home Office that Mr. Lorant, the editor of "Picture Post" being technically an enemy alien, is suffering the restrictions imposed by the Home Office. This is serious because ... he will not be able to go on editing "Picture Post". I think this will be much against the national interest, as "Picture Post" is anxious to do a great deal of our propaganda for us, and at the moment is well disposed towards the Ministry. If anything could be done to get Mr. Lorant out of his trouble I believe we could almost count this organisation as a part of the Ministry.

His case was supported by Brendan Bracken. 'He is one of the best propagandists in these islands, and God knows we need such people!' Lorant's plea that he had done a lot of work for the Ministry of Information and was at that moment compiling a special issue on the Local Defence Volunteers, "Arm the Citizens", at the request of the War Office, fell on deaf ears. The Home Secretary declined to take the necessary action, and Stefan Lorant left the country. The following letter from Duff Cooper is a small triumph of diplomatic sarcasm.

My Dear Home Secretary,
Thank you for your letter of September 9th in reply to my own of July 17th about the naturalisation of Mr. Stefan Lorant. No doubt those who are making enquiries as you say concerning the extent to which he is being hampered in his business by the "Aliens (Movement Restriction) Order" will have discovered that he left for the United States about two months ago. (Ibid., 16 September 1940).

This may explain why Kenneth Clark was unwilling to sponsor Emeric Pressburger's application for naturalisation the following year ("1941 Diary", 3 March).

The Local Defence Volunteers became the Home Guard by a slip of Churchill's tongue. They were founded by Tom Wintringham, a Communist who had fought in the Spanish Civil War, and were officered initially by World War One veterans. George Orwell, who was an enthusiastic recruit, called it 'a People's Army officered by Blimps'. He had decided opinions on the short-comings of the British ruling class, claiming that their military incompetence stemmed from clinging to obsolete methods and weapons and seeing each war as a repetition of the last. 'Probably the Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing-fields of Eton,'

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86 Aldgate, "Blimp," Best of Brit., p. 73.
87 INF 1 234, 11 June, 11 July and 9 July 1940.
but the opening battles of all subsequent wars have been lost there'. The career of Major-General Clive Wynne-Candy, V.C., as Zone-Commander in the Home Guard, is illustrated for us through the pages of *Picture Post*, starting with the edition of September 21, 1940 and finishing with the one of September 19, 1942. (The news stand on that date has a poster announcing 'Wartime Paper Restrictions': could it be a salute to Stefan Lorant from a fellow Hungarian labouring in Britain's defence under the same Home Office restrictions?) But his new career is brought to an inglorious close by the tactics of Lieutenant 'Spud' Wilson, 2nd Battalion, The Loamshires.

The Loamshires is a fictional battalion, and the name must have been chosen for its connotations of earthy vigour and traditional rural values; it is of the people, and specifically of the people who reside in the heartland of England - the Shires. From that rural heartland comes the vision of a new army ethic: total war, bred in response to Nazi methods. Lieutenant Wilson's group of soldiers are highly trained and highly motivated, ready for anything and not averse to bending the rules of engagement if it ensures success. The Lieutenant's attitude is to win the first battle by using all the weapons at his command, and he has no time for sportsmanship or gentlemanly warfare. The opening sequences are sharp and staccato, full of noise and action, 'a series of shots, composed and edited, to produce the maximum effect of speed, efficiency and modern equipment'. It is very appropriate to the declared intention of a film 'dedicated to the New Army of Britain, to the new spirit in warfare, to the new toughness in battle, and to the men and women who know what they are fighting for and are fighting this war to win it' (*S C*; *CB*, pp. 76-77). The closing sequences show a discomfited Clive outside his bomb-devastated home saluting Spud's 'New Army' marching into London. "Brute force and ruddy ignorance" would appear to have won the day.

But the 'New Army' is marching to the tune of 'The British Grenadiers', that anthem to the British military tradition based on the strategies of ancient Greece and Rome; the British Empire might be dying, but it had produced heroes to compare with Alexander, Hercules, Hector and Lysander. Clive Candy has been defeated, not by the enemy but by the need for change, and he accepts the necessity of standing aside for younger and more practical men. Age has reconciled itself to youth. He remembers his own conflicts with older, more experienced men, extends (metaphorically) the hand of friendship to Spud Wilson in the shape of an invitation to dinner and (literally) raises it to salute the New Army: 'tanks, guns, trucks, men, fast-moving, hard-hitting' (*ibid.*, p. 287).

The film was made, in part, as propaganda for American consumption, to persuade them...

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that the British Army was now a modern and efficient fighting force, determined to win and equipped to do just that. Sidney Bernstein had explored the American market while setting up a branch of the Films Division in the United States to liaise with the American Government propaganda agencies. The second-in-command of that organisation informed him in October 1942 that, to the Americans,

England is the country of tradition and America the country of ideas, that we are hidebound and they are progressive; that we lean on the past and the Americans look to the future [and] as a nation (it is generally felt) we have no political sense, and the nation is misled by its upper classes (Moorehead, p. 147).

Even more disturbing was the cable sent to Bernstein by David Selznick on the subject of Thorold Dickinson's *Next of Kin*, made for Ealing in 1942.

*Release of the film in this country in anything like its present version would be a dreadful error from the standpoint of British American relations. ... All the English officers are portrayed as stupid, careless and derelict ... calculated to increase the fears of Americans and mothers especially, that the British are simply muddling along, and their sons will die because of British incompetence* (ibid., pp. 147-148).

*The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* could have been tailor-made to convince Americans that everything they had been led to believe about Britain was true: it was hidebound, the country of tradition and misled by its upper classes but, the film stresses, those failings have been recognised and were rapidly being superseded by a more realistic, democratic and determined approach to the necessities of modern warfare. 'Your sons will be safe fighting with us', it might be saying to all those American mothers, 'speed, efficiency and winning the first battle are the watchwords of modern Britain, not "Veuve Cliquot 1911".' At the beginning of the film Spud Wilson's militia race into London as a mechanised unit to the stirring strains of American jukebox jive. They overthrow the very symbol of British military bungling, and leave it, apparently, impotent and obsolete. It is the death of Blimp and everything he stood for. On these grounds it is excellent propaganda for its stated target.

But, quietly, it states that Blimp still has a use: he is now a 'Grand Old Man', a figure to remember with affection for the traditional values that he represents and which we discard at our peril. The propaganda value of this film may be weakened by Powell and Pressburger's love for the subject of it, but as a work of art it is immeasurably enriched. Blimp becomes a lovable old man, and Britain is portrayed as possessing a civilised attitude to life and warfare that sits uncomfortably with the ethics of total war which the film seems to be promoting. The Mol Report points out that there is danger of the moral purpose of the story being submerged in ambiguous quicksands'. The character of Clive Candy is 'only very mildly blimpish' and this 'has weakened the authors' message about blimpery'. But, it adds,
the over complication of ideas is much more dangerous. The authors attack the British outlook on life as expressed in the terms of sportsmanship and fair play. They show this in contrast to German (not Nazi) efficiency and ruthlessness. They suggest in the end that Germans can only be defeated with their own weapons ('Report', CB, p. 33).

The authors were caught in a dilemma: they wanted Britain and her allies to win the war even if that meant breaking the rules of civilised engagement, but they did not want to lose those civilised rules for ever. Their proposed solution to this conundrum was to suggest that all the English virtues that Clive Candy personified should be put into cold storage. 'We think these are splendid virtues: so splendid that we think that, in order to preserve them, it is worth while shelving them until we have won the war ('Memo', C B, p. 37). But the film celebrates Clive's virtues without indicating to us that they would revive once the war was over.

Postscript

Powell admired Jack Beddington as 'diplomatic, evasive and cunning - just the man for the job', and has described the way he dealt with commercial film makers.

Beddington would send for one of the well-known film-makers to discuss an idea that the Ministry wanted dramatised, or else we would come to Beddington with ideas of our own. We would discuss this with him and the idea would either be approved or not. In our case, because of the unique nature of our creative partnership, it usually was. The point was that these films were financed commercially after having obtained the Ministry's approval of the themes and the general content. They would help us get actors, perhaps out of the Service Departments, get permits to go to prohibited areas, obtain the services of technicians who had been drafted, and so on, and they also kept us in touch with what other people were doing, including the Germans. (Life., pp. 383-384).

He claims that the Ministry was startled at Grigg's choleric memo but were hamstrung by it. 'Beddington and Brendan Bracken were probably laughing like hell in their offices, but they had to do what they were told and follow the policy of the War Office and the Cabinet' (Badder, p. 11). Powell's claim seems quite reasonable. The Mol had financially backed 49th Parallel (1941), approved of and given advice and material assistance with the making of One of Our Aircraft is Missing (1942), would officially promote their next production, The Volunteer (The Archers, 1943), and would ask them to make A Matter of Life and Death (The Archers, 1946). The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp was passed by the BBFC uncut (BBFC, p. 131).

In the spring of 1943 the film was given a special showing for representatives of the Mol and the War Office, 'who took the view that it was unlikely to attract much attention or to have any undesirable consequences on the discipline of the Army' (War Cabinet, 10 May 1943, C B, p. 47). The dark days of 1942 were over, and victories in North Africa had ensured that both the
country and its Prime Minister would survive." The only battle the film still had to fight was for a licence to export it to the country for which its propaganda had been intended: America.

Powell and Pressburger were told by the Mol that ‘that pressure would be brought to bear upon Rank to persuade him not to export the film’ (Life, p. 434). Churchill was determined that *Blimp* should not be exposed to critical eyes abroad. Again, the film’s stoutest defence against Churchill’s intransigence was provided by Bracken. On 9 July 1943 he wrote,

> Is it still your wish that this film should not go abroad? ... My advice is that the film should be allowed to go. At a time when the prestige of the British fighting man stands higher in the world than it has ever done, I think the circulation of this evident fantasy presents no dangers at all.

And on 5 August that,

> As a result of our illegal ban on this wretched film, 'Colonel Blimp' has received a wonderful advertisement from the Government. It is now enjoying an extensive run in the suburbs and in all sorts of places there are notices - 'See the banned film!' 

Bracken would probably have recognised its propaganda potential; Sidney Bernstein would have realised that it fulfilled many of the requirements for a British film to be acceptable to American audiences; and, according to Powell, Jack Beddington acknowledged the propaganda skills possessed by the Archers by saying, ‘You know how to put these things the way that people understand without understanding’ (Life, p. 456). It had the support of both Right and Left.

*The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* was shown to the trade on 8 June 1943 and premièred on 10 June to a mixed reception from the critics. The most enthusiastic praise came from *Kinematograph Weekly*:

>Glamorous, breathtaking, emotionally stimulating and nostalgically enthralling fictional biography, with a crowded and colorful cavalcade background covering the last four hectic decades, effectively built around Low’s famous cartoon character. The hero, a courageous, high-born, one-track minded, tremendously patriotic Boer War and last war veteran, brilliantly drawn by Roger Livesey, dominates the omnibus narrative in circumstances that are both a handsome tribute and gentle reproof of the old-school-tie tradition. Anton Walbrook ... cleverly amplifies the political point as the colonel’s frank and understanding anti-Nazi friend, while Deborah Kerr displays great charm and exceptional versatility on the appealing and intriguing distaff side. Vivid and flawless supporting cameos, excellent atmosphere, and, above all, Technicolor, happily complete not only one of the longest but one of the most significant and entertaining pictures to come from a British, or for that matter, any studio. It contains a dozen themes in one and each generously subscribes to delightful and thrilling screen biography, a biography which is cunningly tinged with satire and gracefully framed in charming romance. 

... Technically the film is the most impressive made in this country. 

>Pressburger was at the special showing of the film and recalled, 'I thought "My God, this is Mr Churchill". After all he was the next man after God and we all believed that it is so and that is how it should be'. He knew by the time of this interview that Churchill had disapproved of the film, and declared, 'If Mr Churchill would have told me then I would have stopped the film being shown' (Pressburger, 'Appendix 1', pp. 49-50).

> Extracts from two minutes from Bracken to Churchill, 9 July and 5 August 1943, *C B*, pp.49-50.

And the *Daily Film Renter* was hardly less effusive.

Brilliant drama of British character. Forty year saga that balances this country's great merits and demerits and points the moral that only by total war can Nazism be downed for ever. Fine theme, grandly scripted and directed, rich in dialogue and character drawing ... A great entertainment and one of the outstanding British films of the war period.\(^{75}\)

*Tribune* praised the acting and the use of colour.

Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger have done a good job of work, and Hollywood will have to look to its laurels if this goes on. Many of the shots had the quality of beautiful paintings, one, particularly of a café in Berlin, might have come from the brush of Renoir. It was full of sparkling light and gay atmosphere.

But declared it to be too long because

no one decided exactly what they wanted to say with it! ... that Old Blimp was a jolly good sort and ought to have been given a good job in this war, or that he was a feeble old buffer but SWEET, and good enough for the Home Guard .... Or even whether David Low needs counteracting, and now we realise that Old Blimp is a DAMN GOOD SORT and feudal England is not so bad. Or Tories are really gentlemen and sound at bottom!!\(^{74}\)

Both *The Sunday Times* and *The Observer* accorded it more criticism than praise. Dilys Powell complained that it was

like the conversation of a clever and plausible talker with the gift of the gab; that is to say, it holds the attention, it is interlarded with excellent jokes; it has patches of feeling and patches of making do, and it goes on for a long time. In another respect, too, it resembles the wily talker: it persuades its audience by appearing to advance one argument while edging in the direction of another.\(^{75}\)

Lejeune conceded that, 'It is a handsome piece. It is frequently a moving piece', but added

'what is it really about?'

Three theories present themselves. *Blimp* indicates (a) that dear old sentimental Britain will always muddle through; (b) that an ex-Prussian officer advocating the bombing of hospitals, the ruthless destruction of women and children, is the right man to teach us how to wage war; and (c) that the experience of age and the functionalism of youth can be sensibly combined. 'A' has nothing to support it except Roger Livesey's winning acting. 'B' seems to have the script on its side. 'C' is my own idea, and I'm all for 'C'. But A, B, C, or X, Y, Z, clarity is surely the thing. *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* will have to profess itself much more openly before it becomes a measuring stick for Shakespeare.\(^{76}\)

The Report commissioned on the film's screenplay by the Mol cautioned that 'we must be very careful not to appear to stand behind and support a film which can be taken in the wrong way by a fair proportion of people'. One point that the Report had identified as problematic was the representation of the Germans as superior to the British, and it quotes Theo in particular.

Owing to his sufferings and his contrast to Candy he appears to have a wisdom and a sensitivity denied to any other of the characters except Edith - and it is significant that Edith

\(^{73}\) "Tatler", *Daily Film Renter*, June 9 1943, p. 8.

\(^{74}\) "The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp," *Tribune*, 18 June 1943, p. 12.

\(^{75}\) Dilys Powell, "The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp," *Sunday Times*, 17 September 1943, p. 2.

marries him and that throughout the film the German has this superiority over the Englishman - he won the woman while the Englishman continually foozled his approach. Admittedly Theo is anti-Nazi, but in his speech to the Tribunal he appears only very weakly anti-Nazi. This is no doubt in the interests of ‘truth’. Whereas the final superior truth is used for Theo, exaggeration is used for Clive (‘Report’, C B, pp. 31 and 34).

Those who had an axe to grind, on both the Right and the Left of the political spectrum, fine-honed it on Blimp. On the Right, the Robsons picked up on the representation of Germans in the film.

You stick a German into a mackintosh coat sitting forlorn, grey-haired and self-pitying in an Aliens’ Office, and that German is no longer a German but an object for our pity - an émigré, an exile from Nazidom, although there is not the slightest scrap of evidence that this German ever raised a finger against Nazidom in active opposition (Shame, p. 11).

On the Left, the Documentary News Letter was predictably scathing. ‘For simplicity’s sake we'll confine the whole story to the wealthier upper middle class group and reflect the whole thing through the eyes of a German. Not a Nazi, mind you, but a converted Prussian officer.’ It criticises the film’s view of Clive Candy, in that

the Blimp of this film is the Englishman that a certain type of émigré would like to think exists - stupid, brave, amiable, kind to animals and domestics, and, au fond eminently amenable to reason, particularly if put forward by someone of another nationality. Unfortunately this type does not exist.

And it concludes with the rhetorical question, ‘one wonders who is the real hero of the film - the German who doesn’t like Hitler or the Old Soldier who refuses to die?’ Even as moderate a critic as Dilys Powell betrayed some scepticism of the relationship between Clive and Theo.

The moral of his career is left uncertain: with one voice the film censures his beliefs, with another protests that they are the beliefs of all upright men. The portrait presented, in fact, is the portrait of almost any decent, slow-witted, romantic Englishman, with this difference, that not all decent, slow-witted Englishmen would show the humanity towards a German refugee shown by this Colonel Blimp.

But the real venom was expressed by The Daily Film Renter, which two days before had inordinately praised the film. It claimed to have doubts ‘concerning the sympathy aroused for the Germans by Emeric Pressburger’s scripting and Anton Walbrook’s performance’.

I cannot help feeling that this arousing sympathy for the Germans, evidenced in “49th Parallel” also in “The Silver Fleet” and again in this picture, in scripts all of which Pressburger is responsible for, is a mistake. There are a lot of people who belong to the school that holds there’s no such thing as a good German - except a dead one! - I’m among them. ... Pressburger has done it three times. If he would take my advice, he’d steer clear of this in future.

Many reviews compared Low’s Blimp with his film incarnation. The Monthly Film Bulletin praised the transformation. "The virtue of this film lies in the skill with which the joint authors, 77 "The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp," Documentary News Letter, 4 (5), 1943, p. 219

8 "Dilys Powell, Sunday Times.

87 The Daily Film Renter, June 10, 1943, p. 4. As far as I am aware, the next portrait of a German, sympathetic or otherwise, does not appear in an Archers’ production until The Battle of the River Plate (1956)."
producers, and directors - Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger - have taken the butt of the
cartoonists and turned him into the sympathetic figure as played by Roger Livesey'. The
Times found the title raised unfulfilled expectations.

The title of this very long, serious and most intelligent film is ludicrously misleading.
Colonel Blimp is identified in the public mind with the comic figure of Low's exuberant,
fancy and satiric pencil, but here is nothing of caricature and little of that exaggeration natural
in the cinema. Low's choleric creation ... represents, indeed, less an archaic attitude
towards a changing nature of war than a reactionary stubbornness in the face of political
and economic problems; the film leaves politics alone and concentrates on drawing a
series of full-length academic portraits in colour of an officer and a gentleman over the 43
years of the present century. There is the man, say Messrs Michael Powell and Emeric
Pressburger in effect - take him or leave him - and the discriminating audience will take
him."

This favourable and uncritical view of the difference between Low's Blimp and that of the film
was not shared by some other right-wing publications, who were not, perhaps, aiming at a
discriminating audience. The Daily Mail declared the film to be 'a gross travesty of the
intelligence and behaviour of British officers as a class'. But it was on the Left that the film's
representation of Blimp was most resented. Documentary News Letter found 'something
highly disturbing in the very sincerity with which our pseudo-British gent is presented. Not only
is he not Low's Blimp; he is the very reverse - an apologia for the upper-class specialists who
misguided this country into the mud of Munich' (Documentary News Letter, p. 219).

David Low's Blimp was both stupid and vicious; Powell and Pressburger's was a muddler
but essentially well-meaning. His original creator viewed this translation of his 'simple symbol
into a two-and-a-half hour feature film' with fascination and concluded that it was an 'extremely
sentimental film about a glamorous old colonel whose romantic attachments nearly - but not
quite - obscured the conclusion that if Britain followed his out-of-date ideas in modern war, we
should all be blown to blazes'. But he enjoyed it. 'Why not? I did not hate Blimp. I hated
stupidity [and] my original conception of Blimp had been as a corrective of stupidity in general,
not exclusively of that in hateful people, and it seemed to me useful to drop a hint that even
nice people can be fools'. Low's supporters, however, were less charitable in their views. The
New Statesman and Nation wailed, 'O Low! O Low! What induced you to offer up your
character ... to be made unrecognisable under a thick coating of technicolour sugar, to be
laughed at, loved and made piteous as just a dear sentimental doddering old fool?'. To which
Low responded with, 'Such innocence of the more subtle forms of persuasion seemed to me
to be itself apt material for a few ripe Blimpisms'. "'Blimpery' was not confined to the Right,

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1 "The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp," The Times, 9 June 1943, p. 6.
2 "Blimp Film Not to Go Abroad," Daily Mail, 25 June 1940, p.1.
3 Low quotes from the review in New Statesman and Nation, 12 June 1943, p. 384.
and Powell and Pressburger's Blimp may have been a better realisation of Low's original conception than many of his supporters would care to acknowledge. Blimp was a symbol of stupidity: 'not of colonels, nor of stupid colonels in particular; not of Authority, nor especially of stupid Authority; not exclusively of the Right nor the Left; for stupidity had no frontiers, domestic or foreign' (Low, Autobiography, pp. 273-274; 270).

Churchill's main aim was to win the war. To that end he sought consensus between right and left, upper class and lower, the home front and the front line of battle. In a large measure he achieved his aim. One of Powell and Pressburger's aims with The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp was to demonstrate that youth and age, enthusiasm and experience, tradition and innovation could be reconciled one with the other and united in a common cause. In a certain measure they succeeded in their aim. But where Churchill would not allow himself to think beyond winning the war to the kind of peace that should follow it, the Archers were already more concerned with the losses of the war and how to restore what had been lost once peace was achieved.

What began as a film to show how a Blimp was made and a propaganda exercise to persuade the world that Britain's military thinking had become thoroughly modern, changed to a labour of love. The stereotypical, two-dimensional Blimp became a fully-rounded human being whose attitudes, though outdated, were admirable and whose loyalties, though divided, were unswerving. It celebrates the strength of a loving friendship that survives despite loss and misunderstanding. But the over-riding love that is expressed in this film is love of the past. Pressburger, an émigré from Hitler's Germany, saw clearly the faults of the country he had chosen as his new home and the faults of its people. Loving both, despite these faults, he urges the necessary changes while writing an elegy for everything that would be lost by the implementation of those very changes, and for everything that had already been lost in the country he had left. Powell, who from his childhood during the First World war had cherished a soft spot for the British Army, and whose own personality appears to have combined the sentimentality of Candy and the enterprise of Spud, was promoting a strategy which he may have felt in his heart was dangerous to encourage. Change was necessary but to be lamented. Clive Candy must allow change (while remaining himself changeless) in order to

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44 Pressburger said that basically, 'it is about the half of the population who are conservative - who are Blimps, in fact - against the new army which contains young people and new ideas. Our aim was that in the end, the Blimps would agree with what we were saying, that the new army is the one which has to fight freely, but at the same time the old have roles of their own to play' (Colin Vanes, "The Archers - an everyday story of film folk," Screen International, 165, 18 November 1978, p. 13).

45 When Candy rouses himself at the end of the film to salute Spud and his men as they march into London, he may appear to have changed. The lamentable/admirable truth about him, however, is that he has always been a good and generous loser.
save the country he loves, even though that change ensures the possible destruction of the values that had made that land lovable. The paradox could not be resolved. The next two feature films made by Powell and Pressburger would continue to explore the values which they saw as being under threat from the change in attitudes brought about by the necessity of surviving and winning the war.

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Before either of those films went into production, however, there was another production of The Archers, featuring Ralph Richardson and Laurence Olivier. Both of them had joined the Fleet Air Arm, which was finding it difficult to attract sufficient recruits. Richardson was asked by his superiors to get one of his movie friends to make a recruitment film, and in September 1942, Pressburger scribbled a few notes for 'a semi-documentary short' (Emeric, p. 201).

Powell’s reaction (‘what is a semi-documentary? ... I have never made a documentary in my life. The thought of a semi-documentary scares the shit out of me’) was not wildly enthusiastic. ‘Originally, Ralph never meant to appear in this hybrid, and I never wanted to direct it. We were being drawn into it by Emeric’s glittering eye. It had to have a title so we called it The Volunteer. I said it sounded like a Restoration comedy, but was overruled’. Nevertheless, it went into production, ‘a pain in the ass from start to finish’.

Because Ralph, the narrator, was an actor as well as a naval officer, I had opened the film with a few scenes taken at Denham Studios: glimpses of famous people. There is a brief glimpse of Larry Olivier imitating a goldfish, and another of Ralph himself as a Beefeater, proclaiming some lines about “the wooden walls of England”. And in the last shot of the film, taken outside Buckingham Palace, there’s a brief glimpse of me, one of my few appearances in my own films. In the film, Ralph is playing Othello at the New Theatre in St. Martin’s Lane, where he and Larry were later to create two memorable seasons. We see him in his dressing room and from the wings on stage. There was a scene at the stage door with autograph hunters, and Emeric couldn’t resist the classic joke that, for an actor, the only thing worse than fans waiting at the stage door is to have no fans waiting at the stage door. After these preliminaries, both Ralph and his dresser join the Fleet Air Arm, and the film gets more interesting as we follow their respective careers (Life, pp. 401, 419-420).

For Powell the main pleasure and interest seemed to have been the filming aboard Royal Navy vessels in the Mediterranean, where he (and Richardson) devised and performed a show for the troops (thus life imitates, art or maybe the other way round, since ‘the volunteer’ is involved in an identical exercise on board his Fleet Aircraft Carrier). He encountered Captain

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Their recruitment difficulties may have been exacerbated earlier in the war by Sergei Nolbandov’s Ships With Wings (Ealing, 1941). Michael Balcon revealed that Churchill ‘had seen the film over the weekend and was insisting that release should be held up, if not cancelled altogether, on the grounds that it would cause “alarm and despondency”, as the climax of the film was something of a disaster for the Fleet Air Arm’ (A Lifetime of Films, p. 133).
Anthony Quayle on Gibraltar, and was involved in the North Africa landings on H. M. S. Indomitable (ibid., pp. 423-433).

For Pressburger, however, the pleasure would appear to have come from the film itself.

He put all his sense of humour and whimsy into it. In 45 minutes it tells the tale of a clumsy, good-for-nothing theatre dresser who volunteers for the Fleet Air Arm and is transformed into a skilled engineer and a crucial element in the fighting machine. ... Emeric suggests that the war can make stars of us all. The volunteer becomes a minor hero, he appears in the ship's home movies, and receives a medal at Buckingham Palace (Emeric, p. 202).

The Volunteer (The Archers/ Ministry of Information) opens with a close up of a pair of feet propped up on a mantelpiece. Ralph Richardson's voice recalls that it was the summer of 1939 and they were performing Othello, then draws our attention to a photograph on the mantle and introduces the cast and stage staff to us, 'even the dressers'. The voice only has to invite us to 'take a magnifying glass', for one to appear and focus on just one face. 'You'll see him better. This is my dresser, Fred, who was not what I'd call a good dresser', we are told. When we finally see Richardson's face, it is reflected, not in the over-mantel mirror, but the mirror of a theatre dressing-room.

The ensuing dialogue between Richardson and Pat McGrath (Fred) is Richardson's continuing narrative; although Fred's mouth moves, it is Richardson's voice that we hear. Not until the blackout curtain has been correctly fixed, the dressing-room curtain drawn to allow Richardson to prepare for his role as Othello and then drawn back to reveal his transformation, do we hear McGrath's voice for the first time, when he discusses which branch of the armed forces to volunteer for. The post-synchronised dialogue has a slightly surreal effect as there seems to have been no attempt to disguise the fact that it is post-synched. There are surreal touches, too, when the scene changes to Denham, and Richardson, dressed as a Beefeater, leads us round the studios: a solid-looking telephone box is lifted and carried away from the outside lot as he explains, 'Odd things happen in film studios'; when he removes his beefeater hat in the studio canteen, his pipe is revealed incongruously balanced on his head; and Laurence Olivier's goldfish imitation is given from the wrong side of the glass, the outside rather than the inside where a goldfish would be expected to swim (unless, of course, he is indicating that Richardson and McGrath are the goldfish). The playing with subjective camera work was to re-emerge in the early 1950s, in a film that Pressburger planned and Powell was enthusiastic about: an autobiographical scenario of the life of Richard Strauss.

The central device in 'The Golden Years' - which is subtitled 'An Autobiography' - was to make Strauss the camera itself. We, the audience, see everything that he sees, but we never see him, except for the occasional glimpse in a mirror or reflection in a window ...

Pressburger (sponsored by David Lean and Sidney Cole to join the ACT union in September 1941) was a familiar figure in the cutting rooms, and this idiosyncratic use of dubbing was most probably his idea.
Only at the end do we see Strauss - the real Strauss - in a piece of home movie footage, taken on the composer's 85th birthday in 1949 (Emeric, p. 338).

Both The Volunteer and Olivier's Henry V exploit theatre: one by using an actor preparing to give a performance as Othello on the London stage and then doing his bit for the war effort by playing a beefeater in a propaganda film; the other by presenting a Shakespearian classic in such a way that its patriotic relevance to the Second World War could not be missed. Both reflect 'the impulse to put the British theatrical tradition in battle dress'\(^\text{**}\) There is, moreover, another potential connection between the two films: in 1943, while Powell was directing Colonel Blimp, Olivier asked him to direct Henry V.

Fillippo Del Giudice wanted Olivier to make a film version of Henry V, but he had refused 'unless he was given complete control over it - producing, casting, editing, the lot'. Del Giudice assented to those conditions, which put Olivier in a quandary: he 'lacked technical experience, and he already had enough work to occupy him fully, without taking on the direction as well'. He had asked William Wyler, Carol Reed and Terence Young to direct it but they all declined (Cottrell, p. 189). Powell also declined and encouraged Olivier to direct the picture himself, guessing that some distributor had said: "Entrust an actor on his first film with £350,000 and let him direct himself! You must be mad, Del," and thereby shaken his confidence. He had listened when Olivier opened a big folder with sketches by Paul Sherrif and Roger Furse, and started to explain how he saw the film.

I was enchanted at once by the opening in the Globe Theatre with Leslie Banks as chorus, and I was more and more impressed as he explained how he proposed to mix theatrical with film conventions - an idea which I loved and which was done so frequently in the early days of films.

Olivier did direct and the result, for Powell, 'was a wonderful blend of theatre and film, with a complete disregard for convention, and which for me opened the way to The Red Shoes and The Tales of Hoffman' (Life, pp. 602-603).

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\(^{**}\) Geoff Brown, "Sister of the Stage", All Our Yesterdays, p. 157. Helpmann is the Bishop of Ely in Henry V.
Material Considerations

A Canterbury Tale

A Canterbury Tale is one of our favourite films, because in this film we have somehow managed to coax out a little bit of magic. Magic being untouchable and very difficult to cast, you can’t deal with it at all. You can only try to prepare some cozy little nests, hoping that a little bit of magic will slide into it somehow.¹

On the 28th of March 1942, Bomber Command (having despaired of hitting anything smaller than a city), bombed Lubeck. It had very little strategic importance as a military target but, being a medieval city with many old houses built of wood, it went up like a fire-lighter. Goebbels decided to retaliate ‘by razing English cultural shrines to the ground’, targeting those places marked with three stars in the Baedeker Guide.² Exeter, Bath and York suffered as a consequence of this decision and, on the first of June 1942, this announcement was made on German radio.

Canterbury, one of the main seats of British arch-hypocrisy, had to atone last night for the assault on the ancient and magnificent town of Cologne. Canterbury is the seat of the primate of the English High Church, notorious for his incitement of the campaign against Germany (1st June 1942, ibid).

Canterbury, the last target in Germany’s ‘Baedeker Blitz’, was subject to the attentions of nearly eighty German bombers, which attacked the city for one and a quarter hours, doing a great deal of damage to the town’s historic centre but leaving Canterbury Cathedral untouched.³

Powell, who had spent his formative years close to the city and had gone to school in the cathedral precincts, would have found this particular piece of retaliation hard to bear. A Canterbury Tale was, in part, one way of coming to terms with what had been lost and enshrining on film a record of what still remained. It was loyalty to place:

to the narrow streets of Canterbury, to the High Street and cattle markets that are no more, to the Christchurch Gate opposite Kit Marlowe’s statue in the Butter Market, to Cave’s café, to the Cathedral standing amid the hushed green lawns of the precincts, to the vast silence of the nave where a chair dragged across the echoing flagstones made one think of Becket’s body dragged by armoured men, pierced and slashed with swords, to die before the altar in the side chapel. All this I have tried to get into the last twenty-five

³ Coventry Cathedral had been almost destroyed by German bombing in 1940. In April 1942 Sir Charles Portal, chief of British air staff, had coined a new description for his bombing strategy - Coventration. It was a strategy designed to weaken German morale by specifically attacking civilian targets (Richard Overy, Bomber Command: 1939-1940. London: Harper Collins, 1997, p. 80).
minutes of a *Canterbury Tale*, guided by Emeric’s noble dramatic instinct, inspired to
dozens of small touches, glimpses of textures, effects of sunlight and shadow, and above
all by love and grateful memory for having been born a Man of Kent.4

More than fifty percent of the film was shot on location in Canterbury and the surrounding
countryside, familiar to Powell from his childhood.

I have been reading up on Canterbury etc. in Mother’s books. I think that Chatham, or
Chilham is the village we need. ... Both are about 4 miles from Canterbury and on the hills
which look down on the city. ... The local magnate would probably be a hop-grower, if he
was a farmer; he would be a J.P (Justice of the Peace) and would sit on the Bench (for
minor crimes) at least once a week, in Canterbury. ... The river Stour is, of course, a great
feature of the whole valley.5

When still a child, Powell had walked the Pilgrim’s Way from Canterbury to Southwark with his
mother. He recalled standing on the Hog’s Back and looking down ‘on the extravagant loops
of the River Wey that had inspired the letter “S” in Kipling’s “How the Alphabet was Made”,
and quotes from the poem that accompanies it.

The Way that Taffy called Wagai
Was almost ten times bigger then,
And all the Tribe of Tegumai
They cut a noble figure then.6

Fordwych, only half a mile from the farm where he grew up, became the fictional village of
Chillingbourne, and Shottendon fulfilled the requirements for a combined smithy and
wheelwright’s shop. It was run by the Horton brothers.

The smithy was a tarred open shed, and there was a pit outside for the great big
cartwheels to lie in while the iron tyres were bound on. It was a prop-man’s dream. Over
the years, every conceivable sort of woodworking instrument had been collected by Mr.
Horton ... The sunlight poured in through the dusty panes. It was a heavenly place.

(Pressburger had been brought up on a country estate in Hungary, ‘with an intimate
knowledge of the finer points of geese rearing, feeding and slaughtering cows and pigs,
growing wheat and seasoning timber’ (Emeric, pp. 7-8). When writing the scenes in the
Shottenden wheelwright’s shop he may have known the practice of seasoning timber, but he
would have needed the English technical terminology. A large part of the dialogue in the film
between the smith and Bob could have been lifted directly from George Sturt’s *The
Wheelwright’s Shop*. There Pressburger could have found everything he needed: a world

4 *Life*, pp. 77-78. Powell may also have been thinking of T. S. Eliot’s *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), which
had been staged at Canterbury Cathedral. It was ‘a conscious return to the ritual roots of drama, combining
curch liturgy with verbal patterns from the morality play of *Everyman*, involving the audience in Thomas à
Becket’s martyrdom as the congregation of the cathedral where he had been killed’ (Christopher Innes,
6 *Life*, p. 74. In fact, it was not the river which inspired the letter “S”, but the snake (Rudyard Kipling, “How the
war causing timber to be felled at the wrong time of year; elm planks built in two stacks for steadiness and bound with narrow strips, but sweating all the same; timber allowed to season a year for every inch of thickness; and the comment that 'a capitalist cannot nowadays afford to have his money lying idle for so long'. He would have learned how to pronounce felloes: 'in this word leave out the o. Make the word rhyme to bellies', and exactly how to describe the operation of 'soling-down'.

This operation, called 'soling down' the wheel (in preparation for putting on its shoe), was for the skilled wheelwright. Taking an old axe... he chopped the rim level all round. He also gouged out the ends of the spokes, lest they should protrude too much against the inside of the tyre, and thereby keep it away from the sole. Further, the felloe-joints needed looking to and perhaps opening half-an-inch or so, lest presently they should close up before the cooling tyre had forced the spokes back into place.

But, as Sturt pointed out, even in 1923 these practices were outdated.

In the slow transition from village or provincial industry to city or cosmopolitan industry, one sees a change comparable to the geological changes that are still altering the face of the earth. Already, during the eighties and nineties of last century ... other materials to supersede the old ones were now arriving from multitudinous wage-earners in touch with no neighbourhood at all, but in the pay of capitalists.7

Flaherty did not have the monopoly of romanticising the present by resurrecting the past. The age of wood had already been overtaken by a new age of iron, as the jibe "I thought this was the iron-age" (from one of the sceptical soldiers at Colpeper's lecture) reminds us.

According to Powell, between Chilham and the main coastal road,

there is a maze of little valleys with leafy deep lanes which turn and twist out of them and which lead you, or in many cases don't lead you, to the ridge roads which run along the top, east and west. Shottenden, embowered in apple orchards, dozes on one of these lanes. It has one pub. It has a few farms, but mostly it has cottages. It has several narrow lanes which turn and twist abruptly for no apparent reason, for which G.K. Chesterton offers an explanation in his fantasy "The Flying Inn":

Before the Roman came to Rye
Or out to Severn strode
The reeling English drunkard
Made the rolling English road

(Kipling's serpentine river and Chesterton's illogically bending road could be analogies for the narrative structure of A Canterbury Tale (The Archers, 1944). Like a slow-flowing river or a winding country road it meanders, appearing at times to be going nowhere. It is, in fact, progressing, but its loops, bends and digressions are as important as its ultimate destination. As Christie has observed:

With a premise as slight and whimsical as Chesterton's The Flying Inn - that earlier classic conservative vision of England rediscovered - it is important that the narrative of A Canterbury Tale should be subservient to image and incident, that it should produce the poetic juxtaposition on which the film depends for its true meaning' (Alienation, p. 319).

When the three travellers arrive in Chillingbourne they are left to the drifts and eddies of the narrative flow for three days until it is time for the plot to carry them to their destination: Canterbury. And the pace of the film slows from the speed of a train to the ambling gait of a horse.

The three modern pilgrims are: Sergeant Bob Johnson, U.S. Army, 'an American from the West and homesick for it'; Sergeant Peter Gibbs, British Rifle Regiment, 'who sees things as they are - or as he imagines them to be'; and Alison Smith, 'a land-girl'. While they are detained in Chillingbourne they make friends and establish relationships within the local community, and it is those relationships that give them a new awareness of both people and place. Misconceptions and prejudices are blown away by fresh understanding of themselves and others, on a personal level and a cultural one. As Alison says to Colpeper when she confesses that she had been mistaken about him, "We have to learn about people as well as roads". Bob Johnson is summed up on the night he arrives at the town hall by his voice alone. ‘The two ARP workers exchange another glance. The damning word “American” is passed between them’ (*Ibid*, p. 20). But by the time he leaves he seems to have made friends with the entire community, his open mind and easy-going manner (combined with his intimate knowledge of timber) having penetrated the local reserve and confounded their suspicions.

Alison Smith makes contact with the women of the village, and Peter Gibbs with the soldiers at the army camp. Most importantly, however, the three of them have time to become friends, arrive at a mutual understanding of their cultural differences, and discover more than they could imagine about the leading light of the village, Thomas Colpeper.

And all this was achieved by a little glue. Glue truly is the cement that binds them together: it is the reason for Thomas Duckett's insistence that Alison must be escorted by Bob and Peter when they arrive at Chillingbourne station, thus ensuring that glue will be dumped on her head; the search for the ‘Glue Man’ keeps Bob in Chillingbourne and brings him into contact with the wheelwright, the watchman and a fair selection of the village boys; it inspires Alison to speak to the ten women who had been ‘incidents’ before her; and it stimulates Peter to explore the life and habits of their principal suspect, Thomas Colpeper. When Alison is trying to wash out the glue, Bob assists her. He comments ruefully, as he lathers her hair, "I've got considerable on me, so there must be less on you, but there's still plenty on you", and the two policemen add their hands to the task, making three pairs of hands on her head among the glue and soap (a strange baptism). A dissolve takes us to Bob shaking Colpeper's hand and saying,
apologetically, “Still a bit sticky, sir.” The glue has come full circle. Without the glue it is very unlikely that the three friends would have attended Colpeper’s lecture: Peter had no interest in ‘country matters’; Alison was, she presumed, excluded since it stated ‘for members of H.M. Forces only’; and Bob would have left for Canterbury.

Bob, of all the pilgrims, appears to have least need of salvation. He is the detached observer; open minded, contemplative and easy-going. Sue Harper claims that, ‘as his heart is safely engaged elsewhere, so also are his loins, and his relations with the heroine are thus unselfconscious and comradely’. But this paints rather too pure a portrait of Bob. He is spending his leave in Kent in order to keep a promise made to his mother, but really wanted to spend it in London, doing what his buddy and alter-ego, Sergeant Rocsinsky, was doing: ”See some good movies - and other things a fellow likes to do sometimes, you know”. It would appear that his loins have remained disengaged mainly from lack of opportunity and that while his relations with Alison are ‘comradely’, they need not necessarily remain so.

Alison is an attractive young woman, who is independent, mobile and (she believes) ‘disengaged’. Her mobility reflects the actual situation of young women in wartime Britain. By 1943, ‘every woman under forty was expected to work, unless she had an exceptionally large family or billeted war workers in her home. Younger unmarried women between twenty and thirty years of age were treated as ‘mobile’ and could be sent to work in any part of the country’. Most of the recruits in the Women’s Land Army were, according to J. B. Priestley, town-bred girls coming from offices, shops, warehouses, theatres [representing] a loan of woman power from the towns to the countryside [but] many farmers could not believe that they would have any real help from these trim young women who descended upon them. There were times when bewildered Land Girls … found themselves treated more like interlopers than enthusiastic voluntary assistants.

But women had achieved a new self-confidence. Priestley noted that, in spite of the tremendous drain of young men from agriculture into the Forces, we are now producing two-thirds of our essential foodstuffs here in this island, far more than we have ever done before.” The whole country was mobilised: not only the fighting men but also the women were doing ‘National Service’.

Alison, a London shop girl who has already seen service as a land girl in the north of England, receives a less than enthusiastic reception from Thomas Colpeper and Jim Horton, both of whom are dismissive of her abilities. She, however, knows her own worth and is confident enough to hold her own. She tells Colpeper, “You have to take what you can get

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these days. You've got me. I can do the work", and she can. Not a woman to waste words, her answers to Jim Horton's questions are a series of guarded monosyllables. Pressburger's screenplay illustrates what the scene was meant to convey, and the film fulfils that intention admirably. 'A solemn audience watches her. All are consumed with curiosity about the London girl, and ready to laugh with her or at her. The smith, a man of ponderous humour, is kidding her. Alison, who is not dumb, tries to give him no opening.' When he explains to her that soleing down 'means "soleing down". See?', everyone, except Alison, grins. 'Score: 1 to the Smith.' But Alison turns the tables on him by asking him what his job was before the war, and then pointing out to him, "I was selling things in a department store before the war. I wonder how you'd look behind a counter, Mr. Horton?" She wins the round. The laugh's on the Smith this time', but she has not yet won the battle. 'Alison brings the horse and backs it into the shafts. ... Nobody offers to do it for her, or steady the shafts. They all wait to see if she can do it or not. Alison knows she is on trial and is quite confident.' She achieves her task successfully and without assistance. 'The show is over. Alison has "passed".' (1943 Screenplay', pp. 44-46).

When she is questioned by Prue Honeywell, her answers are equally terse while being direct and honest: "Yes" to tying sheaves, lifting potatoes and spreading wheat; "No" to being afraid of work; "Not very straight" to leading a harrow; and "If I have to" to spreading lime. She admits to knowing nothing about hops, and Prue is satisfied. Their subsequent conversation is more expansive, centring on the country woman warning of the disadvantages of the country and the town girl countering with the drawbacks of the city: in the country they get up at sunrise, it's hot and sweaty at that time of year and the flies are the very devil. Alison replies as in a game of tennis, lobbing back to Prue: bus queues; stores in August; customers. Prue concedes defeat when she admits she is a virgin because the only man who had ever asked her to marry him had wanted her to live in London, on "a long street with every house a different kind of sadness in it ... ghastly in winter". "Airless in summer", Alison concedes. In this friendly match the scores are even.

Alison is not a virgin but neither is she married. The caravan's enforced immobility and dilapidation symbolise her shattered relationship, but it is also a reminder of her present position as a mobile woman and of her lost virginity (never expressly stated but implicit in the situation of a couple who "spent thirteen perfect days" together in that caravan and were engaged for three years). In 1943 it was still not possible to depict a woman having a sexual relationship outside marriage without her being punished for the transgression, or for her behaviour to be roundly condemned by someone within the film who carries moral authority.\(^\text{12}\)

\(^{12}\) Korda's *That Hamilton Woman* only passed the US censors by employing both devices.
as two Gainsborough films released in 1944 demonstrate. In Frank Launder's *2000 Women*, Jean Kent indulges her sexual desires (much to the disgust of the other female occupants of their French concentration camp), and is beaten up by an informer. In Leslie Arliss's *Love Story*, Margaret Lockwood has an affair with an RAF officer, but as she knows she has only six months to live (and her lover is going blind), nature is providing her punishment. Harper maintains that two other Gainsborough melodramas, Arthur Crabtree's *Caravan* (1944) and *Madonna of the Seven Moons* (1946), circumvented the convention by having the heroine who has transgressed die, 'not as an atonement for her sins. Rather the films imply, in a High Romantic formulation, that real life itself has become an anti-climax once the fantasy has been totally fulfilled' (Harper, p. 187). *A Canterbury Tale* also circumvents the convention but in a less flamboyant way. The reality was that during the war the conventions of sexual behaviour were flouted and a more liberal attitude towards sexual transgression prevailed. Priestley suggested that the consciousness of sex 'tends to be considerably heightened in war-time, when destruction and death are in the air and, in the face of their challenge, both men and women feel strongly their deep biological urges' (Priestley, p. 55). Certainly the one and a half million GIs who came to Britain after 1941 received an enthusiastic welcome from some British women. This liberalisation of attitudes, however, did not extend to the authorities, who were obsessed by female 'licence' but less concerned by male transgression.

*A Canterbury Tale* presents us with a range of female sexual attitudes that are treated as perfectly normal and acceptable: Alison's pre-marital affair, which no one condemns; Prue Honeywell's choice of virginity rather than marriage to a man who would condemn her to live in a soulless house in London; Susanna Foster's risqué remarks on the activities of those who occupy the bed in the Elizabeth Room at 'The Hand of Glory'; and the comment from Fee Baker (as she munches her apple dumpling in the hop garden) that 'a girl must live' even when her man is away at war games. None of them would raise an eyebrow today, but apparently a few were raised on the film's release in 1944, though the implicit nature of the sexuality provided protection from the censor's scissors.

There is, however, an ambivalence in the representation of the apparent enemy of sexual fulfilment. Thomas Colpeper, the glue-distributing patriarchal leader of the community of Chillingbourne, is presented initially as a criminal and gradually revealed as an over-zealous missionary. The very nature of his 'crime' was the subject of debate, and the apparent absence of punishment for that crime a cause of mild outrage. At the time of its release the reviewers of the film were puzzled, and found the premise somehow distasteful without being able accurately to say why. Several, including Lejeune, suggest that his behaviour merited the
attentions of a psychiatrist. "This fellow may be a mystagogue, with the love of England in his
blood, but he is also plainly a crackpot of a rather unpleasant type, with bees in his bonnet
and blue-bottles in the belfry. Only a psychiatrist, I imagine, would be deeply interested in his
behaviour." Another reviewer was disturbed by what Americans would learn about Britain,
'that the scenery and architecture are lovely at their best and that magistrates are liable to mild
forms of perversion'. Colpeper's behaviour has continued to disturb viewers ever since and
given rich fodder for retrospective psychological analysis. Among the explanations for his
behaviour is the suggestion that he may be a closet homosexual.

Colpeper's Freudian attacks on the girls may have a cultural rationale, but it is also the work
of a troubled man; whether or not it's the girls he desires or their would-be soldier escorts is
never made clear. There is a homosexual implication in the fact that he still lives with his
mother, but his attraction to Alison is palpable. ... Straight or gay, pansexual or asexual,
the glueman is the archetypally repressed Archers hero. But living at home with your mother in 1944 would not have led most contemporaries to the
conclusion that a man was possibly homosexual; it was in no way unusual. Douglas McVay
provides another psychological explanation.

Culpepper's [sic] glue-pouring activities are explained by him not in Freudian terms (as
some crypto-homosexual, misogynist fixation) but more nearly in Jungian ones, as a kind
of unconventional act of communion or baptism, a symbolic expression of his desire to
pour knowledge of England's heritage into the apparently unreceptive brains of local girls.
Culpepper [sic] progressively emerges as such a Deux ex Machina, in his influence on the
trio of "pilgrims", that he can't but strike us as a God-figure, or a Christ-figure, in a literal,
supernatural fashion. Baptism does occur as a symbol in the film, but using the conventional medium of water
(Alison's cleansing at the hands of Bob and the local policemen), and Colpeper was not
interested in pouring knowledge into girls' heads, only into men's, so the analogy of baptism
has a gap in it unless we assume that he was unconsciously aiming to educate women, not
men. Critics (and other viewers), both contemporary and retrospective, may have made a
conscious or unconscious connection between something wet and sticky poured by a man
onto a woman in the dark and found it disturbing. Maybe the audience is in need of psychiatric
help, since it is in our minds that the sexual defilement occurs. Powell realised that the idea of
the Glue Man was a kinky premise, but told Graham Fuller in 1986,

13 C. A. Lejeune, "Tall Tale From Canterbury," Chestnuts, p.121.
fighting for might have turned the film into a self-praising documentary, so instead of that I
let the glueman ride. I said to myself 'I think I can get away with it'. But I couldn't (Fuller, p. 34).

He was not surprised when the critics at the time were shocked; 'they'd heard vaguely that
some people loved to throw jam at naked girls and they thought this was the idea. You can't
imagine how prudish people were then' (Badder, p. 11). An even more disturbing insight into the
development of the narrative is that the 'utterly bizarre idea of the "glueman" was actually a
compromise: in the original script, Colpeper slashed the girls' dresses with a knife. This was
considered too sadistic' (Emeric, p. 236).

John Russell Taylor suggests that Colpeper is a character who is presented in an
increasingly sympathetic way as someone who is concerned for the fabric of England, but that
he is, like Puck in *Puck of Pook's Hill*, 'a mischievous and unpredictable force of nature, one of
the dark gods surviving and superficially domesticated, working at once to disorient people,
and in the long run effectively to reorient people, destroying in order to create' ('Myths,' p. 227).
And for Graham Fuller, too,

"Puckish" is the operative word, for Colpeper is an adult version of the Puck who spins a
series of adventures - of a Roman centurion, a Norman knight, a Renaissance artisan, and
English villages of the past - for two Edwardian children, in *Puck of Pook's Hill*, Powell's
favourite book as a child. Set in Sussex, adjacent to Kent, Rudyard Kipling's 1906 novel
initiates these children into taking their "place/ As men and women of our race" through the
acquisition of knowledge about England as an eternal, unchanging land with psychically
deep-rooted traditions. Initiation is precisely what Colpeper is about, too, and in Alison's
case the pouring of glue on her hair is a kind of baptism (Fuller, p. 36).

Baptism again. But there is another much less pleasant possibility. In the screenplay, Susanna
Foster says of the Glue-Man, 'If I could get my hands on the man I'd tar and feather him' ('1943
Screenplay', p. 33). This reverses the gender convention, since tarring and feathering is more
often a painful humiliation inflicted on women who were thought to have associated with the
enemy. Rather than a baptism, Colpeper's pouring of glue onto women's heads could be a
humiliation, equivalent to tarring and feathering, designed to deter other young women from
consorting with soldiers and thereby distracting them from their duties. The ambivalent nature
of the man leaves his actions and motives open to endless speculation.

Perhaps Colpeper's real crime is his puritanical interference with other people's sexual
fulfillment. But, more importantly, he is guilty of seriously underrating women. "He seems to
see girls as essentially silly, frivolous and second-rate, weaker vessels who serve only to lead
men on and to distract them from their duties to their families and their opportunity to learn
about the true meaning of England." His lectures are directed at men only, and he is genuinely

17 Jeffrey Richards, "A Canterbury Tale," *Best of Brit.*, p. 49. Powell says that they had offered the part to Eric
Portman because he understood it. 'He gave an extraordinary performance. His Colpepper had the face of a
medieval ascetic, which could quite easily have been torn out of a monkish manuscript' (*Life*, p. 441).
surprised when Alison asks him “didn’t it ever occur to you to ask the girls to your lectures?” To his “No”, she answers “Pity”, and we are left with the distinct impression that she has convinced him of the error of his ways. Powell has blamed Colpeper’s misogynistic behaviour on his unmarried status.

The trouble with a man like that is that he’s a loner. If he had a wife she’d have told him not to be so silly and taken his glue away from him. But he’s a typical Englishman in that way. I tried to indicate that by the type of things he’s interested in. You see in his room mountain climbing and walking scenes - things you do alone. So a chap on his own gets a bit cracked sometimes - monomaniac (Williams, p . 13).

Colpeper is obsessed with finding an audience for his message, and guilty of not realising that there are more ways than one of achieving his aim. Alison opens his eyes to a solution and, in the screenplay, the last image is of the Colpeper Institute: ‘There is a new poster up, advertising a series of lectures. And - believe it or not! - soldiers and girls are going in’ (’1943 Screenplay’, p. 120). His blessing is to have known Alison; his penance is to have lost her. He is a judge who has exceeded his authority. Like Chesterton’s Basil Grant, the star-gazer and mystic, who ‘seemed to have lost interest in the law ... and to be occupied in giving personal and moral advice to the people concerned’, and who ‘talked more like a priest or a doctor’, he has put himself above the letter of the law that he should administer. But he is representing a body of opinion among the community that he serves. “Most of our girls have their men in the services. The older people didn’t like the idea of them going out with every soldier that came along.” But none of them “wanted to stop the soldiers having a good time”. Something of a double standard is evidenced by the attitudes of part of the local community; the soldiers deserved to enjoy themselves but not the women of the village. And Bob is caught in the paradox. He wants a good time too but is worried about his girl back home, 5000 miles away.

Powell and Pressburger stated that *A Canterbury Tale* was a first blow in their crusade against materialism and was designed to show the spiritual values that England represented. But those values are founded on the capacity to change when change is needed. Colpeper cannot be dismissed merely as an old stick-in-the-mud who defends the status quo by questionable means; he sees the necessity for social change. When Alison explains that her fiancé’s father, being of a good family, cannot accept that his son should marry a shop girl, he responds with “Good family, shop girl. Rather dilapidated phrases for war time”, and to Alison’s dejected reply that for Geoffrey’s father “It would have taken an earthquake”, he tells

18 In the screenplay he elaborates on his negative reply. ‘The girls? They would have found them pretty heavy going. My sort of subjects are hardly ...’. Alison interrupts with ‘I was the first girl to gate-crash your lectures. Did you notice me struggling for breath?’ He replies, ‘You know, you’re perfectly right. It never occurred to me. But I hadn’t met you then’ (’1943 Screenplay’, p. 103).
her "We're having one". He wants to promote understanding of the nation’s heritage but understands the necessity for change. It is surely no accident that the bronze plaque on the Colpeper Institute reads

1886
Ceded to the Borough
of Chillingbourne by
the former owner
James Colpeper, J.P.

"Not Heav'n itself upon the past has pow'r;
But what has been, has been, and I have had my hour."
John Dryden 1631 - 1701

The past is unchangeable. The present and the future depend on that unchanging past but need not be chained by it.

The past was the beginning of A Canterbury Tale. J. Arthur Rank, a confirmed Methodist, had promoted the idea of a film based on Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. Pressburger suggested writing his own pilgrim’s progress set around Canterbury Cathedral, with Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales as a rough blueprint; 'a tale of four modern pilgrims, of the old road that runs to Canterbury, and of the English countryside which is eternal'. This was not the only British wartime film to mine the past for proof of the country's inherent virtues of tradition and continuity. In David MacDonald's This England (British National, 1941), the action centres on four episodes from Britain's past, all designed to stress her heroic spirit in times of adversity: the Norman conquest, the Spanish Armada, the Napoleonic wars and the first world war. The film stresses the timelessness and eternity of England and the English by having the same actors play the same symbolic roles in each episode: vicar, doctor, blacksmith, publican and - in particular - yeoman farmer Rookeby (John Clements) and farm labourer Appleyard (Emlyn Williams).

This England has the air of a somewhat downbeat English pageant, and Anthony Asquith's The Demi-Paradise (Two Cities, 1943) hinges upon an excruciatingly bad village pageant that the Russian hero has to witness twice before he understands its importance. After his first exposure he accuses his hosts of living in the past; after his second exposure, when war has been declared and Russia has been attacked, he congratulates them for being in touch with their past.

A Canterbury Tale begins with a close up of the bells of Canterbury Cathedral ringing inside the bell tower. Allan Gray's music is solemn, and chimes in with the one bell we see as the camera pans up and over it to allow us a view of the countryside through the oriel window, a view that is replaced by a sheet of parchment illustrated with the prologue of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales.

20 Emeric, p. 234; A Canterbury Tale, Press Book, BFI.
Whan that Aprille with his shoures sweet
The drought of Marche hath perced to the root,
And bathed every vein in suche licour
From which virtue engendered is the flower.22

Esmond Knight’s voice recites the strange-seeming words in a clear and measured way, so that we can understand the import if not the precise meaning.23 The text is replaced by an old map of the Pilgrims’ route from Winchester to Canterbury,24 then by an engraving of Pilgrims on the way to that holy place, and then by living people on horseback travelling the road, still with Knight’s narration of Chaucer’s words accompanying the images. But any fear that this will be a tedious pageant is dispelled from the moment that the squire releases his hawk.25

The SQUIRE casts off the bird. It mounts swiftly into the sky, higher - higher - higher - . His hand shading his eyes, the SQUIRE watches. We are so close to him we can see the veins on his forehead, the bones of his nose; his curled locks. His wide embroidered sleeves - ‘Embroidred was he as it were a mead’ - no longer seem important; we see instead his brown face, his intent gaze, as he watches the hawk.

We hear a distant humming, strange and yet familiar, as it grows louder and louder. It is the sound of an aircraft engine: a fighter. High in the summer sky, the hawk becomes a spitfire.

We see again the SQUIRE, as he watches the spitfire. His curly hair is cropped, his helmet is steel, he wears battledress; but the brown face, the intent gaze are the same; the background of the English countryside is the same.

We are in the C20.

The camera sweeps down from the sky.26

The brilliant ellipsis reassures us that this is to be no plodding progression through selected moments of English history but a direct connection between the past and the present. The narration continues, but these rhyming couplets were never penned by Chaucer.

600 years have passed. What would they see
Don Chaucer and his goodlye companye
today? The hills and valleys are the same;
Gone are the forests, since the enclosures came;
Hedgerows have sprung, the land is under plough;
And orchards bloom with blossom on the bough;
Sussex and Kent are like a garden fair,
But sheep still graze upon the ridges there.
The Pilgrim’s Way still winds above the Weald
Through wood and brake and many a fertile field;
But though so little’s changed since Chaucer’s day
Another kind of pilgrim walks the way (ibid. p. 9).

The emphasis is on a virtually unchanged landscape, but, during the course of the film, we are stimulated to an awareness of the accretions of time from the Iron Age to the modern ‘iron age’

23 Helped by judicious updating of Chaucer’s spelling.
24 Wonderfully fabricated by Alfred Junge.
26 ‘1943 Screenplay’, p. 8. Stanley Kubrick’s 2001 (MGM/Stanley Kubrick, 1968) employs a similar ellipsis; man’s apelike ancestor tosses a bone into the air and as it spins and turns in slow-motion it becomes the lazily turning shape of a satellite in space.
of steam power and Spitfires. And the present, just three days and nights (Friday night to Monday morning), in the hot summer of 1943 when the south of England was full of troops preparing for embarkation and D-Day, is to be the focus. The past merely emphasises and explains the present. The end of the war is foreseeable, and it is time to enjoy what we have and look to the future.

For the three modern pilgrims their time in Chillingbourne passes like a dream. It is a brief respite from the pressures of war, an idyll. One of the advantages of living in the country during the war was the relief from the fear of bombing and the catastrophic casualties and destruction that the cities had to endure. Powell confessed to a feeling of relief at escaping from the London blitz into the make-believe world at Denham studios during the making of Blimp: 'It was the grim period of “London can take it”; ‘the contrast with Alfred Junge’s gay, colourful and fantastic sets was very striking. We used to rush whooping into the studio, like children returning to their newly decorated nursery’. Before the location shooting started on A Canterbury Tale, he had bought a house in North Devon: ‘the buzz bombs had started and there was a new evacuation from London of everybody who could and would go’ (Life, pp. 408, 443). Devon and Kent were an escape from the worst effects of the war, and A Canterbury Tale was a brief escape from the implications of warfare.

It was like a return to childhood, which might explain the important part played by children in the narrative, both in the sleuthing and narrative digressions. G.I.’s were particularly popular with children because the cultural and language barriers were not so insurmountable, and their generosity was less likely to be misconstrued. Bob immediately strikes the right serious note when he encounters the two groups of boys engaged in mock-military manoeuvres, addressing them by their military rank and joining in the ensuing battle with gusto. It also gives him the opportunity to display his anti-isolationist credentials by asking to lease-lend the two generals for a pow-wow. The immediate response is to ask what lease-lend is and to be told that if the isolationists could hear them they’d be mighty sore, which inevitably leads to “Who are the isolationists?” “Short-sighted folks”, he says. “Why don’t they buy spectacles?” “From what I hear, that’s just what they are doing.”

The period covered by Went the Day Well? is also three days over a weekend, but Graham Greene’s story and Cavalcanti’s direction emphasise the tragic results of the complacency bred by an idyllic rural setting and the respect given by the villagers to the established hierarchy. Manvell considered Went the Day Well? breached the ‘new realism’ prevalent at that time, that it ‘lacked the necessary actuality to make its unexpectedness credible, its touch of “disenchantment” real’. He also attributed to Cavalcanti, ‘a certain un-English quality, a foreign, Latin emphasis on the ruthlessness of violence’ (Manvell, p. 105).

The dream that takes you to a fantastic world and then brings you back to the familiar but hum-drum world of reality is emphasised in the screenplay by the song that Peter sings when he mistakenly thinks they had caught the ‘Glue Man’, “Heigh-ho! The Glue-Man’s Dead!” (continued ad. lib. to tune of “The Witch is Dead” from “The Wizard of Oz.”) (‘1943 Screenplay’, p. 29).
Bob Johnson has the task of helping to cement Anglo-American relations, which came under something of a strain with the vast numbers of American troops based in the UK, preparing for D-Day. The actor to play the part 'had to be rather unusual - a film matinee idol and a kind of soldier the Americans would like to see representing them over here in Europe, and which we would like to think represented the typical American soldier'. Powell had cast Dennis Price on the strength of his performance in a play at the Arts Theatre ('He had charm and elegance and a long, good-looking oval face with a long, sensitive upper lip. He was impudently well-mannered. I gave him the part of the British soldier, the organist in our film'). He cast John Sweet in a similar way. The Ministry of Information advised them that there was a superior production by the U.S.O. of Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* going around the camps and that it was being brought to London to give a few performances at the Old Playhouse Theatre. As a serving soldier, Sergeant John Sweet was playing the part of the storekeeper who also acts as commentator throughout the play on the lives and deaths of the other members of his town. I went. It is a great play, almost foolproof to any cast, but made particularly moving on this occasion by the fact that all the parts were being played by young servicemen and -women, in the middle of a war from which many of them would never return. John Sweet was homely, honest and a natural actor, with a very good speaking voice. There was no doubt he would be wonderful as our American soldier (*Life*, p. 441-442).

As Bob Johnson, he gives a thoughtful and honest performance of easy-going charm which shows at its best, perhaps, in the scenes where he joins the children in their acting (a mock invasion across a river, which prefigures D-Day) with proper respect for its importance.

Acting is an important element for the adults as well as the children in the film. At the beginning, on the platform of Chillingbourne station, Thomas Duckett introduces himself by saying "My name's Thomas Duckett, Station master, acting". Bob responds with "Mine's Bob Johnson, Sergeant, also acting", and Peter completes the triplet with "Peter Gibbs, Sergeant, underpaid". They are 'acting' in that the roles they fulfil are of a temporary nature and will last only until the war ends, but most of the characters we meet are 'acting' in much the same way: Thomas Colpeper as both a Home Guard and a fire watcher; Alison and Fee Baker as Land...
Girls; and the other women who have taken on the jobs normally performed by men (bus driver, signal woman, postmistress). And this kind of ‘acting’ was part of most actors’ experience during the war. John Sweet was a real American Sergeant, Sheila Sim had been a Land Girl and Dennis Price had been invalided out of the British Army. They are required, in a way, to re-enact their own experiences. But, of course, one of the Horton Brothers at Shotend and the children at Fordwych were amateur performers who were required to play themselves, which they did to perfection, a production principle of which the documentary realists would have approved.

There is a reflexive element within the film. Colpeper’s magic lantern show harks back to the beginning of cinema, and Sergeant Rocsinsky is discovered ‘doing’ Canterbury with a cine-camera.

He pans slowly and steadily down the whole height of the towers until the South Porch is just coming into picture. Another few feet and the shot would be in the bag but a thundering yell from the door to the Cathedral makes him move his camera with a jerk and there, in the viewfinder, is his buddy ... running towards him, giving Johnson County war-whoops (1943 Screenplay, p. 112).

Bob, a keen cinema-goer, confesses that all he has seen of England so far is Salisbury, and all he has to say about that city is that it has some swell movies. His contention that it’s “a great thing to sit back in an armchair and watch the world go by in front of you”, earns him this rebuke from Colpeper: “The drawback is, Sergeant Johnson, that people may get used to seeing the world from a sitting position. ... Then when they really do pass through it, they don’t see anything”. Colpeper’s attitude has echoes of Chesterton’s character, P. G. Northover, who complains to a prospective client that ‘there is no element in modern life that is more lamentable than the fact that modern man has to seek all artistic existence in a sedentary state’, while offering to ‘give him back his childhood, that godlike time when we can act stories, be our own heroes, and at the same instant dance and dream’ (Queer Trades, p. 45). *A Canterbury Tale* is an adventure and a romance that gave its creators the opportunity to return to their childhood, to act stories and at the same instant dance and dream. And we, the viewer, sit in our armchairs and are entertained.

The entertainment we receive has many elements of a Shakespearean comedy. The three pilgrims are transported to a world where the rules have been turned upside-down. When Alison offers to help the barman at ‘The Hand of Glory’ with clearing up, he answers “I’ve seen some topsy-turvy things in this war, and in the last, but to see guests doing real work for me, no Miss”. It is a world where the rules and the roles have been reversed: women are doing men’s jobs; children are fighting the battles of D-Day (with wooden cannon and handkerchiefs to represent Montgomery-style berets), and tracking down the criminal that the Chillingbourne
police have failed to catch; and the leader of the community is the villain of the piece. There is
also the darker side of comedy in evidence. The name of the inn, 'The Hand of Glory', is taken
from a ballad in Barham's *Ingoldsby Legends*. Bob (in the screenplay but not the film) finds a
copy of the *Legends* on a shelf in his bedroom and becomes absorbed in that particular
ballad. A dessicated hand cut from a corpse on a gibbet becomes, after suitable incantations
by a local witch, the 'Glorious Hand' that can penetrate any barrier. It is used to enter the house
of a miser to relieve him of his wealth, a crime that receives appropriate punishment, but the
hand itself is neither innocent nor guilty but merely a glorious instrument. Colpeper may be
envisaged as such an instrument since, although his activities appear dubious, the results are
benign and do break down the barriers between the pilgrims and their desires.

The dreamlike world that Chillingbourne becomes has its darker side, and this is indicated
early in the screenplay.

We would like to emphasize here, particularly to Alfred Junge and Erwin Hillier, that the
Railway Station and Chillingbourne Village at night are only described thus prosaically
because, in daylight, that is what they really are. But at night they loom, awful and
mysterious, of dimensions unknown, of potentialities undescribable, full of strange shapes,
stranger sounds, menacing shadows and hard corners.

It is 'a nightmare decor'. As in *Contraband* (1940), the blackout is used for expressionistic
play with dark and light, shadow and substance. In this darkness the three travellers have to
negotiate their way to the town hall, and Alison is attacked by the errant 'Glue Man'. When
Bob wakes in the morning in the 'The Elizabeth Room', it is to a world illumined but still of
strange dimensions.

And his sense of proportion is further taxed by the sight of a young boy staring at him through
the bedroom window and apparently standing on thin air. The conversation that follows
between the American sergeant and the English boy (supported by a cart loaded with hay)
brings up the inevitable question, "What do those stripes mean?" To which Bob patiently
replies "I seem to have heard this one. I tell you that they mean Sergeant, and you tell me,

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32 There's a complete set of "The Canterbury Poets", two guide books and "The Ingoldsby Legends". Bob
examines the latter. It opens at the ballad: "The Hand of Glory". Bob reads the opening lines, is intrigued,
takes the book with him to breakfast ('1943 Screenplay', p. 43).


34 '1943 Screenplay', p. 11. Hillier, who was lighting cameraman on A Canterbury Tale, had worked as a camera
assistant on Fritz Lang's first sound film, M (Nero Film, 1931). The expressionist use of darkness in that film
may account for its effective use in this one. Powell, though, says that Hillier 'had a keen eye for effect and
texture and I gave him ample opportunity to use it. Whether in the studio or on location, we decided to go for
complete realism' (*Life*, p. 443).
what?" "They're the wrong way up." By this time Bob is becoming accustomed to the eccentricities of life in Chillingbourne. The streets are narrow and the upper storeys of the houses overhang and, he is informed, "They do say that two six-foot men could shake hands across the street, sir". When he comments on the size of the bed he is told "There are only three like it in all England. They say two six-foot men couldn't shake hands across that bed". To both these unsolicited explanations of strange dimensions he replies "Why would they want to do that?" He has to drink tea when he would like coffee, and while wrestling with the English public telephone system, he recites a catalogue of eccentricities: "A buttons, B buttons, mirrors, tea-drinkers, left-hand driving, stripes upside-down, Yes, Ma'am. It sure is difficult." But these are superficial difficulties. The perception of dimensions is much more radical.

Bob is gently taken to task for boasting about the dimensions of his own country, when he comments to Alison that "This country is like a doll's house. I like these one-way lanes and the cute little woods". To Alison's prompting about the size of woods in Oregon, he replies that there are "some bigger than Ireland and Belgium put together", which provokes the slightly tart response, "Everything you have is bigger than two things together." To Peter he points out that the view from the bend on the Old Road is, of course, "nothing to compare with the view from Three Sister's Mountain", and is rebuked with "Now don't start to tell me that you've got higher hills and broader rivers". He cannot recognise the River Stour until Peter points it out to him and tells him it goes to Canterbury, to which he amiably and logically replies "Going to Canterbury is no proof it's a river. I'm going to Canterbury and I ain't no river". But he is at ease with the proportions and dimensions of the timber yard, just as Alison is favourably impressed by "the perfect place" that turns out to be the home of Thomas Colpeper, 'a good square house, honest-looking. There is something so right about its proportions, so homely about its atmosphere, so perfect about its setting' (Ibid., p. 50).

When Peter enters Canterbury Cathedral it is in search of the Police Inspector to whom he intends to denounce Colpeper. He asks the Cathedral organist where he might find him, and adds that he wants to see him urgently. The organist, whose pet hates are unnecessary speed and incompetence, merely repeats that last word, "Urgently?" The screenplay informs us that 'in his tone there is condemnation of centuries, devoted to the pursuit of truth and beauty' (Ibid., p. 108). This is the moment when things appear to Peter in their true scale of importance. He is suddenly very anxious to appear well in the eyes of this little old gentleman. He has found his sense of proportion and is rewarded with the dropped sheet of music that floats down the organ loft steps, inviting him to ascend and receive his blessing. At

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36 The sheet of music is 'Bach's Choral for Organ' (Ibid., p. 108).
the beginning of this modern pilgrimage, Peter has the furthest to travel to understand spiritual, as opposed to material, values, but by the end he is the instrument through which the spiritual feelings of the all the people congregated in the cathedral can ascend and be released into the clear air above, the means by which they are able to transcend the material concerns of life.

The three modern pilgrims are, at the outset, literally 'in the dark'.

It is night, pitch dark. The noise of the train grows louder and louder. By the sound of it, we are standing on a station platform as the train rushes haughtily in, pretending it isn't going to stop at all, only to be brought to an ignominious halt with a great deal of clanking and banging and hissing of steam. ... The night is as black as Laval's heart. As the train stops, chinks and streaks of light appear as passengers in the blacked-out carriages lift the blinds and peer out ('1943 Screenplay', pp. 9-10).

The pellucid light and gentle sounds of horses and musical instruments of the prologue are swept aside by the modern industrial age of steam power; a train sweeping through a darkened landscape and stopping with the clank, bang and hiss of a new iron age. In that darkness the three travellers have to rely on sound for orientation and Bob, asleep when the train draws into the station, is at a disadvantage in dealing with English station announcements when delivered by the likes of Thomas Duckett, so becoming an accidental tourist in Chillingbourne. When he tries to illumine the situation with his big strong flashlight he is pounced upon for breaking the regulations. Alison, initially seen in silhouette against the door of the waiting room smoking a cigarette, knows her own mind. The screenplay tells us that the monosyllable, "Yes", and the way it is spoken are quite enough to create a suspicion that she is attractive, which becomes a certainty when she questions the need for an escort. Peter, in the darkness, has 'a confident, positive, tough Londoner's voice' (Ibid., pp. 12, 11). All three set out through the darkness with only Alison's torch (dimmed as per regulations and looking like an anaemic glow-worm) for illumination. But, when Colpeper commits his crime, Bob defies Duckett's strictures and shines his searchlight so that they can see the direction the shadowy figure takes. Colpeper is caught by sound and light: first by the tin can that he kicks in his flight and the big American flashlight; later by the sound of his hastily deposited jacket slipping from its hanger onto the cupboard floor in his office and the night watchman telling him that his blackout curtain is not properly drawn.

"Which other movie has ever introduced three of its four main characters in an extended blackout scene, so that it is impossible to see them clearly, except for brief moments in the glare of torchlight? The dialogue [is] made doubly confusing by our inability to see clearly who is talking. Paradoxically (or not), "seeing" is really what the film is about: seeing beyond surface appearances to the essence of things' (Chris Wicking, "A Canterbury Tale," Monthly Film Bulletin, 51 (610), pp. 355-356).

Pressburger would have had no reason to love Pierre Laval. 'In July 1942 the Vichy regime agreed to hand over to the Germans 10,000 foreign Jews in the unoccupied zone; they were to be deported to Poland. ... A public statement by Laval that it was his intention to "cleanse France of its foreign Jewry" did not increase optimism regarding the fate of refugees in unoccupied France' (Bernard Wasserstein, Britain and the Jews of Europe: 1939-1945. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, pp. 110-111).
It is the absence of light that damns Colpeper; there was no light showing from his window before they all arrived at the town hall; ergo, the blackout curtain must have been carelessly replaced after a hasty entry. This is only the most practical and mundane of the things which cannot be seen in the film. Colpeper cannot really see his audience in the blacked-out room at the Colpeper Institute, and they can only see him silhouetted against the perfect circle of light thrown by the slide projector, which, with the shadows of smoke drifting over its surface, looks like a full moon on a misty night. And it is a misty moonlight that obscurely lights the scene outside the institute when Bob takes his fellow sleuths through the stages of his exposé. They are in silhouette as Bob questions the local man who confirms that he is right in every particular, and who is canny enough to agree when Peter asks him, “Are you the village idiot?” They remain in silhouette for the rest of the exposition, and Bob and Alison have only the match lit for their shared cigarettes to highlight their features in their subsequent conversation. The scene ends with the ‘village idiot’ in deep focus in the background, posturing like a scarecrow to the accompaniment of a clear cuckoo call. (Can he be right again? Has Bob been cuckolded or is it a sign that Bob and Alison are in danger of cuckolding their respective partners?)

When Alison sees the front of Thomas Colpeper’s house, she exclaims “Oh, look at that house. What a perfect place. I wonder whose it is? And what it’s like at the back? What wouldn’t I give to grow old in a place like that”. She then sees what the house had hidden until then; its owner sharpening his scythe in the middle of cutting the grass. It unnerves her, the contrast between the impression she had formed of him at night, and the view she has had of him looking so right in daylight and in this perfect setting. It is with this ambivalent feeling towards him that she attends his lecture, at which Alison is the only woman. She has to endure a mild cacophony of wolf-whistles and the unspoken disapproval of Colpeper, who has already established himself as a man dismissive of women’s worth (his refusal of Alison as a farm labourer, his approval of the use of the ducking-stool for talkative women). When he discovers that Alison knows a great deal about the Old Road and, moreover, possesses and is prepared to give to his museum the Belgian coins excavated from the bend in that road (the very coins he had been trying to trace without success), his opinion of this one woman begins to change. And Alison, having discovered in him a common interest, is perhaps more attuned to what he has to say. In the darkness of the blacked-out room he talks of the pilgrims and their connection with the present day. As he is saying, “When you see the bluebells in the spring and the wild thyme and the heather you’re only seeing what their eyes saw”, Alison leans back and we focus on her face as she listens. Colpeper leans forward so that just his eyes are highlighted.
You ford the same rivers, the same birds are singing. When you lie flat on your back and rest and watch the clouds sailing as I often do, you're so close to those other people that you can hear the thudding of the hooves of their horses and the sound of the wheels on the road and their laughter and talk and the musical instruments they carried (Own Transcript).

Alison’s eyes close, the light fades on them, “and when I turn the bend in the road where they too saw the towers of Canterbury, I find I only have to turn my head to see them on the road behind me.” Alison is as one entranced. When Peter speaks to her, ‘The spell is broken. Alison opens her eyes. She smiles at Peter as one smiles at one’s neighbour at a concert where the soloist has played perfectly a familiar passage’ (‘1943 Screenplay’, p. 72). Colpeper has, unwittingly, been preaching to a convert, one who does not need a missionary to open her eyes, but only an instrument which reproduces perfectly an impression already formed.

The next day, when she walks to the bend on the Pilgrim’s Road, it is sound that dominates her perceptions. ‘Here, on the top, a little wind blows, mingling with the song of the birds, the chirp of the crickets, and the hum of insects and all the thousands of sounds of the Kentish countryside; and the strangest thing of all is that all these noises together result in a glorious silence’. She reaches the bend on the Old Road and sees the towers of Canterbury Cathedral, just as the original pilgrims would have done when they stood at this point.

Then, suddenly, coming from nowhere, she hears the thrumming of horses' hooves, distant chatter and laughter and a simple melody, played on a wind instrument, just as we heard the sound of the pilgrims in the Prologue, only less distant. She turns around but nothing is there; only the Old Road and the grass bending in the wind. At that very moment she hears Colpeper's voice... She stares - quite willing to believe it is an hallucination. ... she still has one foot in the fourth dimension (ibid., p. 94).

The paradox is of familiar sounds that we do not consciously hear and the sounds that we hear but which do not exist in reality, or at least, not in real time but in a dimension of time that is somewhere else on the wavelength, rather like the snatches of radio broadcasts that swirl over the continent of Europe as we come close to our home planet in the prologue to A Matter of Life and Death (The Archers, 1946). When she hears Colpeper’s voice but cannot see him, she assumes that this voice is also coming out of the ether, but he reveals himself by rising from his concealed position in the long grass and reassures her that those sounds “come from inside, not outside. And only when you're concentrating and you believe strongly in something”. The pilgrims have left their mark on the hillside, not just in buried coins and kitchen knives, but also in their talk, laughter and music, for those who are attuned to them. When they hear the voices of Peter and Bob approaching their spot on the hillside, like a pair of lovers or criminals, they hide themselves in the long grass and listen to the conversation, unseen. Both are embarrassed by it: Colpeper because he realises that his ‘Glue Man’ identity has been exposed; Alison because it reveals that she has been aware of that identity. This is the
moment when the spell is broken and the erotically charged relationship that had been growing between them evaporates.

The following morning, all four meet in the railway carriage on the train to Canterbury. The three pilgrims make a rather embarrassed panel of judges for a completely unrepentant Colpeper; he maintains that he has committed no crime, unless trying to pour knowledge into people's heads is a crime, in which case you would have to condemn every mother who forced her unwilling child to school. Bob and Alison allow that there is some merit in his defence, and Colpeper admits that if he has done wrong he will have to pay for it. Peter, however, is determined to bring him to justice. Denying any personal need of either blessings or a penance, he scoffs at Colpeper's suggestion that he may be an instrument, saying confidently, "I'll believe that when I see a halo round my head". The train obligingly draws into Canterbury station, where 'the bright sun, which has been shaded by the wall of the station, suddenly strikes on the glass of the window against which Peter is sitting, enveloping his fair hair like a halo' (ibid., p. 103). Of this Peter is blissfully unaware.

Peter, as a cynical materialist, would appear to be the most resistant to Colpeper's hypnotic power, but he is affected without realising it. His conversion, though, is probably based on Colpeper's uncanny penetration of the true feelings underneath his cynical veneer. Having discovered that Peter was trained to be a church organist but has accepted a culturally less prestigious (but financially more rewarding) career as a wizard of the Wurlitzer in a West-End cinema, he gently berates him. "It seems to me, Sergeant, there are two kinds of men; the one who learns to play Bach and Handel, only to play 'I kiss your little hand, Madam', and the man who learns to walk step by step so that one day he might climb Mount Everest."

Peter does climb his personal Everest when he mounts the steps to the organ loft in Canterbury Cathedral and is rewarded by the opportunity to play, at last, on a church organ. Very shyly and tentatively, Peter starts to play the first chords of Bach's 'Toccata and Fugue in D Minor'. The first deliberate chords exactly pattern his own feelings. It works! Peter gets more self-assurance with every chord. He pulls out more stops. The majestic, booming sound of the organ drones through the Cathedral ('1943 Screenplay', p. 110).

We hear Chaucer's pilgrims three times: in the prologue; in Colpeper's mystical recall of their experiences on that hillside; and with Alison's trip into the fourth dimension at the same location. But we hear the musical motif that is associated with them again, as we reach Canterbury, and there was a fourth 'visitation' that was not kept in the finished film. Peter is outside the police station in Canterbury, preparing to denounce Colpeper.

As Peter stands in the street a woman passes him dragging along a little boy with a satchel on his back; he is crying bitterly: "Mummy! Mummy! I don't want to go to school! Mummy! Please." Peter smiles.
He crosses the road. Suddenly, quite plainly, he hears the simple flute of the Pilgrims, the hoofs of the horses and the chatter of their voices. He stops dead and turns around.

The long curving street is quite empty.

He goes into the Police Station (ibid., p. 105).

It was, perhaps, gilding the lily to have a fourth manifestation; three is a more appropriate number for spiritual experiences.

Reality had intruded when the four pilgrims arrived in Canterbury: Colpeper faced potential exposure; Bob had to find his buddy; and Alison had to visit the Agricultural Committee and the garage where her caravan was kept.

Alison comes walking up the Parade. It has been little damaged here by the blitz, but as she passes Butchery Lane she sees the ruin ahead. ... The whole East End of the town is a piteous sight, flattened to the ground; and now it is cleared, looks even more desolate. The shell of St. George's still stands; one side of Butchery Lane, the end of the town, as far as the Cattle Market and Lower Bridge Street and beyond, are gone completely. [She] stands at what used to be the corner of Rose Lane and the Parade. She is completely lost, has no idea where she is. Only the great Cathedral, rising clear of its surrounding houses and now visible from the centre of town, remains a landmark, apparently indestructible, a modern miracle and a tribute to the men who saved it in its greatest hour of peril.

A modern miracle. A Canterbury Tale is the account of miracles of survival, reconciliation, understanding, communication and perception. Its roots lay in a conversation between Powell and Pressburger while they were filming One of Our Aircraft is Missing. 'There is so much talk about the country and the people, about protecting the women and children, but who is going to think about the human values - the values that we are fighting for?' (Emerio, p. 233).

When Alison finds the garage where her caravan is stored, she discovers its tyres have been removed and it 'looks like a barefooted lady sitting in an easy chair' ('1943 Screenplay', p. 115). She puts her hand on the naked wheel, pats it and says "What a shame!". When Colpeper enters the garage, she feels his presence before she sees him and is reduced to childish helplessness. He looks at her tenderly, and says: "I don't want to hurt your feelings, but there's something impermanent about a caravan. Everything on wheels must be on the move sooner or later." Implicitly she is being offered what she has said she would love to have, life in the country in that perfectly proportioned house. She is saved from a potentially disastrous decision by the fortuitous arrival of Mr. Portal with the good news of her fiancé's survival and his father's reconciliation.

As Bob stands in the nave ‘doing’ the Cathedral with a plan in his hand, he hears the organ

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54 Ibid., p. 114. (The bomb devastation gives this better view of the cathedral, as the lady with the over-refined voice points out to Alison.)

55 The screenplay describes Mr. Portal as 'an enormously fat man. "Fat" does not really describe him, he is so superior to the common race of fat men' (Ibid., p. 116). The broad-beamed Portal may be, as his name suggests, a gateway to heavenly bliss, but it was also the name of the Chief of British Air Staff, Sir Charles Portal, architect of the reprisal bombing strategy against German civilians. A portal can lead to heaven or hell.
above him, but cannot see the organist.

From his angle we move through the archway: the whole Eastern end of the Cathedral suddenly bursts upon him, as large again as the stupendous Nave behind him. He stares at the Choir, the Presbytery, the High Altar, and, in the far distance, the great window above St. Augustine’s Chair.

Bob, at last, is almost speechless.

At last he has found a dimension that matches the vastness and grandeur of the landscape of Oregon, and he ‘welds Britain and America together with the awestruck reflection: “And my dad’s pa built the first Baptist Church in Johnson county, Oregon. Red cedar and cedar shingles. 1887. Well, that was a good job too’” (ibid., p. 111). The comparative smallness of his grandfather’s church back home reverses the size relations that he had taken so much for granted: it makes him realise that mere size is not the most important factor, only the spiritual dimension is important. As he stands gazing upward to where, if only he knew, Peter is playing the organ, a charwoman is on her knees, scrubbing the stone flags of the cathedral floor, just like Susanna Foster on her knees polishing the floor of ‘The Hand of Glory’. Outside the cathedral Peter’s battalion is beginning to muster, marching through the streets of Canterbury. ‘As the Battalion passes, people fall in behind. People flow out of the side streets. All the life of the town seems to be flowing towards its true centre - the Cathedral’.

Bob has found his buddy and received a packet of letters from his girl, all with an Australian postmark. He stands in the cathedral reading them, oblivious of the crowd. ‘His lips move in delight and wonder and admiration…. He buttons the pocket and, just twice, he pats it contentedly. He has got his blessing, he has made up his mind, his girl is his girl, and he’s going back to her’ (ibid., pp. 118,119). Alison is there, and beside her a man of about fifty, who looks at her as if she were his daughter. Her fiancé’s father has accepted her; the way he takes her arm reinforces that impression. And in the organ loft the cathedral organist touches Peter’s shoulder as he plays.

Peter has become, both metaphorically and literally, an instrument. It is his playing of Bach’s Toccata and Fugue on the cathedral organ that influences Bob’s awestruck response to what he sees in the cathedral. Allan Gray’s superb orchestration of that work accompanies Alison as she walks through the bomb-damaged city centre, with its business signs advertising relocation but continuation of the commercial enterprise of the city. And at the end, when all the protagonists are gathered in Canterbury Cathedral, along with Peter’s Battalion and a large number of the citizens of Canterbury, Alison and Bob have received their blessings, delivered by the unlikely heavenly messengers, Sergeant Rocsinsky and Mr. Portal. Both have heard the music played by Peter on the cathedral organ without knowing that he was the source of it, and all three have been touched, both physically as a sign of acceptance and
emotionally by the spiritual uplift of the music.

Colpeper has witnessed Alison's joy at the news that her fiancé is alive and knows that he will never have his desire. He is isolated and has received no blessing: his penance is a lonely one. He does not even have the satisfaction of knowing that Peter Gibbs has climbed his Everest and is the source of the music that floods over him.

Peter plays. The gates have opened for him. High above the Organ, he seems only a moving spot of light among the great pillars. The glorious sounds, rushing upwards, seem to transcend their author. The great congregation in the Nave kneels. The sound flows up and up, upward to the Angel Steeple, where the bells are ringing (ibid., p. 119).

Directly after the prologue and before the end credits Pressburger wrote this description of the bells, the same at the beginning as at the end:

The Bells of Canterbury Cathedral are ringing
We see the bells, great and small, shaking the timbers of the roof with their clamour.
We see the towers of the Cathedral, the Angel Steeple, the mass of the building.
The bells are still ringing. There is no sign to show whether the time is 600 years ago, or today.
We see the Cathedral, far away across the valley of the Stour, the houses of Canterbury huddled around it (ibid., pp. 5, 120).

The bells signify spiritual continuity; they are the same bells that our ancestors heard and that our children will hear in the future. But they also signify change, the change from one year to another. Church bells in England ring the changes, quite literally, since each peal of bells carries a different message. Tennyson used church bells pealing on New Year's Eve to symbolise the continuous passing of time: 'Ring out the old, ring in the new, ... The year is going, let him go'. But he also used them to celebrate the potential for change in the future:

Ring out false pride in place and blood,
The civic slander and the spite;
Ring in the love of truth and right,
Ring in the common love of good,
Ring out old shapes of foul disease;
Ring out the narrowing lust of gold;
Ring out the thousand wars of old,
Ring in the thousand years of peace. (stanza 106, lines 21-28).

A Canterbury Tale is an amalgam of a conservative wish to preserve the past and a more radical desire to incorporate the changes that would affect the future. It is at one and the same time a very realistic portrait of life in rural England in 1943 and a stylistic expressionist poem

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40 I believe there has been a little bit of musical recycling here, in that Allan Gray's music for the bells makes an earlier appearance for the credit titles, and to accompany the church service on board the Fleet Aircraft carrier in The Volunteer (1943).
41 The same message of the bells symbolising continuity was employed in Jack Conway's A Yank at Oxford (MGM, 1937), where the college chapel bells fulfil a similar function to that of the bells of Canterbury Cathedral. Edward Rigby appeared in that film and in A Canterbury Tale.
that attempts to distil the spiritual concerns of a nation that is tired of war. It deals with reality but
pleads for understanding of the unseen and unheard, the illogical and the perverse. Its magic is
in its makers and what they have succeeded in conveying to an audience that is prepared to
accept its premise: that all is not what it seems and life is full of the miraculous - if you know
where to look for it.

*I Know Where I'm Going!*

It lies not in our power to love, or hate,
For Will in us is over-ruled by fate.

*I Know Where I'm Going* (The Archers, 1945) was born of frustration. The next production
was intended to be *A Matter of Life and Death*, but since it required the use of Technicolour
film stock and the Treasury could not afford the dollars to purchase enough of that commodity,
the film’s star-crossed lovers were left drifting in space between this world and the next for a
year while The Archers looked for a new story (*Emeric*, p. 241, *Life*, p. 459). There was a certain
urgency in their search: Powell was technically in the Navy and could have been drafted into
the Services, and his stage production of Hemingway’s *The Fifth Column*, which had opened
in Glasgow, had flopped and nearly bankrupted the company (*Badder*, p. 11, *Emeric*, p. 453).
After the negative reception accorded by the critics to Colpeper’s strange behaviour in *A
Canterbury Tale*, they were not quite sure where they were going. In this state of indecision
Pressburger came up with an idea.

I have always wanted to make a film about a girl who wants to get to an island. At the end
of her journey she is so near that she can see the people clearly on the island, but a storm
stops her from getting there, and by the time the storm has died down she no longer
wants to go there, because her life has changed quite suddenly in the way that girls’ lives
do (*Life*, p. 459).

This story, provisionally titled ‘The Misty Island’, developed into a companion piece to *A
Canterbury Tale*. Together with Erwin Hillier, they spent a fortnight exploring locations ‘from
Glasgow to Kinloch Moidart’, and decided on the island of Mull (*Emeric*, p. 243). When they
returned to England they made for Powell’s house in Devon to develop the screenplay. Both
Powell and Pressburger attest to the speed with which it emerged: ‘It burst out. You couldn’t
hold it back. I wrote the full script of that in four days’ (G-Y, 1971, p.11). From frustration to
completion in four days was a situation that mirrored the experience of the film’s main
protagonist. Although it might seem that to travel from the south-east of England to the
Western Isles of Scotland would produce films of a very different character, *A Canterbury Tale*
and *I Know Where I'm Going!* have much in common. Jeffrey Richards has enumerated many of them. They both use the same production team, and were designed to be crusades against materialism. But more than that, both films hymn the rural beauties of Britain, and both chart the spiritual awakening of city-dwelling materialists. In both, the travellers from the modern world are stranded at night in thick fog, emerging into a community rooted in older, deeper values. As the fog clears, so too do their misconceptions and muddles, as they move to a realisation of the real meaning of life. Both films celebrate the delights of unchanging, hierarchical village communities. Both invest in the local squire/laird an almost unearthly power, locating in him the source of ultimate wisdom.

I would, though, question the validity of the last statement, since in both films the squire/laird has to learn painful lessons from members of the 'weaker' sex.

For Powell it was a small step from the rural delights of Kent, the county of his childhood, to the Hebrides, the original location of *The Edge of the World*. In his account of the making of that film he makes a direct comparison between the attitudes of the Scottish islanders and the inhabitants of one small area of his home county: 'Mainland, as the principal island of Shetland is called by the islanders, not caring a fig for the rest of the world, as in Dymchurch they say the world is divided into Europe, Asia, Africa, America, Australia and Romney Marsh' (*Edge*, p. 90). He claims to have 'ransacked the west coast of England' and to have considered and dismissed the Farne islands and Holy Island on the east coast and Bardsey Island on the coast of Wales, before exploring the possibilities of the Western Isles as the location for the film, but it would seem almost inevitable that the choice would eventually fall where it did. 'I was already bewitched by the magic of the Isles. ... I had Seton Gordon's *Highways and Byways in the Western Isles* and I read it as I travelled' (*Life*, p. 464).

Ten years before, while nursing the scheme of a film to highlight the depopulation of St. Kilda in the outer Hebrides, Powell had read a great deal about the islands, their customs and their language. He engaged Alasdair Alpin MacGregor, *The Times* correspondent on St. Kilda at the time of its evacuation in 1930, as an expert advisor on the Hebrides. But then *The Edge of the World* (1937) was shot on Foula in the Shetland Isles, not on St. Kilda.

For seven years I had woven my story round St. Kilda, its people and their lives. There was hardly a scene in the completed script that did not contain some allusion or name that rang true to anyone familiar with the islands. ... what a wrench it was to discard everything I had painfully learnt ... I still thought in terms of the Hebrides' (*Edge*, p. 48).

Now, at last, his stored up knowledge and love of the Hebrides could be used. Seton Gordon, whose book, *Islands of the West*, had first confirmed his interest in the evacuation of St. Kilda, now became Powell's expert on the Western Isles and the Gaelic. Gordon had

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44 *Ibid.*, p. 461. Powell recalls that, while Pressburger was writing *IKWIG* in the house in Devon, ‘Seton Gordon had come by invitation to see the buzzards, and to take gigantic walks over the moors with me’ (*Ibid.*, p. 467).
been writing about the wild life of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland since the beginning of
the century. In *A Highland Year* (1944), he stated that the golden eagle 'will take lambs if no
other food is available... but the harm an eagle does on sheep ground is infinitesimal
compared to the damage wrought by a fox'. And in *Highways and Byways in the West
Highlands*, Powell would have found that on Colonsay, the ancestral home of the Lord of the
Isles, there was a bay with golden sands called Kiloran. And so the mythical, unattainable
island of the film, which is the ancestral home of the McNeils, was christened 'Kiloran'.

Shooting began on Mull in the autumn of 1944 (*Emeric*, p. 247). Some of the Foula Regulars
(John Seabourne, Finlay Currie and Powell) and the rest of the production team made
Carsaig their base camp so that they could work from dawn to dusk. They were joined there
by Pamela Brown. Pressburger made two visits to Mull during the location shooting, and, on
one of them, Wendy Hiller remembers him standing in the house, looking out and saying:

'That's what I want', and he was looking at a meadow - grass about two foot, three foot
high - and it was waving like the waves of the sea. It was - the wind was moving it as
though it was moving the surface of the sea. And he said 'That's the Hebrides', and I
thought 'Yes, you've got the Hebrides but you've more than got the physical side of it'.
He had the psychological side of it, you know, in the most remarkable way.

Hiller also recalled that although they had to work very hard while on location there were
compensations: 'We weren't being bombed, that was the great thing'. In London and the
south-east of England a new kind of bomb had been falling since June 1944, and would
continue to fall until the end of that year. During the period from June to September it had killed
5,475, seriously injured 16,000, and wrecked 25,000 houses in the London area alone.

'London', one West End resident observed, 'was becoming once more the city of the
brave and the few.' In the suburbs, J.L. Hodson noticed fresh salmon in his local fish shop
for the first time in ages. The people who normally got it had packed up and fled; part of a
huge private evacuation of London.

But London was not the only target. V1s were also delivered from piloted planes, and on
Christmas Eve, 'a salvo was aimed at Manchester. Only one reached the city, but twenty-
seven people died in the nearby town of Oldham' (*Calder*, pp. 560, 562). (Manchester is the

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Powell was in fact referring to this book, since I have not discovered a publication by Seton Gordon entitled
'Highways and Byways in the Western Isles'). Two of *IKWG*'s characters are named after Gordon's daughters
(Catrina and Bridie), and Gordon and Powell's long-lasting friendship has a visual testament in Gordon's
*Afoot in the Hebrides*: London: Country Life, 1950. Opposite p. 280 there is a photograph of Powell (in kilt
and climbing boots) examining 'the rock on Pabbay from which ancient grave stones were hewn'.
48 The House of Carsaig doubled as Catriona's house, Erraig, and really had been commandeered by the
RAF, reflecting the circumstances in the film (*Life*, p. 475).
50 Michael Moynihan, introduction to Lionel King, "Buzz Bomb Summer," *People at War:1939-1945*. Newton
home of Joan Webster and Sir Robert Bellinger.) Many of the salmon-eating customers of fish mongers in the north as well as the south may have decided to leave their homes for the duration. But they would not have been the only escapees; the film unit spent several months on Mull, during the worst of the bombing.

Salmon would have been a luxury, probably supplied ‘under the counter’ to privileged customers. Rationing, which did not apply to fish, was otherwise very strict, and there was a good deal of discontent over tales of profiteering. In Sidney Gilliat’s *Waterloo Road* (Gainsborough, 1944), the spiv character played by Stewart Granger avoids conscription, profits from his pin-ball parlour to buy all the alcohol he needs, and has time on his hands to attempt the seduction of the heroine, whose husband is in the Army. But his transgressions were multiplied many times over in the public perception by the owners of companies who could manipulate government contracts to their own advantage and emerge from the war richer than before. Many people would probably have agreed with the president of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, who alleged that the ‘troops had been “let down by men who believe that patriotism is another name for profits and that democracy means dividend”, and went on to attack profiteering by firms on Government contracts’ (Calder, p. 254). We are not told how Sir Robert Bellinger came to be one of the wealthiest men in England, but a rich industrialist would have been viewed with some suspicion. For Pressburger, however, it was less a question of condemning the profiteers than of examining the values by which different people lived; to show ‘this girl who was brought up to become a rather superior sort of being’, whose ‘standards were entirely different from the standards I was aiming at or people I liked were aiming at’ (G-Y, 1971, p. 11). The city-bred materialist whose exposure to the traditional values of a rural community would leave both parties changed for the better was what he had attempted to show with Peter Gibbs in *A Canterbury Tale*; Joan is the city-bred materialist whose sea-change on the island of Mull he is now attempting to show in *I Know Where I’m Going!*

Joan has grown up knowing exactly what she wants (the best of everything), and she usually gets it. The credit titles are interspersed with vignettes from her childhood, showing that her progress has been arrow-straight: the crawling infant who goes neither right nor left but straight on; the five-year old who asks Father Christmas for silk stockings, “and I mean silk, not

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60 The subject of Jewish black market activity in the later years of the war was raised in the House of Commons, ‘evoking a gleeful diary comment from Dr. Goebbels: “A frontal attack on black markets was made in the House of Commons. No bones are made about the fact that Jews were chiefly implicated in profiteering in the food market. Heading the procession were the Jewish immigrants who went from Germany to England”.’ (Wasserstein, p. 119). Both *A Canterbury Tale* and *IKWG* eschew conspicuous consumption of food and drink, perhaps just a reflection of the prevailing mood of austerity as rationing became tighter.
artificial”; the schoolgirl who is too impatient to wait for the school bus but beguiles the milkman into giving her a lift; and the young working woman who demands, and gets, dinner in the best hotel from the young man who can deny her nothing. Interspersed between these short sequences are the actual credits, cleverly incorporated into the potted biography by being decoratively painted on the side of her cot, chalked on her blackboard, printed on the side and back of the milk float and, for Powell and Pressburger’s joint credit, on the brass plate of the C.C.I. factory gates (they were the ‘Top Brass’ of the production). Powell claims he was a little anxious about this way of starting the film: ‘You really want to start the film with a little girl, who can hardly walk, in a comfortable, middle-class nursery, crawling across the floor in a straight line? ... Are you sure it won’t empty the cinema?’ ($ Movie, pp. 320-321). The credit title sequences were original and attracted criticism both favourable and unfavourable from the reviewers. Variety found the production mountings outstanding, ‘from the unique method of presenting the credits to the suspense-laden climax’. Lejeune, however, was less impressed and thought the film would have been better without ‘all that fancy montage work at the beginning. While they were about it, they might also have printed the main title in decent capitals. To call a film, i know where i’m going is a pretty clear sign that i don’t quite’. She has, possibly unwittingly, made an important connection between the assumed and real strength of Joan’s confidence in her chosen direction. There is a slightly childish and defiant vulnerability in the lack of capital letters in the film’s title.

The opening scene of the film is set in the lobby, bar and restaurant of an expensive hotel. Joan’s entrance, full of assurance and poise, indicates that she is perfectly at home in these surroundings. Her father, huddled in the bar, is not at home at all. “You know I don’t like being seen in expensive places like this and you know what my clients would think if they saw me here,” he complains, aware of the public revulsion from evidence of obvious luxury in a world of general privation. In a way he represents the life that she is trying to escape, a life of precise calculation and complete probity, stifling in its suburban morality. She is trying to rise above her station, and small things give her away: the constant checking of her appearance in a mirror; the pleasure she takes in being able to perform appropriately in surroundings like these. She is acting a part she hopes will become second nature. While she breaks the news to her father of her impending marriage, their table is overseen by a statue of Eve being tempted by the serpent. Joan is more than ready to be tempted, she is eager for it. The only time she loses her bright and carefree confidence is when her father comments that Sir Robert Bellinger “must

be nearly as old as I am”. It takes her a second or two to recover her poise.\textsuperscript{53}

Her life up to now has given her everything she wanted and she is confident that she will continue to get whatever she wants to achieve. Her determination is about to be rewarded with marriage to one of the wealthiest men in the country, a man who can afford to give her a luxurious wedding on his own private island retreat where “the war’s a million miles away”. At the station Bellinger's butler has everything arranged for her convenience, even to ensuring that her sleeping compartment is not over the wheels. Her father’s comment, “It is not so easy these days”, is brushed aside with an imperturbable, “We have our methods”. We are left to ponder what those methods might be. She has only to reach the island for all her dreams to come true. As the train leaves the station she tells her father reassuringly, “I know where I'm going”. It was a little Irish melody that gave the film its title.

\begin{quote}
I know where I'm going
And I know who's going with me.
I know who I love,
But the dear knows who I'll marry.
\end{quote}

As the train departs the wheels pick up the refrain, and as the train speeds north to Glasgow, the orchestration plays with it. A soloist sings the first verse while Joan reverently unpacks and hangs up her wedding dress in its cellophane wrapper, whereupon the Glasgow Orpheus Choir hums it with the slightly sticky-sweet modulation of an advertising jingle, before it is orchestrated to the rhythm of the train wheels, and reprised as American swing before returning to the choir. The soloist sings the third verse under the ever-so-precise English voice reading out Joan's itinerary, and the third verse is as appropriate as the first two.

\begin{quote}
I have stockings of silk
And shoes of fine green leather,
Combs to buckle my hair
And a ring for every finger.
\end{quote}

Joan has a wedding dress of silk (where did she get the coupons from?) as well as, we assume, real silk stockings, just the one ring (but it is a diamond from Cartier's), and a brooch on her left lapel: a silver arrow pointing in the direction of her heart. She sleeps and we see her dreams. The wedding dress disappears from its wrapper; through the empty transparency of the glistening cellophane we see her in the dress and bridal veil, being asked by her father (masquerading as a vicar), “Do you, Joan Webster, take Consolidated Chemical Industries to be your lawful wedded husband?” Eyes modestly lowered, she answers “I do.” When her father asks, “Do you, Consolidated Chemical Industries, take Joan Webster to be your lawful wedded wife?”, he has to crane upwards; the response is a mournful hoot of acceptance from

\textsuperscript{53} At the beginning of this scene we are not sure of their relationship; she calls him “darling”.


the steam engine's whistle as it powers the train northwards. In the background (and in negative) are what appear to be the bells of Canterbury Cathedral from A Canterbury Tale. Then, to the rhythm of the wheels, sycophantic voices chant a litany of "Everything's arranged/Charge it to your account, Madame/Perfect fit/Five hundred guineas/We'll send it, Madame/Charge it/Thank you, Madame", while five pound notes flutter down like confetti. The dream ends with the train like a toy winding its way through ridiculous tartan hills and a voice (suspiciously like John Laurie's), singing "I'll take the high road and ye'll tak the low road", then announcing "Next stop Gretna Green. Ye're over the border now." Her dream reveals her ignorance of the country she is going to and the inappropriateness of the match she is making.

At Glasgow station she is met by Bellinger employees, one of whom is wearing a black top hat. At the end of this scene the camera zooms in on the top hat, which appears to belch steam from its crown. The dissolve to the next scene reveals a locomotive's smoke stack. The journey continues like clockwork by train, boat and car, and she reaches Port Erraig on the island of Mull just as evening is falling and a mist is rising. There her plans are frustrated, not by human or mechanical failure (one is sure that Sir Robert would not countenance that) but by the forces of nature. The fog prevents her from crossing to Kiloran and, as she sits obstinately waiting for the boat that will not come, her itinerary is blown from her hands, a sign that from now on there will be no precise timing by the clock but only by the tides and the weather.

As it was for Peter in A Canterbury Tale, a floating piece of paper is the key to future fulfilment: for him, the chance to play the organ in Canterbury Cathedral; for her, escape from a marriage that would probably be loveless and frustrating in exchange for a union that her heart, rather than her will, has dictated. The arrow has stopped short of its target (the brooch never appears again after this first evening on the island), and she is slowed to the pace of the islanders. Her frustration is palpable and her impatience only too apparent, but her enforced stay on Mull will blow away her misconceptions and alter her standards. Four nights and days are enough to undo almost her entire education.

On that first evening she is stranded in a strange world: the language is different; nobody thinks it strange that she should sit alone on a quayside in darkness and fog; doors are left open and strangers accepted without question; her hostess is a woman who behaves like a man (striding across the landscape with a pack of wolf hounds and a shot-gun, hair unkempt...

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4 A surreal juxtaposition somewhat similar to the one in Jennings' Spring Offensive (GPO Film Unit, 1940), where a farmer is shown oiling part of an unidentified machine, followed by a series of close-ups of other parts. 'Only after the shots have been assembled and the machinery is functioning do we recognize it as a steam engine'. He then shows, in an extreme long shot, 'the engine, surrounded by wheat, belching smoke like a factory chimney'. (Rodney E. Sheratsky, "Humphrey Jennings: Artist of the British Documentary," Film Library Quarterly, v. 8, n. 3-4, 1975, p. 23). The music for this film was composed by Brian Easdale.
and a face devoid of make-up); animals have as much right to the comforts of the house as human beings; and a fellow guest greets her with a falcon on his wrist and tales of taming a golden eagle. That evening Torquil confides to Colonel Barnstaple that taming a woman would be harder than taming an eagle. "Can't be done, old boy! Can't be done!" booms the Colonel. All you can do is offer the lure and hope the bait will be taken. The eagle, named after Torquil, serves as a symbol for both Torquil and Joan, as a predator and a creature to be tamed. But her taming by Torquil is almost as rumbustious as that of Katherine by Petruchio in The Taming of the Shrew. She begins the action impeccably attired in a well-fitting suit, set off by a hat and bag of leopard-skin, and transporting an expensive white silk wedding dress. By the end she has discarded the suit, the hat and the bag, and has seen her wedding dress and the rest of her luggage swept away to sea. Torquil tames her by exposure: to the ways and values of the islanders; to the contrast between the islanders and the other strangers among them; and to the elements.

Her first painful lesson is to discover that Sir Robert is not the true owner of Kiloran but rents it only 'for the duration'; her second is to hear the men on the local bus to Tobermory talking about the "Rich Man on Kiloran", who is behaving "like a little king", building a swimming-pool on his new domain and importing his salmon (privileged food for rich southerners!) from the mainland rather than buying it from the local fishermen. By the time we hear his voice, the soft tones of the islanders have given us (and Joan) a standard to judge him by. His throaty tones and insensitive recommendation to contact the Robinsons because "they are the only people worth knowing around here", give Joan some embarrassment. When we meet the "English Family Robinson" who, like Sir Robert, are merely renting Some Castle, we discover a silly, superficial and totally self-absorbed woman with no interest in life but her spoiled, precocious, sulky daughter and her games of bridge. Her vapidity is matched by her husband's dull, slightly pompous, fatuity. They reveal their limitations further when Mrs. Robinson tactlessly and tastelessly tells Torquil, the Laird of Kiloran, that he had asked too much for the rental of his island; this as he is helping their hostess, Rebecca Crozier, to serve them their tea!

Against this boorish and money-obsessed couple, with their over-indulged and impertinent daughter, are ranged a selection of the local residents. Rebecca Crozier, whose large estate

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*Colonel Barnstaple is seen in a later scene with a charlady's scarf on his head and wielding a feather duster, further upsetting conventional expectations.

*We never see Sir Robert Bellinger, only hear his voice, which puts him on the same level as the Germans in One of Our Aircraft is Missing, as the 'enemy' whose importance is reduced by being kept firmly in the background.*
can no longer be maintained since servants are hard to come by in the war, dispenses hospitality with the help of friends and guests, while remembering with loving nostalgia the colour and warmth of the old festivals (a reverie rudely shattered by Mrs. Robinson’s demand for bridge). Ruairidh Mor, who cannot be persuaded to carry Joan to Kiloran until the weather permits a safe crossing, despises her attempt to bribe him with money. Kenny and Bridie long to marry but accept that they must wait until they can afford it. Catriona Potts, who has learned to live off the land and has put up with eighty RAF personnel camping in her house, says little but sees much, and is the person who completes Joan’s education. To her puzzled comment, “I thought you didn’t care about money”, she responds with “I’d swim to Oban for ten pounds. To Glasgow for twenty.” She rejects the suggestion that she and Torquil and Rebecca Crozier could sell their homes to relieve themselves of the responsibility of property that they cannot afford to maintain, with the much disputed line “Yes, but money isn’t everything.”

Powell maintains that the notorious twenty-two takes that he inflicted on Pamela Brown and Wendy Hiller were because the line wasn’t right, and that Catriona should have answered “Yes, but then we’d only have the money.” Harper maintains that ‘it is no accident that the phrase which required the famous twenty-two takes concerns rent’, since rent is the major symbolic issue in the film. I feel this is too narrow a focus. There is an uneasy ambivalence about the anti-materialist aspect of this film (and of the one that preceded it). Powell and Pressburger were sheltered from the necessity of raising the capital to finance their ventures by the generous terms of their contract with Rank, and I Know Where I’m Going had a ‘surprisingly large budget of £200,000 (£20,000 more than Colonel Blimp), and a final cost of some £30,000 more’ (Emeric, p. 248). Their dreams of retaining the traditional spiritual values of rural areas were funded by J. Arthur Rank, a north of England industrialist whose business empire was not seriously dented by the war. Bellinger, the north of England industrialist who rents the island of Kiloran from its rightful owner, may be guilty of insensitivity to the local residents and their way of life, but he is not damaging the economy of the area; quite the reverse. As Torquil points out to Mrs. Robinson, “I’m afraid that’s the only income I ever have from Kiloran. You see, for three years’ rent I can live there myself for six. That’s Highland economics!”. Pressburger has described the character he meant as a contrast to the standards espoused by Joan.

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58 Renting for the duration of the war is not condemned in itself. If it were, George Orwell (Eric Blair) would have to be included in this stricture since he was renting a cottage on Jura ‘for the duration ... at least it’s out of the war’ (Life, p. 463).
As against her, there was a young man who was in a way a happy-go-lucky sort of man who was doing what everyone was trying to do well in the war. It didn’t bother him at all that someone else had the island. He was quite satisfied with the fact that with the rent he got for the year from some rich fellow, he could live on the island for free’ (G-Y, 1971, p. 11).

The alternatives are to sell or allow the property to deteriorate. It is not money that is the problem but the use to which money is put. Building a swimming pool when thousands of families have been made homeless, and buying salmon from the mainland when the local fishermen could supply it, are symptoms of indifference to the needs of both country and community. And bribing an impecunious young man to put his life in danger in order to escape a dangerous passion in yourself betrays a selfish indifference to the lives of others. Joan deserves the strictures heaped on her by Bridie: "Who are you to be giving orders? You that come from the city with your airs and graces and your heart of stone! Why should you think that our lives don’t matter at all and that yours is so important!".

Joan’s passion is the point of the film. The anti-materialist money argument pales into insignificance beside it. How to redirect that passion into a more appropriate channel is the task of the film’s development. The scripts of I Know Where I’m Going! have on their front page this epigraph from Marlowe’s ‘Hero and Leander’

It lies not in our power to love, or hate,
For Will in us is over-ruled by fate. (Sestiad 1, lines 167-168).

In the poem Leander drowns as he swims across the Hellespont to fulfil his amorous engagement with Hero; in the film both Joan and Torquil nearly drown as they attempt an equally dangerous crossing of the channel between Mull and Colonsay. Marlowe’s poem is a mini-epic that still delights with its erotic jewelled imagery and playful sexual ambiguity (Leander rivals Hero in beauty and is the object of Neptune’s amorous advances). I Know Where I’m Going! also carries an erotic charge and plays with sexual stereotyping. Joan listens entranced and looks at Torquil with puzzled wonder as Rebecca Crozier describes Highland Dancing in peacetime.

The place blazes with jewels. The men! The men are more splendid than the women, with their velvet doublets and their scarlet waistcoats and their lace cuffs and jabots, and their buttons of gold and silver, and cairngorms, and their buckled shoes and feile-beags of every shade and colour! 60

As Joan struggles to resist her passionate response to Torquil she finds, as did Hero, that ‘Thus having swallowed Cupid’s golden hook/The more she strived, the deeper was she strook’ (“Hero,” 1, 333-334). And the trapped animal analogy is not confined to fish. A bird can be

60 Own Transcript, except for the spelling of ‘feile-beags’ (taken from Eric Britton, I Know Where I’m Going. London, 1946, p. 46).
both predator and prey, and Joan’s position becomes increasingly that of a trapped bird.

Love is not full of pity (as men say)
But deaf and cruel where he means to prey.
Even as a bird, which in our hands we wring,
Forth plungeth, and oft flutters with her wing,
She trembling strove (2, 287-291)."

Like Hero, Joan prays for deliverance from her passion but finds her prayers are ineffectual.

On the first night she submits to local superstition and counts the beams in her room and prays “Please, Lord, don’t let the wind drop, and let it blow away the fog.” But the gargoyle that is on the boss at the centre of the beams has its tongue impudently stuck out. Whatever god she prays to will, we feel, be inadequate to counter this mocking figure’s power to distort. Hero prays to Venus, but ‘Cupid beats down her prayers with his wings’ (“Hero,” 1, 369). Joan prays to the Lord, and this puckish figure grants her wish but ensures that it is ineffectual; the wind blows away the fog, but replaces it with a gale. The second night is spent in the hotel at Tobermory after she has spent most of the day in Torquil’s company. An unfinished letter to her father illuminates her state of mind. “You thought you had a grown-up daughter who knew her own mind and could manage without anybody’s help. Oh, darling, I wish ...”. When she prays that night she checks to see if there are any beams before pleading to God, “Please stop the gale. I must get to the island tomorrow. You know that I must.” We get the distinct impression that she hopes her prayer will not be answered. On the third night she is desperate. As she prays imploringly, “Please, please, God. You know how important it is for me to get to the island!”, the wind blows the curtains and rattles the windows. Superimposed round her head are swirling images of the dancers at the ceilidh, her emotional turmoil now centred on movement, energy and passion instead of, as in the dream on the train, money, privilege and subservience.

The prime characteristics of this ceilidh are energy and pace. John Laurie, as the character who has organised the celebration for his parents’ sixtieth wedding anniversary, moves swiftly and with decision; the singers sing at a cracking pace, and the dancers throw themselves into the schottische with controlled abandon. Torquil has taken advantage of Joan’s dissimulated ignorance of bridge to dissimulate his own knowledge and persuade her to observe the celebration. Once there, he ensures that she knows his true feelings by reciting the words of ‘My Nut-Brown Maiden’ to her, fixing her with his gaze as he delivers the line “And you’re the

67 Torquil, as cruel as the eagle, takes satisfaction at every encounter that brings home to Joan the enormity of her mistake: the news that he is the true owner of Kiloran and its laird; the tone and content of the radio conversation with Sir Robert; the criticisms of the ‘Rich Man of Kiloran’ on the bus; the insensitive vapidity of Sir Robert’s chosen élite, the Robinsons; the wave that he deftly avoids but which he allows to drench her; the sight of her wedding dress swept away on the turbulent waters. All give him a slightly malicious pleasure.
maid for me”. He allows her no polite way of escape from joining the dancers and, being in intimate contact with him, her own energy and passion (primed by Rebecca Crozier’s account of Highland dancing) are released. Hence the desperation of her prayers and the increasing desperation of her situation the following day when the wind shows no sign of abatement. Her bribing of Kenny is born of that desperation. Her emotional danger blinds her to physical danger; the risk of “losing everything I wanted ever since I wanted anything!” makes her oblivious to the risks she is imposing on others.

The physical danger is presented as very real. In Highways and Byways, Gordon describes the Gulf of Corryvreckan as a place of great peril for sailing vessels and quotes from the old ‘Statistical Account (vol. vi, p. 260)’. Between Jura and Scarba the space is about one mile over, in this narrow strait. Three currents formed by the islands and mainland meet a fourth, which sets in from the ocean. The conflux is dreadful and spurns all descriptions. Even the genius of Milton could not paint the horror of the scene. At the distance of twelve miles a most dreadful noise, as if all the infernal powers had been let loose, is heard. By the conflict of these inanimate heroes, who will not yield, though fighting twice a day since the foundation of the world, an eddy is formed, which would swallow up the largest ship of the line. But at full tide these combatants take a little rest, and when they are asleep the smallest bark may pass with impunity (Highways, p. 318).

The four desires that swirl in conflict within Joan are like the four currents that meet and boil in the Gulf of Corryvreckan: her desire for the life of ease, luxury and power offered to her by marriage with the wealthy industrialist; her respect and admiration for the quiet dignity and solid values of the islanders; her love for Torquil which she cannot control; and, finally, her pride in being a woman of honour who will not break a promise to marry even though her affections and perceptions have shifted. This maelstrom of anxiety and confusion in her mind and heart is symbolised by the whirlpool that forms in the narrow channel that the boat is attempting to navigate. The safe haven of passionless luxury can only be reached by courting danger; by navigating the cross-currents of passion created by the energies of conflicting desires. The danger of the voyage is that the energy of the waters may sweep you away from the safe passage into waters so turbulent that you achieve nothing but an end to all desire. The resolution to Joan’s problems could be death; the actual resolution is that she loses the symbol of her misguided desire for a loveless match, the wedding dress, and lives only to be returned to her starting point. She is still on Mull and still has not made a decision. But the passage is calm and can be crossed without physical danger.

And then there is the legend. The tidal race and turbulent waters of the gulf were the site of a test of love and honour many centuries before, when the Norse and Irish princes vied for control of the Western Isles. This, according to Gordon, is how the passage acquired its name.
Coire Bhreacain, a dreaded gulf in the days of sailing ships, received its name, according to an old tradition of the district, from Breacain, a prince of Norway, who sought the daughter of the Lord of the Isles in marriage. The Lord of the Isles imposed on him the hard condition that he must remain at anchor in the Gulf of Coire Bhreacain in his galley for three days and three nights. Breacain returned to Norway, and asked the advice of the sages of that northern land. They told him to take with him three ropes, one of wool, one of hemp, and the third of the hair of maidens of spotless fame. The daughters of Norway willingly surrendered their tresses, but, unknown to Breacain, one of the girls had surrendered to temptation, and her hair in the rope cost him his life. Breacain sailed for the Hebrides in his galley. He arrived at the dreaded gulf beneath the frowns of Scarba, and anchored in the tidal river. The first night the woollen rope broke. On the second night, the hempen rope was unequal to the strain. The galley was now held only by the rope of hair, and this held until the end of the third night, when a storm so furious arose that the strand of hair of the erring maiden parted. This weakened the remaining strands of the rope of tresses, and just before daybreak they also broke and the hero and his ship were carried away and engulfed in the raging flood (ibid., p. 323).

And that, apart from a few minor changes, is how the legend is told to Joan by Torquil, though his narration is interrupted at the snapping of the second rope and only resumed when they are in the boat and coming close to Corryvreckan. "You never finished the story of the Norwegian Prince. Two ropes broke, what happened to the rope made from the faithful maidens' hair?" "It held until the tide turned. Nothing is stronger than true love!" "No. Nothing", she agrees. "But one maiden had been untrue to her lover! One only. And when that one strand of hair broke, the whole rope broke with it." Joan is attempting the passage in order to be faithful to her promise and not to give in to temptation. Torquil is prepared to risk his life in order to save hers so that she can give in to temptation and dishonour her promise.

Faithfulness, we perceive, lies in being true to the dictates of your heart and blood, not to mistaken pledges. The legend is reworked to ensure that 'true love' triumphs (an indication, perhaps of the moral shift from pre-war values), and that there is a marriage between two differing cultural traditions: the Scottish islanders' rural community based on hierarchical values with the new, thrusting and progressive values of the English industrial heartland.

A similar reworking of the past was accomplished with the curse. Pressburger insisted upon it because the stories of Sir Walter Scott 'always have a Curse in them. People will expect it' (Life, p. 468). He may have been thinking of the curse on the House of Ravenswood in The Bride of Lammermoor, which results from the death by drowning in a fountain of a beautiful young woman whom one of the Lords of Ravenswood had detained against her will. From this period the house of Ravenswood was supposed to have dated its decay, since 'the spot was fatal to the Ravenswood family; and that to drink of the waters of the well, or even approach its brink, was ominous to a descendent of that house'. The curse created for I Know Where I'm Going, is similarly based on the death by drowning in an enclosed body of water.

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of a woman held against her will, the decay of the House of McNeil, and a prohibition on the lord's descendants if they should dare to approach the location of the tragedy. The curse may have come from Sir Walter Scott but the location was pinpointed by Gordon.

In the banqueting hall of Moy Castle is a curious raised portion built of irregular stones and mortar, forming a kind of platform at the end of the room. At the bottom of the dungeon (which leads off the dining hall) was a rounded stone just emerging from the water, which was some nine feet in depth. The unfortunate prisoner in the dungeon had to stand or sit upon this stone, from which a false step in the darkness would have meant a speedy end to his troubles (Highways, p. 270).

This was the foundation of Catriona MacLaine's curse on the descendants of McNeil of Kiloran.

Once upon a time, hundreds of years ago, McNeil of Kiloran took a beautiful wife from the mainland. But she was in love with a cousin of hers, a Maclaine who held Moy Castle. After a year and a day, when her husband was away ravaging the mainland, she escaped from Kiloran and took refuge in Moy Castle with her lover. One black night, Kiloran came. He besieged and took the castle and killed every soul except the two lovers. There's a deep dark dungeon just off the Banqueting Hall. It's a well with nine feet of water in it and a rounded stone just big enough for a man to stand on or drown. Kiloran stripped the lovers, chained them together and threw them into the dungeon. He sat in the Great Hall, feasted and mocked them while they held one another above the water 'til their strength failed and they dragged one another down. Before she died the woman cursed Kiloran and every future McNeil of Kiloran if they should ever cross the threshold of the castle (Own Transcript).

It reminds us that love can be cruel and that a loveless union can lead to unhappiness and literal or metaphorical death. But the curse was imposed on the McNeils by a predecessor of the present Catriona MacLaine. She loves Torquil, that is plain to see, but why then did they not marry? The curse, we assume, prevented them. It is Catriona who breaks the curse by sacrificing her own love when she tells him, "Torquil, don't you understand? It's you she's running away from!"

The past has confined Torquil. He accepts the validity of the curse and, like his predecessors, has no desire to enter the castle. His acceptance of his fate is shaken by his passionate love for Joan, and the apparent loss of the object of his desire makes him willing to risk whatever doom awaits him. Fate can be over-ruled by will in this modern age when men and women no longer passively accept the restrictions of the past. Joan, like Alison in A Canterbury Tale, releases the man from his blinkered view of the past and its bearing on the present, but she achieves this only after Catriona has broken the chain that bound her to Torquil. And the curse itself is deliberately open to more than one interpretation. "This is the Curse of Caitriona Maclaine of Erraig on MacNeil of Kiloran ...Never shall he leave this Castle a free man. He shall be chained to a woman for the rest of his days and he shall die in his chains!" In these circumstances it is easily read as a blessing, since Torquil immediately receives his heart's desire; the chains of marriage to the woman he loves that will bind him for the rest of his life. According to Pressburger, it reads
like an old-fashioned message from Emeric Pressburger the Hungarian Jew who has come from Berlin to France and then to this country and he writes this. How does he dare? It is supposed to be a curse and when they read it, it turns out to be not a curse, that if you ever come here then you are going to find a woman, fall in love, and you will be chained to this woman all your life. So what was to be a curse turns out to be the truth.6

Hillier was again the cinematographer, and his relationship with Powell was a stormy one.

From the first shot to the last ... Erwin and I had our usual love/hate relationship. We both of us thought we knew everything there was to know about black and white cinematography, and this was very likely true. ...The black and white cinematography on I Know Where I'm Going was inventive, poetic, miraculous. Only Johnny Seitz, Rex Ingram's cameraman, who taught me to appreciate romantic photography, was his equal. Erwin has done many wonderful films since then, but his work on A Canterbury Tale and I Know Where I'm Going was original and unforgettable (Life, pp. 477-478).

The back projections for the Corryvreckan sequences were shot by Hillier (Emeric, p. 247), but Powell remembers capturing much of the back projection material himself, assisted only by the boatman (Ian MacKenzie) and Pamela Brown. On Sundays, when the rest of the unit were exploring the island or taking their ease, they would put out in the big motorboat.

We would be only a few hundred yards from the overfall beneath the sea which was creating the whirlpools and eddies which were popping up all around us. Ian would creep into the main eddy below the sea cliffs of Scarba, and cruise about there as calmly as if he was on the Serpentine. I had my hand camera, my faithful Eyemo ... I would tie myself to the mast, like Prince Breacan, to leave my hands free. This is how I got the shots of the eddies and whirlpools (Life, p. 460).

On one occasion, he says, they nearly drowned. Life imitates art. He, too, could test his endurance to show the strength of his love for the new woman in his life. All the better that he was testing her endurance as well.

Early in November 1944 the unit moved back to Denham, taking with them the actual motor boat they had used on location for the reconstruction of the climactic battle with the maelstrom.

Powell had the workshop produce

a design with eccentric screws which held the keel of the boat in which the two principals were and then working on these screws they were able to turn the boat anywhere you wanted with the use of resistances and things like that. The way the wedding dress floats away is wonderful. After that, we felt we could do anything (G-Y, 1971, p. 8).

This was a new technique for its time, but for the grand climactic shot, 'when the whirlpool forms and the boat skids around its lip and pulls away to safety', Powell relied on an old one that Cecil B. De Mille had used in The Ten Commandments (Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky, 1923). 'For his master shot of the Red Sea, De Mille chose a high angle, a God's-eye view, of a deep trough the walls of which were coated with gelatine and into which water could be released from tanks so that it crashed and boiled. He filmed it with two high-speed cameras, one of them running in reverse. Powell took the idea and handed it to Poppa Day, who
ceased trying to make a whirlpool out of water and made it of plastic material like gelatine. It was mounted on an eccentric arm and could be whirled at varying speeds in a tank of water. We used the trick of a high-speed camera running in reverse as De Mille had taught us, and at last our Corryvreckan rose out of the sea. It had only to be married with half a dozen other landscapes and waterscapes to see itself reproduced in a charming booklet published after the war, which had several photographs from frames of the film. It claimed to show us the only authentic picture of Corryvreckan in action. ... The shots weren't authentic, but they were unique, and cost us about £40,000 to get them on the screen.

It was an imaginative and technical tour de force and, with the publication of the booklet with its 'authentic' picture of Corryvreckan, a myth-creator (Life, pp. 492-494). It was not, however, the only technically complicated aspect of the film.

Roger Livesey, playing Torquil MacNeil, 'never came within 500 miles of the western Isles'. He was playing in Peter Ustinov's production of Banbury Nose in the West End, and all his exterior shots were taken by a double. Powell claims it a triumph of ingenuity over necessity.

I'm not sure, but I think it is one of the cleverest things I ever did in movies. ... to double the leading man in all the exterior scenes of the film and intercut them with studio close-ups with such a distinctive person as Roger Livesey, was a miracle. ... Erwin Hillier and I would work out the scene and rehearse it, and the script-girl would make notes of the places where we proposed later to cut-in medium shots and close-ups of Roger filmed in the studio. ... so perfect is the illusion that I couldn't tell myself, now, which is Roger and which is his double in certain scenes.

The most controversial casting was the part of Catriona, which Powell was determined to give to Pamela Brown. Pressburger, according to Powell, 'thought her hideously ugly and what was worse, hideously intelligent. Hungarian women do not wear their brains in their head. The fact that I thought Pamela's great face and haunting eyes were something I could do wonders with, did not weigh with him at all' (ibid., pp. 476, 473).

Pressburger realised that 'there was not one love story but two love stories' (ibid., p.460). Powell tried to capture the unspoken love between Torquil and Catriona, but Pressburger, 'who was always trying to get rid of this mystical sort of dual theme that went on' (G-Y, 1971, p. 3), would have none of it and the extra footage was ruthlessly excised. The tales of the making of I Know Where I'm Going illuminate the way Powell and Pressburger worked together. In his autobiography, Powell explains how the screenplay evolved.

Emeric writes his stories - or he did then - with thick pencil in longhand into a quarto-size ringed notebook which accompanied him everywhere ... When he has written "The End", he takes the script out of the rings, numbers the pages, and staples them together at one corner of the manuscript. Only then am I allowed to read it - sometimes. [And then] according to our usual plan of work, my job was to add to and change the location sequences, bringing all I had learnt of the authentic dialogue, atmosphere and names of the Western Isles. I ransacked Monty McKenzie's pot-boiling novels for Gaelic phrases and idioms. As soon as I had completed the first few sequences, and numbered them with regular script numbers, I turned them over to Emeric for him to agree or disagree, or to point out to me that I had entirely missed the point of the scene (Life, pp. 467-468).

Pressburger has described their method of mutual regulation.
When I am writing the script Michael always says, "Do we need that?... Don't you think we could get rid of that scene? Do we really need this dialogue?" And I really begin to resent him. Then he goes off and shoots and shoots and shoots and shoots and I have to say, "Michael, do we need that? Why don't we pull out this bit, or join these two scenes together?" and he hates me for it - but that's really why we work so well together.

(Emeric, pp. 246-247).

A brief and incomplete Pressburger treatment for I Know Where I'm Going casts a little more light on the evolution of this particular film. The girl is an architect, 'in love with one of the greatest architects of the country. She is now in the WRENS. Her fiance is about 55, very influential, very refined. She hopes to work with him to build up a new Britain'. And there is a farmer who is serving in the navy, and who learns from the girl that her fiancé is renting the island. The triangle is in place: girl, older fiancé rich enough to rent an island, and a man native to a rural location. Both the girl and the fiancé, however, have more acceptable credentials (great architect, influential and refined; young woman who is serving her country in the Royal Navy; both hoping to build up a new Britain).

1. One foggy night a man and a girl meet in the only hotel of a small port. He is a naval commander, she a young architect. He has come to spend a week's leave on his island; she has come to marry a famous architect who rents the island for the duration. Somebody has lost his way in the fog and is calling for help. That is how the other two meet. The lost man is the best man, another architect.

2. In the morning a wind blows up and the developing gale prevents them to cross. They go to the shortwave station. The commander talks to his factor. (He keeps a cottage for himself) the girl and the best man talk to her fiance. The best man has the idea to go over to some rich people, for whom he built a house (ibid).

A gale preventing them from reaching the island, and only being able to make contact by radio, is in the final film. The best man, however, is a complication: another man, another architect? The plot begins to feel overconstructed and with too many angles. Would the triangle become a quadrangle? Is she to be torn in even more emotional directions? The presence of a best man is logical, but logic does not have to be obeyed. The part was cut.

The emphasis on architecture can be explained by the overwhelming need to reconstruct large areas of Britain, both because of the loss and damage caused by the war, and because of the revelation of the appalling living conditions endured by some of the poorer inhabitants of the country. There are, moreover, extracts from a text which Pressburger probably transcribed from some publication on the economic problems of Scotland. Included are these points: even the large landowners are not rich by English standards; it is a self-supporting economy; Scotland has exported men for a long period... emigrants, recruits to English industry - fighting forces; they have a passionate love of liberty - independent, individualistic, but lack of power to cooperate; and,

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64 Emeric Pressburger, 'I Know Where I'm Going', Handwritten Script, A-S-61, Michael Powell Collection, BFI.
the time has come when Scotland needs the best of her sons within her own borders, men who will break with the tradition of going forth and succeeding and instead remain at home to tackle the social and industrial problems which have grown acute. ... the population is not rising but shrinking and aging (ibid.).

It is a plea for the people of Scotland to stay in Scotland and build her future. *I Know Where I'm Going*, despite its mystical atmosphere and reliance on myth, legend and ancient curses, sustains that plea. It argues for keeping what is good of the past but for abandoning whatever is harmful to the country's future, and for Scotland's sons to stay in Scotland and work for that future.65

Powell, in his autobiography, claims that the shooting script of *IKWIG* had not worked out in practice and blames himself for Pamela Brown's performance, saying that it appeared to both himself and Pressburger to be 'mannered and over-romantic'.

I had fallen in love with her face, with its tiger's eyes framed against the dark hills and the stormy seas. ... I had made it clear that Catriona had been in love with Torquil ever since their childhood together. This sub-plot had to go. No doubt people who loved the film, and who have seen it many times, will howl with anguish when they learn what they have missed. But Emeric was firm and I have to admit that he was right (Life, p. 537).

But in his 1970 interview with Gough-Yates he was less conciliatory about the changes forced upon him by Pressburger's rigorous cutting of the scenes he had shot with Pamela Brown.66

I saw what a marvellous creature this was and what an interesting part if we could somehow link it with the old legend without her knowing it and so I shot her entire sequence - and nearly drove everyone mad - so that I would link her half consciously and half unconsciously with what was going on - not exactly spying on things but being drawn. She has this mystical beautiful presence. I did quite a lot with her but it was ruthlessly and imploringly excised by Emeric who altered my story. Of course it wasn't, but it had a lot to do with the way I was telling it, you know. I'm the teller of the tale, not the creator of the story (G-Y, 1971, pp. 3-4).

By 1978, when he was interviewed by David Badder, he was still concerned to explain what he had been trying to achieve with the excised footage.

She was obviously in love with Torquil and would have been in love with him at any time in the past two or three centuries. I wanted to get that over without ever actually saying it. Originally I had a lot more stuff of her watching Torquil. I shot a scene at the end when he apparently leaves Wendy Hiller and goes into the Castle to face the curse; in the scene Catriona followed him in there and watched what he was going to do, as if she were drawn there by the same inspiration as him, the same legend. I think there is much more goes on in life - below the surface - than people realise. It's not really mysticism as far as I can see: I think life is like that, it's not everything that you see but many layers underneath. ... In other words I'm a great 'eye' but I also believe there's more than meets the eye (Badder, p. 11).

65 A book title quoted in the handwritten treatment, *The Future of Scotland* by Dr. J. A. Bowie, is a very thorough statistical analysis of demographic patterns and economic indicators, but is not the text from which Pressburger quotes.

66 In 1970 Brown and Powell were living together, which may have inspired him to a stouter defence of the excised footage. He appears obsessed with how his vision of relationships within a film conflicted with Pressburger's whenever Powell had an emotional attachment to the female half of the relationship. Here, again, he paints Pressburger as an anti-feminist, as when he describes the scene in *Blimp* with Deborah Kerr (see footnote, p. 115). Could he be over-reacting?
We will never know if the missing footage would have enhanced or confused the finished film, but Powell’s accounts of the tussle between the two partners on what should or should not be included in the finished product gives us an intriguing insight into how they worked together and the balance of power within their professional relationship. Powell’s further elaboration on the division of creative responsibility within this production throws more light on their working methods in general.

This is how Emeric and I always worked together. He invented a situation and I followed it through to the end. Authors think of a storm, wind and waves and a stormy sea. A director personalises the conflict, in the same way that Edgar Allan Poe did. He had never been to the Lofoten Islands, but he had heard of the great and awesome Maelstrom. What a name! What a sound! I decided to take a tip from Poe - no writer should be ashamed to do that - and create my own fearsome whirlpool off the island of Scarba (Life, p.465).

Powell acknowledges Pressburger’s inventive skill but seems to imply that the real writing, the creation of the narrative and interpretation of the theme, was in the hands of the director. But later in his autobiography, having described the technical details of creating the whirlpool sequence in the studio, he confers the directing honours for that sequence on Poe.

But the director of the sequence was really Edgar Allan Poe. His Tales have inspired every imaginative writer over the past 150 years. It is not just the subject that thrills the reader; it is the style - like carved ivory - and the vision. His details are realistic, but he controls his realism as a strong rider controls a horse that’s beginning to bolt with him. (Ibid., p. 494).

It would seem that, for Powell, the terms ‘writer’ and ‘director’ are fluid and transferable. He acknowledges his debt to writers past and present, but claims that his function as a film director embraces both writing and directing. Pressburger had presented him with a situation: a girl must be prevented from reaching an island. He had read in The West Coast Pilot that only the Lofoten Islands in northern Norway could compare with the dangerously swift currents of the passages between the islands of Jura, Scarba and Mull, and had immediately leaped from prosaic fact to imaginative dramatisation. Poe was both writer and director; Powell was both writer and director. And Powell, like Poe, was concerned that the detail of his creation should be as realistic and authentic as possible to provide a solid framework for the fantasy it sustained.

Pressburger, nonetheless, was the writer of the story and influenced the final shape of the film through his knowledge of editing and his presence in the cutting room. He was responsible for the film from inspiration to completion and, thematically, it is primarily concerned with marriage, the education of little girls, and the stability of traditional rural communities. There were personal reasons for Pressburger’s emphasis on marriage and children. His daughter, Angela, was two years old, and his wife bore more than a passing resemblance to the film’s heroine, Joan Webster: ‘Like her fictional alter-ego, Wendy was stubborn, ambitious,
sophisticated, materialist and beautiful. That cast Emeric in the role of Torquil who, despite his numerous disadvantages - his lack of classic good looks, the insecurity of his life and his foreignness - had "got the girl." I Know Where I'm Going is a fairy tale with a happy ending. In real life the ending was far from happy; in 1953 Wendy divorced him and took their daughter with her to America (Emeric, pp. 245, 346-348).

The satisfaction Powell gained from the film was more extensive. He had covered the Shetland Isles for The Edge of the World, and the Orkneys for The Spy in Black.

Now I had made I Know Where I'm Going in the Hebrides, and the conquest was complete. The groundwork was laid long ago by Walter Scott, John Buchan, Robert Louis Stevenson and Robert Burns - all great tale spinners and subtle propagandists for their mother country. Now with three films that had been distributed all over the world I had joined this select company (Life, p. 540).

He had acquired Scotland. The dedication at the end of the film is "to true Scotsmen everywhere", among which number Powell, I'm sure, would claim a place.

I Know Where I'm Going was not an instant success in America and they immediately put it on the shelf. About a year later they put it on in Boston because it had an Irish tune in it but it wasn't a success (G-Y, 1971, p. 7). Then, two years later, a miracle happened. Prestige had in its vaults the Wendy Hiller film, I Know Where I'm Going, which had failed to achieve a Broadway opening and which not even the "art" houses would touch. The Sutton, a small theatre (561 seats) which had previously refused to play the film, suddenly was forced to book it because of a last-minute cancellation of a scheduled attraction. The house was customarily devoted to second-run films, none of which played for more than a few days. I Know Where I'm Going ran nearly a year. Just what manner of spell it cast upon the huge number of New Yorkers who came to see it no one is really sure.*

And it was not only the American public that appreciated I Know Where I'm Going. In 1947 Pressburger was introduced by Anatole Litvak to the head of the story department at Paramount studios, who told him that they had a copy of I Know Where I'm Going, and that 'Whenever his writers were stuck for inspiration, or needed a lesson in screenwriting, he ran them the film, as an example of the perfect screenplay' (Emeric, p. 249).

Powell's most persuasive evaluation of the film's continuing popularity was that the picture stands on its own legs as a romantic and moving farewell to a European culture that was vanishing. It was also a wry salute to the materialism which was fast taking over Europe after the war. ... Only another writer can appreciate the skill with which Emeric plots his love story, by word and look, until both lovers are caught in the net. We played it straight, Wendy and Roger masking every emotion and refusing any tell-tale intonations. It worked. It's the sweetest film we ever made (Life, p. 538).

But would it have been a more moving farewell to a vanishing culture if the scenes with Pamela Brown had been allowed to remain in the finished cut? We shall never know.

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A Matter of Life and Death

Love rules the court, the camp, the grove,
And men below and saints above,
For love is Heaven, and Heaven is love.

While Powell and Pressburger were busy with the post-production phase of A Canterbury Tale early in 1944, Jack Beddington asked them to make a film to help with Anglo-American relations which, he explained, were deteriorating.

The top people are already planning strategy in terms of spheres of influence, spheres of business. There's a danger that the ordinary man and woman in the Services will forget what they have learnt about each other. The old jealousies, misunderstandings and distrusts will return... When Europe falls apart, there's going to be a most awful lot of bickering and skullduggery.

He wanted a film that would 'appeal to the Yanks as much as to the British', an epic film 'about two great nations, full of colour and larger than life, with parts for good actors and full of jokes about America and England' (Life, pp. 456-458).

The initial inspiration for the story was a real but inexplicable event. Early in 1944 German radio broadcast that a British rear-gunner had jumped from his aircraft and fallen 18,000 feet with a parachute that failed to open. Nobody could explain his survival. The story was printed in the British press, and this became the basis for Peter D. Carter's inexplicable survival under similar circumstances. But, with the story written and a lot of the research done, Powell and Pressburger were told that there was no Technicolor film stock available, so they temporarily abandoned the project and made I Know Where I'm Going instead. There was a considerable overlap between the two films. While Powell was shooting on location in the Western Isles for IKWIG, Pressburger was writing the first draft of the screenplay for A Matter of Life and Death. When Technicolor became available again, and the story and script had been approved both by the MoI and by Rank, it was agreed that they should visit the USA early in 1945 (Life, p. 488). Powell was still shooting scenes for IKWIG at Denham studios when he was told that there was a berth for him on the Queen Mary, leaving that night. He abandoned everything and told Roger Livesey to direct himself (Badder, p. 12).

The visit to the US was a multi-purpose one: to follow up a possible partnership with United Artists; to be in New York for the American release of Blimp and The Silver Fleet; to find an American actress to play the part of June in AMOLAD; and to interest people in the idea of the film. While Powell was crossing to America on the Queen Mary, he was busy.

1 Emeric, p. 251. 'In 1944 Fit. Sgt. Nicholas Alkmade survived an 18,000 ft fall without parachute from an RAF Lancaster bomber over Germany. He landed in a snowdrift' (Daily Telegraph, 25 June 1997, p. 3).
Emeric and I had had numerous conferences while he was writing the script, and I was working from his final draft. The next one - mine - had to be our definitive version, for it was going to be read by many people in America. Emeric had done the historical research and written the story and most of the jokes. I had my medical notes and brought to the script all that I knew and loved about England. Powell had not been happy with the fantasy that Pressburger had initially created because it did not have a solid grounding in reality.

Emeric wrote the first script of *A Matter of Life and Death* as a fantasy, just as fantastic as *Here Comes Mr. Jordan* (Alexander Hall, 1941). I couldn't wear that, I said. First it was because it didn't fit into the war atmosphere and second, I didn't think it was very interesting. There was a scene where the heavenly messenger (Marius Goring) talks to Peter Carter (David Niven) which I played in the library. Suddenly someone looks away and there's a curtain waving in the wind and he's gone. ... I was determined to anchor it down, not only to the ground, but to what goes on in the brain of a highly intelligent and sensitive man whose brain is injured from an ancient injury and because of which he is now suffering from pressure - adhesions on the brain (G-Y, 1973, p. 17).

Powell's brother-in-law, Joseph Reidy, was a plastic surgeon. Through him, Powell was able to study medical cases that supplied him with a condition in which, adhesions can produce pressures on various parts of the brain which can produce what are called 'highly organised hallucinations'. These can be comparable to an experience of actual life. I use this phrase because it was quoted to me by the surgeon who did the job in the particular case I was studying. And then he uttered another marvellous phrase which really altered the whole conception of the film. He said, 'And this illusion can take place in space but not in time.' And that's what we showed with the frozen ping-pong game and David Niven sitting up during the operation with everyone around him frozen in time - we had lots of fun then. There is this whole hallucination taking place in the thousandth of a fraction of a second (Badder, p. 12).

Wonderful! He could stop time. Out went Pressburger's 'light-hearted miracles, mysterious appearances and disappearances ... double-exposures and ghosts waving curtains'; in came frozen ping-pong games and an operating theatre that comes close to looking like an exhibit in Madame Tussaud's. 'And then there were all the other things like the pressure on the eyes and the smell of fried onions, which all came from textbooks. I rewrote the script entirely and everything came out of natural ideas' (G-Y, 1971, p. 8).

Both Powell and Pressburger could have read Frigyes Karinthy's, semi-autobiographical account of a brain operation, *A Journey Round My Skull*, which was published in Hungarian in 1938 and in an English translation by Faber in 1939. The hallucinatory symptoms Karinthy...
suffered as the result of a brain condition included the perception that past and future did not exist, but ‘reality was ever present. The indivisible moment was reality ... the one moment unique and eternal. The moment that exists could neither be long nor short ... it was the only possible mode of being’. His sense of smell and taste were tested in the course of arriving at a diagnosis of his condition, and he described his dreams before the operation as being ‘more vivid than the events of the day’, and that in them ‘my arguments were clear, logical and convincing’. Powell also introduced a lot of English poetry, ‘ferreting through the anthologies to choose deathless lines from English verse, which Peter could spout in the burning plane on the way to eternity’ (Life, p. 498). There were some excisions: the extraneous characters at the airfield and the American Army base; and the scenes with Dr. McEwan in Frank’s study and at the hospital. In the Picture Gallery at Lee Wood House, however, there were additions: a large group of young American airforce personnel rehearsing a play or a concert.

While in New York, Powell met with Kathleen Byron (the schoolmistress in The Silver Fleet), who agreed to play the principal angel in AMOLAD. But they still had to find an American girl to play June, for whom the requirement was someone ‘young, pretty, the right age to be in the Forces, and real’ (Life, p.488). In Hollywood, Alfred Hitchcock suggested the young actress who had spoken Ingrid Bergman’s lines during tests for parts in Spellbound (David O. Selznick,1945). Her name was Kim Hunter and, according to Powell:

She was brave and pretty and sensible, and very well put together and weighed about one hundred pounds. Although only about twenty-two, she was obviously an experienced actress. When she spoke, her voice was delightful. When she acted, imagination and intelligence showed in every line she spoke. Whatever accent she may have had for American ears, it was charming to English ones (ibid., p. 524).

But Hunter was not The Archers’ first choice for the role. Their ‘Guide to a Screenplay’ (undated, but it includes the medical basis for Peter Carter’s hallucinations) states: ‘The film has

Frigyes Karinthy, A Journey Round My Skull. London: Faber, 1939, pp. 35, 125-126. Christie contended that it was an inspiration for AMOLAD (Alienation, p. 320), a contention reinforced by Diane Broadbent Friedman’s research, which identifies the likely source of expertise and some of the texts that Powell may have read’ (Christie, Amolad, p. 21). Joseph Reidy worked with Dr Hugh Cairns, who, as Professor of Neurology at Oxford, took part in a discussion on the ‘Significance of Auditory and Visual Hallucinations’ in July 1939. One participant referred to Karinthy’s book, and another instanced a case which had begun ‘with a hallucination of smell’. Cairns himself maintained that more complex hallucinations related always to past experience: ‘it is the diplomat who served in Japan and not the cook from Whitechapel who sees the Japanese warrior in tortoiseshell armour’. He also contended that visual hallucinations could be produced by ‘lesions involving any part of the cerebral cortex, optic nerves and chiasma and probably optic thalamus’, understandable because of the ‘elaborate nervous mechanism necessary for vision, and its correlation with other sensory impressions, and with space and movement’ (‘Significance of Auditory and Visual Hallucinations’, British Medical Association Scientific Meetings, 26-8 July, The Lancet, 19 August 1939, pp. 426-7). Friedman maintains that AMOLAD depicts clinical details in such an accurate way that a clinician might diagnose the probable site of the lesion, and that Powell portrays Peter’s seizures accurately and without trivialization, even though ‘the story does not require such accuracy. This transparent accuracy was a deliberate artistic choice in many of Powell’s films’ (Diane Broadbent Friedman, ‘A Matter of Fried Onions’, Seizure no. 1, 1992, pp. 307, 309).
been written with the following personalities in mind': Vivien Leigh as first choice for 'An American Girl', with Betty Field and Paulette Goddard as alternatives; Laurence Olivier as 'A Pilot' with David Niven in second place; Ralph Richardson as 'A Doctor', followed by Roger Livesey; while 'A Yankee' was to be offered first to Henry Fonda, then to Burgess Meredith.

It is interesting that, even at this advanced stage of preparation for the production, the characters are presented not as individuals but as types, defined by nationality or occupation.

When Powell and Pressburger returned to Britain it was to be faced with the post-production problems of *I Know Where I'm Going*. But it was not only *IKWIG* that overlapped with *AMOLAD*. Even though Technicolor film stock was now available and the cast assembled, including the transatlantic actors Kim Hunter and Raymond Massey, a further delay to the start of shooting arose and was put to good use.

While waiting for production to begin ('There were only three Technicolor cameras in England at that time'), Hunter filmed a prologue and epilogue for Powell and Pressburger's *A Canterbury Tale* (released in the U.S. in 1949). She played 'Johnson's girl,' opposite an American sergeant, John Sweet.

The prologue and epilogue were deemed necessary for distribution in the U.S. *I Know Where I'm Going*, however, dominated the overlap, since Niven stayed on at the end of *AMOLAD* to shoot scenes for an aborted production ('The White Cockade') on the romantic theme of Bonnie Prince Charlie, inspired by Samuel Johnson's account of his meeting with Flora MacDonald (*Life*, p. 540).

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With its cast and crew assembled and with a Technicolor camera available, shooting began on *A Matter of Life and Death* in August 1945, shortly after the Second World War ended with the capitulation of Japan. The film pinned its colours to the mast with the credit titles: the familiar Archers logo appears in black and white but floods into red, white, black and blue
Technicolor as the arrow hits the target; the title of the film has the ‘A’ in red, the ‘Matter of Life and’ in white and ‘Death’ in black, all on a backcloth of a smoky heavenly blue, which deepens and becomes studded with stars for the written foreword. In 1944 the two lovers, June and Peter, had been left ‘in Purgatory, drifting in space between this world and the next’ (Life, p. 459). In the opening of the completed film it is we, the audience, who find ourselves drifting in space (without any notion of why we are there), viewing a beautifully coloured, slightly fairy-tale, luminous starscape. The title, *A Matter of Life and Death*, implies a desperate situation of some urgency, but we are being taken on a guided tour of the universe, where events are spectacular but at such a distance from ordinary life on earth that we are not invited to involve ourselves emotionally. We are doubly distanced: by the casual but informed voice of the commentator (so long associated with documentary realism) which guides us with an avuncular familiarity through this starscape, pointing out objects of interest; and by the sheer vastness, in terms of space and time, of a universe which is impossible to grasp in its entirety. We are in a realm that, for all its cataclysmic events, seems calm, harmonious and outside time. The reference to one of those cataclysmic events, however, would probably have sent a frisson of disquiet through contemporary audiences: "Hello! There's a nova, a whole star system exploded. Someone must have been messing about with the uranium atom. No, it's not our solar system I'm glad to say." Single chords of music sound at the beginning, fade into silence, strike a note of warning when the nova is mentioned, and then accompany us with a gentle, recurring, wave-like, travelling motif which becomes discordant as we approach nearer to home. We are travelling through space, not time. Only when we reach the solar system and then the moon, "our moon", and the earth, "our earth", and then a specific continent, "Europe", does time reassert itself with the urgency of the commentator's voice and the particularity of the night of May 2nd 1945. The war is still on, bombers from England are conducting raids on Germany, people are dying - civilians (a thousand-bomber raid on Europe) and military (not all plane crews return home safely). The universal is displaced by the particular, the scale of thousands of suns and millions of stars by one country and two people. The voice instructs us to listen and then abandons us in the fog over the English Channel, our ears assaulted by a barrage of noises: fog horns booming mournfully, distress signals, and voices broadcast by radio waves that are still swirling in the atmosphere above the earth (a snatch of a Churchill speech, a strident oration from Hitler), and then a girl's voice, unmistakably American.

We hear June and Peter before we see them, and they hear but do not see each other at

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Since Pressburger usually wrote the prologue last, this reference to the uranium atom would almost certainly have been inserted after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. There is no reference to it in the screenplay or Warman's novelisation.
all in this scene. There is a conflict of aims in these two voices, almost as if they are speaking different languages - one is efficient, neutral, businesslike, the other personal, nostalgic, circumstantial (the battle is finally won by the personal). This opening scene of the narrative takes a fairly familiar wartime situation (a badly damaged plane trying to reach base, in contact with air control), and milks it for all its inherent emotional effects. It plays on similar scenes in other films: the unmanned plane that drones overhead and crashes at the beginning of *One of Our Aircraft is Missing*, and the pilot of F. for Freddie in *Target for Tonight*, who has to decide whether to land and risk killing his crew or bale out and risk the unmanned plane crashing onto civilians below. And it mirrors the situation at the end of Anthony Asquith's *The Way to the Stars* (Two Cities, 1945). The pilot instructs his crew to bale out, but refuses to bale out himself to ensure that the plane will not crash onto civilians, so establishing that the pilot will always sacrifice himself for the sake of others. Peter's crew have baled out on his instructions (with the exception of his dead wireless operator), he cannot control the plane because the instruments have gone, and he would die in the fire that is consuming it. He has protected his crew, he cannot protect civilians, so he has no one to consider but himself. There is a simple choice; jump or fry. He jumps. But the scene establishes the character of this man who is facing certain death and has one last link with humanity, the voice of the girl in the air station.

We hear Peter's voice telling us his age (twenty-seven), his education (violently interrupted), his religion (Church of England) and his politics (Conservative by nature, Labour by experience) - like an abbreviated curriculum vitae. Then we see a puzzled June trying to make sense of this, before cutting to the exterior of the plane (one wing in flames), then to the interior, with its wreckage and the sounds only of the wind, the banging of loose instruments and the drone of the engine. We see a body lying sprawled with eyes wide-open and, finally, the pilot, dirty face streaked with blood, the fire behind his head, quoting poetry into thin air:

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O, give me my scallop-shell of quiet,
My staff of faith to walk upon,
My scrip of joy, immortal diet,
My bottle of salvation,
My gown of glory, hope's true gage;
And thus I'll take my pilgrimage. (lines 1-6)
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*Rowell called the scene 'a tilting match at the documentary boys', because there was a whole air station with everybody working. 'I told them to take it away. I just wanted one girl and the air station.... Although for four years people had been making documentaries about war, I bet you that no one's noticed that there is no one about in the air station. It was a great triumph for my point of view' (G-Y, 1971, p. 8). The 'Pencil Draft' has a full complement of staff at the air station, the screenplay only has June ('1945 Screenplay', pp. 4-8).* 

*Bomber Harris, or some other noted commander, was asked by Churchill whether he might count on the votes of his men. "No, sir... eighty percent of them will vote Labour." Churchill, much displeased, said, "Well, at least that will give me twenty percent." "No, sir, the other twenty percent won't vote at all" (Calder, p. 581).* 

Something is very wrong. This is no time to quote poetry. Undeterred he quotes even more
(four lines from Marvell’s ‘To His Coy Mistress’), gives a message for his mother (revealing
the true affection behind an Englishman’s traditional reserve and apparent lack of emotion),
outlines the hopelessness of his position, declares he could love June (“You’re life and I’m
leaving you”), and signs off, having promised to come and visit her as a ghost. She loses all
pretense of impersonal control and breaks down in tears. When he jumps, it is into a grey
void. Fog fills the view. The romance, so predictable, cannot develop.

It is an intolerable event, precisely because it is so much within conventions (of the brave
last message; of the first encounter between characters clearly destined to become
lovers), and at the same time frustrating those conventions. The pathos of the sequence
is produced by the wild mixture of conventions which themselves are to some extent
frustrated, refused their ‘habitual’ outcomes, and equally by the dislocation that works
between them (‘last message’ v. ‘beginning of love story’). Yet this frustrated love-story
comes itself as a disruption, a disruption of the harmony of the universe, where all events
make sense, and no events involve the spectator (Ellis, pp. 93-94).

But even here the spectator is, I believe, somewhat distanced. The event is not so much
‘intolerable’ as moving and mystifying. We have been led on a ramble through the universe
and then presented with a love story that develops and ends in four minutes of film time with
the death of the leading man. Where can we go from here? And why the poetry? C.A.
Lejeune’s review focused on the poetry. ‘A Matter of Life and Death begins by quoting
Marvell and Raleigh, and ends with a snappy excerpt from Sir Walter Scott’. Between times,
it manages to work in a saw or two from Plato, George Washington, and Benjamin Franklin,
and to touch lightly and familiarly on Dryden, Pope, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, Milton and
Donne. We are left to understand that the hero (David Niven) may in time become as
significant a writer as any of these, but his poetical works are tactfully not illustrated.

The Way to the Stars has one poem which is composed by the hero, an RAF pilot, who
dies leaving his wife pregnant with their first child (the poem is another creation that outlives
him). Humphrey Jennings’ Words for Battle (Crown Film Unit, 1941) consists of nothing but
extracts from poems and speeches (read by Laurence Olivier), married with appropriate
images. But that film was short, made to inspire a people who are facing a seemingly
invincible foe with the determination not to give in to barbaric totalitarianism. A Matter of Life

18 In Powell’s short film, An Airman’s Letter to his Mother (1941), the airman’s feelings are transmitted to us by
the words of his letter (spoken by John Gielgud), and his interests by the contents of his room (photographs,
trophies, and books). He states his willingness to sacrifice his life in the hope of bringing peace and justice to
the world and has only one regret; that he will not be with his mother in her ‘declining years’ (Own transcript).
Powell based his film on a real letter from an airman which was printed in The Times on June 18, 1940, and
19 C A Lejeune, “And Heaven Too,” Observer, 3 November 1946, p. 2. p. 279. The screenplay also has ‘O
teach me to see Death and not to fear’, and ‘The Pine-tree drops its dead’ (‘1945 Screenplay’, pp. 4, 8).
14 While Olivier recites Blake’s Jerusalem, ‘Bring me my chariot of fire’ is accompanied by a train speeding
through the suburbs, and ‘Till we have built Jerusalem/ In England’s green and pleasant land’, with children
paddling boats on a quiet, sunny river in the countryside.
and Death, it seems, sinned by using a fairly full freight of English literary references too lightly. Those references are used, however, with a purpose. A Canterbury Tale had begun with the Prologue to Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales as an illustration of Britain and America’s shared cultural heritage and the need for faith in all ages; here the first poetry Peter spouts from his burning bomber illustrates perfectly the dilemma in which he finds himself. Ralegh, an adventurer who served his queen and country in war and peace and whose poetry celebrates fortitude rather than heroism, may have written this verse, from ‘The Passionate Man’s Pilgrimage’, the night before his execution. Peter, another Englishman serving his king and country, is facing his own seemingly inevitable death and journey into the unknown with equal fortitude. But the voice of the girl is very attractive, and she is life, symbolising all that he will never now experience, which makes Marvell’s lines from ‘To His Coy Mistress’ also appropriate to the situation:

But at my back I always hear
Time’s Winged Chariot hurrying near;
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity (lines 21-24).\(^\text{15}\)

He is contemplating an eternity without sensual pleasure, and his time for wooing is pathetically brief. The lines are very apt for a love affair that has lasted only minutes and can have only moments before death intervenes between these star-crossed lovers, who appear fated to meet only through the ether and never in the flesh. When Peter slips through the open bomb door in the bottom of the plane and launches himself into the grey swirling fog, he fully believes his death to be inevitable, and when the fog slowly clears we see Peter’s body floating upwards, eyes closed, on a gently swelling tide on a long coastline. The colour is subdued as we hear his last words, “prop or wings”, repeated until the colour fades and the image is replaced by rows of traditional white angelic wings (his wish has been granted), unattached, shrouded in clear cellophane, jerking along an assembly line. Their movement mirrors the waves breaking on the shore except that here it is like clockwork. We are in a monochromatic Other World, where the bureaucracy is clockwork perfect but where time is measured only for the benefit of those who arrive from earth. In the Air Crew Section the clock is shaped like a futuristic airman’s chronometer, and its relentless ticking is the only music, except for that which the dead airmen (entering through an opening shaped like an aircraft wing) bring with them: a mournful dirge on the harmonica for one; a breezy, snappy, bustling, toe-tapping tune for a group of Americans (they find a coke

machine). No differentials are allowed, of race, sex, colour or politics - all are equal, all the same. Everything is light, white, cool, modern and antiseptic, and the 'angels' wear white WAF uniforms. While their Section Officer (Kathleen Byron) is explaining to Bob Trubshaw that they don't make mistakes there, but that if the records didn't balance all the alarm bells would start ringing in the Records Office, her face is haloed by her blonde hair, which is haloed yet again by the shining circular frame of the chronometer. When the alarm bells do sound, it is like the music of the spheres but slightly off-key; an indication of an imbalance in the perfection of its calculations.  

The written foreword in the film credits tells us precisely what is happening here:

This is the story of two worlds, the one we know and another which exists only in the mind. There is a pause before the caption rolls on to reveal:

of a young airman whose life and imagination have been violently shaped by war.

Any resemblance to any other world, known or unknown, is purely coincidental.

The scene we have just witnessed is, therefore, a product of Peter's imagination, showing what he anticipates finding in that Other World, which (by the presence there of his dead 'Sparks', Bob Trubshaw) is awaiting his imminent arrival.

When the ringing of the alarm bells fades, we are again on the long deserted coastline where we had seen Peter's body lying in the sea, and again the change to colour is subdued. The waves gently deposit Peter's body on the shore, but we cannot tell if he is alive or dead.

18 The screenplay indicates the normal balance that pertains in this realm: 'There is a music wherever there is a harmony, order or proportion; and thus far we may maintain the Music of the Spheres; for those well-ordered motions and regular paces, though they give no sound unto the ear, yet to the understanding they strike a note most full of harmony. Thus Sir Thomas Brown' ('1945 Screenplay', p. 1). Christie maintains that, since Sir Thomas Browne was a seventeenth-century physician and essayist whose writings 'combined Christian piety, vaulting imagination and classical erudition', this quotation from Religio Medici 'sanctions an interpretation of Reeves as a source of both medical and metaphysical wisdom, a mediator between two worlds ... like a Renaissance magus, he bestrides the outer and inner worlds' (Christie, AMOLAD, pp. 23-24).  
17 Own transcript. The pause after 'in the mind' leaves us time to wonder if it is a universal 'mind' or the collective mind of the audience. When the caption rolls we discover it is the mind of one specific individual.  
18 For Philip Horne, the transition 'fairly clearly indicates on one level that the Other World is a figment of Peter's imagination, directly embodying and dramatising his last conscious concerns: but on the less sceptical level of course it tells us that indeed we do wear wings in the Beyond' (Horne).
He opens his eyes and we assume that he believes he is dead and in the Other World. But do we believe that he is dead? In the screenplay Peter is described as 'just the body of a young pilot, baled-out over the sea and washed up drowned', and it emphasises that the 'effect of this sequence is that Earth should be made to look like Heaven. It must be shot very early in the morning to do that' ('1945 Screenplay', p. 14). It was, in fact, shot very early in the morning and the light is pearly soft, shining on a slaty sea. In the sandhills (described as 'quite classical'), Peter encounters an Arcadian scene: a naked goatherd playing on his pipes the same dirge that the airman played on his harmonica in the Other World. We may suspect that the wool is being pulled over our eyes but neither we, nor Peter, can be sure - until a plane from the local airfield zooms overhead. By sheer coincidence(!) Peter meets June (in the flesh) and within a few minutes the consummation of the plot of a conventional romantic movie has been achieved; boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy finds girl again. But this is a film that takes stock situations and gives them an extra twist. Here, it is that boy may lose girl (and his own life) again! When the colour fades this time it reveals a balance sheet with a discrepancy of one between the 'invoice' and 'delivered' columns.

In the Other World the perpetrator of this carelessness, Conductor 71, defends himself to the Chief Recorder (whose pride in the efficiency of her department is 'almost human' ('1945 Screenplay, p. 11) by saying, "I lost my head". When asked if the cause of death was natural, the reply is the same, "I lost my head". Since he is dressed in the style of a French aristocrat of the end of the eighteenth century and his head was lost during the French revolution, we have no difficulty in surmising that he was a victim of Madame Guillotine. (Perhaps because Peter is 'a student of European History, he thinks of a French aristocrat from the days of the guillotine for Conductor 71 precisely because of the pun on the expression 'I lost my head', which becomes a joke in the fantasy' (Horne)). He seems to have an inordinate regard for the frivolities of existence: elegant clothes, make up, coiffured hair, jewellery, and, we later discover, colour and beautiful women. At the end of this scene he seems more concerned with the rose in his buttonhole than in his mission, which is to find Peter Carter and persuade him to take his

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18 Powell has described this scene more than once: 'all those sequences with David Niven being washed ashore after the bomber had crashed, the little naked boy piping with the goats all around. It was a spoof, of course. I think people got that. But I wondered if I would get away with it at the time' (Badder, p. 12). 'The goatherd was one of my inspirations, like introducing a Coca-Cola machine into Heaven. The script called for a boy with some animals ... I made the boy a naked boy, playing on a reed pipe a little tune composed by Allan Gray, while his goats cropped the sparse marram grass on the sand dunes. It looked charming, like a scene from Theocritus (Life, pp. 542-543).

20 Horne contends that the piling up of of the unbelievabilities in this mysterious scene 'is one of the necessary conditions of Peter's (medical) case [which is] that he should have no persuasive account to give of how he came to survive his baling-out, that he should find it in some sense unbelievable that he is still alive' (Horne).
proper place on the balance sheet despite having fallen in love during the twenty hours that have elapsed since he should have died. The rose fills the screen and slowly blushing a deep and vibrant pink. Conductor 71 is on earth (and in heaven); his makeup, hair, elegant clothes and, especially his Maréchal Neil buttonhole, at last show to good effect.

Pressburger had insisted on Technicolor because there were to be two worlds: one, the familiar one we know, should be in colour and the other in black and white. Technicolor had been used throughout Lubitsch's Heaven Can Wait (TCF, 1943), in which the reception area of Hell is an elegant cross between an embassy and a grand hotel, and you are taken up (or down) by the lift boy to register in the appropriate place. But a story of two worlds had already been filmed in a combination of Technicolor and monochrome: Victor Fleming's The Wizard of Oz (MGM, 1939). Dorothy's 'real' world, however is in grey monochrome and her 'Other World', the land of Oz, in gloriously flamboyant Technicolor. It is a child's imaginary world, bright and colourful and peopled by good and bad characters who are, for the most part, replicas of those she has left behind at home, explicable as a dream experienced as she sleeps after a blow on the head. Both worlds, the real Kansas and the imaginary Oz, seem equally illusory, the one too uniformly grey and drab and the other too bright and colourful. In A Matter of Life and Death the colour configuration is reversed, so that the desirable place becomes home and the grey monochrome is reserved for the place we go to when we die, all passion spent, all emotional colour drained from us. The subdued colour before the switch to monochrome matches in reverse the subdued switch from grey monochromatic Kansas to the colourful world of Oz.

On the train from New York to Hollywood Powell and Pressburger had discovered that one of their fellow passengers was Fritz Lang, who was Powell's idol. And Pressburger had worked at the Ufa studios at the same time as Lang, and both had fled from Germany to France in 1933. While there, Lang had made Liliom (Fox Film Europa, 1933), a film based on Ferenc Molnar's stage play. His version of the story of a fairground barker who dies, goes to judgement in the next world and is offered the chance to return to Earth for one day, has bittersweet charm. Molnar's vision of the Other Place as a place of purifying redemption is kept by Lang, but is made more mordantly critical by its presentation as a realm that reflects the

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21 In Pressburger's pencil draft, the scene begins in colour and stays coloured until the WAAF uniformed attendant removes the 'sight veil' from Bob's eyes. She explains that there are no changes in that world, either physical (leaves turning from green to brown) or emotional (blushing), which means that we bring both music and colour with us to the Other World, for a time ('Pencil Draft').

22 Powell, asked if The Wizard of Oz provided the source for A Matter of Life and Death, said that Heaven in monochrome and the earth in colour was Pressburger's idea, but 'Fleming was a great technician and I am, too, a great technician', and the Wizard of Oz would have influenced his interpretation (G-Y, 1973, p. 18).
bureaucratic muddle and bluster ("Let it be said once and for all that the administration is never at fault") that exists on earth. The same bearded official from the police station appears (still bumbling and blustering) in Heaven, but with the addition of a ridiculously small pair of cherubic wings. A pair of scales are used to demonstrate Liliom's progress in making himself fit for redemption. For every mistake he makes an energetic Vulcan look-alike heaves rocks onto the side of the scales that will doom Liliom to hell, but, just as June's tear is the evidence that sways the court in A Matter of Life and Death, it is the tears of Liliom's long-suffering and selflessly loving wife that, literally, tip the scales in Liliom's favour. That idea, together with the notion of a bureaucracy that never makes mistakes, may have influenced Pressburger. Powell mentions Liliom in his account of how the story of AMOLAD was planned, and links it to Pressburger's way of writing:

>This was basic Hungarian dramatists' thinking. They like to treat serious themes lightly. They like to keep tragedy in reserve as the hidden weapon of comedy. They like to think that it is they who control the audience, not the actors. I thought of Liliom (a play), and of how beautifully life and death were blended in that love story' (Life, p. 458).

Powell's emphasis on Molnar's play of Liliom (both here and in $ Million, p. 282), may indicate that he had not seen Lang's film, or had seen it and judged it unworthy of the director he idolised, or considered the play was closer to his own vision than the film. Dann Schon Lieber Lebertran ('I'd Rather Have Cod Liver Oil') (1931) was the first film Ophuls directed. It was made at Ufa, with Pressburger and Erich Kästner collaborating on the story and script. Two children pray for the roles of parent and child to be reversed, and St. Peter answers their prayer. Heaven is depicted as operating on a mechanical clockwork basis, and it is a child's view of heaven, where even St. Peter can make mistakes (Emeric, pp. 76-77). So AMOLAD was not the first film that Pressburger had scripted about the relationship between this world and another.

Powell credited Jack Cardiff with the idea of using Technicolor stock throughout the film and printing it without the dyes for the black and white sequences, 'the only way you can get the effect you want: colour fading from the rose and the colour flooding back into it without cutting away' (Life, p. 498). The effect of this process was to make the scenes in heaven appear suitably pearly. Conductor 71 leaves the world of pearly monochrome and steps into a mass of brightly coloured foliage (much as Dorothy does when she is swept out of dull Kansas into the world of Oz). As he strolls with suitably controlled intoxication through brilliantly hued

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23 Liliom (1933), from the English translation held at the BFI.
24 Max Ophuls, who was preparing On a Volé un Homme (Fox Film Europa, 1933) while Lang was shooting Liliom (both for Erich Pommer), said that Pommer had made a mistake, since 'Lang would certainly have made a remarkable thriller, while I probably would have turned out a good romantic comedy' (Thomas Elsaesser, "The German émigrés in Paris during the 1930s," Sight and Sound, 53 (4), Autumn 1984, p. 281).
rhododendrons, he says "One is starved for Technicolor up there". He is stating a very personal cause for regret but we, the audience, laugh because our conventional anticipation of a neutral word like 'colour' has been surpassed. Powell was triumphant; he had taken a risk and the audience at the première had responded as he had not dared to hope they would. They had shown only puzzled interest in the first scenes in monochrome and hadn't understood that the film was meant to be a joke on the theme of life and death. I believe that, up to this point, most people who see the film (without any notion of the story) would probably be just as puzzled. Powell, in his autobiography, explained why he made the change.

Now in the original script, this joke had been suggested by Emeric, but in conventional terms, i.e. "One is starved for colour up there." When we came to shoot the scene, I didn't find the joke funny or pointed enough. I was also interested in finding out whether you can make an escapist joke like that within conventions of a naturalistic super-film in colour. So I deliberately changed the line from the script, changing "colour" into "Technicolor." To my delight, the whole audience... gave a roar of laughter right on the joke, which is a professional one, and then without the slightest difficulty, or noticeable transition, they went right back to the film and went on following it in the normal way of involvement. ... After that, I felt I could do anything and get away with it. Film was what I had always thought it was - wonderful fantasies superimposed upon life. For me from then on, there was no more realism in films, only surrealism (Life, pp. 591-592).

He was delighted when the audience laughed but it is an 'inside joke', one appreciated most by those professionals who had been deprived of Technicolor for some time and had to content themselves with black and white film stock. The joke also draws the audience's attention to the fact that this film is an artifact made for their enjoyment, yet again distancing us from the characters and their fate. Once the film is firmly identified as a comedy, a 'stratospheric joke', we are almost certainly assured of a happy ending and can relax and enjoy the path by which the film achieves it. I would suggest that much of the disquiet and dislocation experienced by spectators of the film centres on this confusion over its genre.

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It was almost certainly Powell who was responsible for the addition of one of Shakespeare's comedies to the film. In the picture gallery, a group of young American air force personnel, male and female, are preparing for a performance of A Midsummer Night's Dream. Some are painting a promotional poster, some rehearsing, one standing on a table

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25 It is 'colour', not 'Technicolor', in both the 1945 Screenplay, p. 20, and Warman's novelisation, p. 29.
26 In the Pencil Draft, June and Peter are alone in the Loggia. In the screenplay, they are in the Picture Gallery with 'a bunch of American boys and girls rehearsing a play or a concert' ('1945 Screenplay', p. 30). In the novelisation (which in most other respects follows the screenplay pretty faithfully), it is 'a further rehearsal of Shakespeare. Frank entered 'just in time to take a cue from one of the girls. He tripped lightly into the scene, with feminine grace, and contributed: "O wall, full often hast thou heard my moans".' (Warman, p. 42).
being fitted for her costume as Hippolyta. The scene is the rehearsal of the Mechanicals' production of their own version of the tragedy of ‘Pyramus and Thisby’, which makes it a rehearsal of a play, within a rehearsal of a play, within a film; we are multiple-level spectators.

And, as Ellis has noted, Bottom's lines about how 'Wall' is to be represented, take 'realist conventions to their logical and absurd conclusion' (Ellis, p. 100). Powell is mocking the realist credo of using only 'real' people and locations to represent 'reality', which does not allow spectators to use their own imagination. The choice of A Midsummer Night's Dream was extraordinarily apt, and not only for its playful mockery of representational modes.

‘Pyramus and Thisby’ is a tragedy but, as presented to us by the Mechanicals, it becomes a farce. A Midsummer Night's Dream is a romantic comedy that skirts the edge of tragedy and resolves problems by the passage of time and supernatural intervention. There are two worlds, the normal rational world of work and responsibilities and the 'green' world of pastoral lovers, seasonal rituals and pagan deities. It celebrates the triumph of life over the wasteland in the revival of the year, and allows the old law, which condemned a daughter to obey her father or face death, to be overruled by a new law that offers individual freedom of choice. But the two worlds are not hermetically sealed; Athenians invade the green world and supernatural beings invade the Athenian palace. Time is measured by the clock in the normal world but there are no clocks in the forest, where time is durative and seasonal. Both worlds seem real when viewed independently of each other, but unreal seen by the light of the other. Love is represented as irrational and nonsensical in both worlds, and lovers are equated with poets and madmen:

Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends.
The lunatic, the lover, and the poet,
Are of imagination all compact. Act V, Sc. 1, lines 4-8.

And poets are given a special perceptive ability:

The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them into shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name. Act V, Sc. 1, lines 12-17.28

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27 As she is being fitted for her costume, she looks casually at one of the portraits hanging in the picture gallery. She sees a woman, richly dressed in a sixteenth-century costume, stiffly posed for the painter, with an eye that speaks of regal disdain; the woman in the portrait appears to be examining this young American girl, who (dressed in a fluid gown suitable for an ancient Greek huntress/queen) is chewing gum with an equal quality of disdain. Both have red hair. Colour unites the past and the present in a mutual gaze of curiosity.

A Matter of Life and Death is a romantic comedy that treats a potentially tragic theme lightly. There are two worlds, and the principal characters have all come from cities to this idyllic pastoral location of Lee Wood: Peter from London and the business of killing people in Europe from his bomber; June from the city of Boston; Dr. Reeves from London because, according to June, he 'likes living in a village' ('1945 Screenplay', p. 28). Peter is both a poet and a lover and is in danger of becoming a madman. The visitors from the Other World (which is nothing if not logical, rational and bureaucratic) could be seen to have intervened to save the life of the man who, by wedding June (surely the choice of name was not accidental), will ensure the regeneration of the wasteland the war had created. June is life and he loves her. Peter, with his mind's eye, does 'glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven', and his imagination does create another, unknown world. Because our point of view is, for the most part, strongly aligned with Peter's, both worlds seem real when viewed independently of each other, but we know that both are illusions. There is, however, a reversal of some of the elements of this Shakespearian comedy. In A Matter of Life and Death, the 'green world' is the real world and the 'rational world' is the fantasy world of supernatural beings who resolve the lovers' problems by the passage of time and a judicious relaxing of the law of the universe. This means that the Technicolor world of Lee Wood in the county of Somerset, is the 'world turned upside down' of Shakespearian comedy, the green world of dream and fantasy.

The Mechanicals of A Midsummer Night's Dream are common working men whose production of the tragedy of 'Pyramus and Thisby' for the aristocrats of the Athenian court is 'tragic mirth' that unites actors and their audience in a willingness to please and be pleased. The 'Mechanicals' who provide us with comic by-play in the film's rehearsal of A Midsummer Night's Dream are played by young Americans. Bottom's lines, "Some man or other must present Wall. And let him have some plaster, or some loam, or some rough-cast about him to signify wall; and let him hold his fingers thus, and through that cranny shall Pyramus and Thisby whisper", are delivered three times: first flatly by an American private; then with feeling and action by the play's director (the local vicar). They are finally delivered again by the private, who obviously relishes the opportunity, 'to use the business to hit his officer several times. Hence, not only representation involving pretence, conventions of depiction, but also the

29 A Midsummer Night's Dream has, according to Christie, 'undeniable elements of the kind of masque that would have been devised in the seventeenth century to celebrate weddings', and the hall in which this scene takes place, 'recalls the aristocratic setting for much Elizabethan and Jacobean courtly entertainment' (Christie, AMOLAD, p. 17).
30 The vicar is played by Robert Atkins. John Gielgud had seen 'a number of simple but effective Shakespeare productions at the Vic, under Robert Atkins (a boozy old survivor of Forbes-Robertson and Beerbohm Tree), who managed a shabby, ill-paid company with extraordinary skill and enterprise' (John Gielgud, with Gavin Miller, Shakespeare - Hit or Miss. London: Sidgewick and Jackson, 1991, pp. 33-34).
acting-out of fantasies, at least on the part of the performers' (Ellis, p.100). It also echoes the scene in the Aircrew reception area of the Other World, where an American airman who expects to be assigned officer's quarters is told, "We're all the same here, captain", to the delight of his companions from the lower ranks.

The other most obvious sequence which uses multiple levels of reflexivity is the trial in the High Court of the Other World. We are an audience, watching a vast audience, which is watching and listening to a debate between opponents (who are themselves only representatives of parties in dispute), before an audience of a judge and jury. They must be persuaded, the trial's audience must be persuaded and, most importantly, we, the audience in the cinema, must be persuaded of the rightness of the defendant's case.

An argument is presented between the proponents of each discursive mode: Reeves for the love-story, Farlan for the documentary of the Law and Order of the Other World. The argument has no arbiter deciding which point has been won or lost: it is addressed to the audience, for their arbitration (Ellis, p. 102).

Another, more self-conscious, example of playing with forms of representation is provided by the scene in Dr. Reeves' camera obscura. It is a tribute to one of the earliest versions of cinema, all done with mirrors and prisms, the present paying homage to the past. We see, through the rectangular frame which encloses the scene, a circle of light and shade that represents to Dr. Reeves and June (and us) the village that encircles the camera obscura. We, too, can 'see it all clearly and at once as in a poet's eye', but from our vantage point the village of Lee Wood is upside-down, a topsy-turvy world. There was no camera obscura in Pressburger's pencil draft. Powell said that Pressburger would have written the scene with Livesey looking down at a village street.

I would seize on this, introduce the camera obscura idea as a wonderful trick to get everyone interested and excited - the cameraman, the trick department and the designer - everybody. It's also a very interesting thing to do, photographing the street as though it were a camera obscura shot and it also makes Livesey seem more like God. Anyone can do a man looking out of the window down a street, but a man who had under his control a camera obscura table with two spaniels sitting on it is already a wizard. And they all leapt into it with great enthusiasm.

Dr Reeves, whether wizard, God, or 'benign Prospero' (Arrows, p. 77), surveys his kingdom from above, a willing exile who prefers the undisputed possession of this small island of a

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53 Said by Dr. Reeves to June, the sight of whom in his camera obscura inspires the good doctor to quote Percy Bysshe Shelley's, "She walks in beauty like the night", thereby establishing his knowledge of poetry, while undercutting any hint of pomposity by adding, "Only she's cycling and the sun's shining".

52 G-Y, 1973, p. 19. John Russell Taylor elaborates on this use of the camera obscura: "At once it harks forward to Peeping Tom, a film about scopophilia, "the morbid urge to gaze", and back to the comment of Clive Candy in Colonel Blimp when the nurse he fancies appears and disappears: "It's like the Indian rope trick: first you want to see it, and then you see it." If the creator is in some way essentially devilish, in a more general sense his activities are benign" ("Myths," p. 229).
village in the English countryside to the prestige he might enjoy in the metropolis.

The doctor's first motor-bike ride to the American Army Base fulfils a number of functions: it allows us to see and appreciate the countryside through which he rides; establishes a credible reason for him to appear in black leather gear in the hospital scenes; shows the admiration and respect he inspires in the American officers he races against; and, most importantly, prepares us for his pride in his dare-devil skill and speed so that his fatal accident does not come as a complete surprise. When he sets out on that last ride it is again a race, but this time only against time. It is a stormy night and as he rides the rain is lashed onto his motorbike goggles. The screenplay indicates a unique view of this journey: 'Closer and closer we move to the driver until his eyes can be seen through the blurred glasses. In the glass we can see reflected the lamplit road flashing towards us' (1945 Screenplay, p. 55). We would see what he sees reflected back to us from the blurred glass as if we were perched on the handlebars. When he meets the ambulance on the bend outside the gates of Lee Wood house, he turns sharply to avoid it and crashes into the gates. He kills himself rather than risk hitting the ambulance, thereby saving Peter's life. He, in a way, has taken Peter's place on the balance sheet.

The film plays with ways of seeing by allowing us to perceive the action from different points of view. The most well-known of these subjective positions is as the anaesthetic is administered to Peter in the hospital, but we share his perception at an earlier point in the narrative. After Conductor 71 has disappeared from the scene among the rhododendrons in Lee Wood Park, Peter's vision is temporarily reduced to a narrow jagged slit with darkness on either side. We see this as through his eyes, preparing us for the more extended subjective shot in the operating theatre. As Peter is wheeled along the hospital corridor we are with him, looking up at the white ceiling, at June, at the top of the doorway into the operating theatre. We are lifted onto the operating table with Peter and look up at the nurses preparing us for the operation. The circular light above the operating table is very large and very bright and it is almost a relief when the mask is lowered onto our face and the eyelids begin to close, transforming the bright whiteness into a soft, luminous skin colour. One British reviewer commented that

the camera goes with him in the ambulance to the hospital, along a wooden corridor to the theatre, down the long journey of anaesthesia to what Flecker called "Ether's long bankless streams". Our eyes see only what the ill man's eyes see. It is, I suppose, hospital ceilings that the dying say goodbye to.

The reviewer for American Cinematographer examined the technical aspects of the subjective

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33 It may have been an impossible shot to achieve at the time, which could explain why it does not appear.
34 Helen Fletcher, "A Matter of Life and Death," Time and Tide, 9 November 1946, p. 1074.
camera work in more detail, and judged that in the operating room sequence, an angle is adopted which is unquestionably the ultimate in subjective approach.

After conventional establishing shots of the patient on the operating table, the camera takes up a vantage point presumably inside his cranium, and we find ourselves looking out through his eye (with the eyelids and lashes clearly framing the scene) as he stares up at the ceiling. As an anaesthetic is administered, he closes his eye, and the lids slowly come together, blotting out the scene in a dissolve to masses of red and blue specks on a gray field, symbolic of the sensations of a man losing consciousness.36

And it is a single eye that closes, whereas the screenplay states: 'We have the impression that we are behind Peter's closing eyelids: two arch-like curtains drop slowly before us. Both are the colour of flesh' (‘1945 Screenplay’, p. 58). The single closing eye, however, corresponds more closely with the camera's eye and with the mind's eye of a poet's imagination.

Earlier in the film we had been given a demonstration of the difference between the way the eye of the camera and a human eye operate. While Peter sleeps in the Doctor's study, June and the doctor are playing ping-pong (the game that so infuriated Powell when they were travelling to Canada on the 'Drunken Duchess' to set up 49th Parallel).36 It appears in Pressburger's pencil draft, and Powell saw that it would be 'a wonderful thing to stop in motion. It's done by a combination of stop-frame and posing by the actors with the ball suspended on an invisible thread'.37

The game of table-tennis is first shot with the camera panning wildly back and forth between the players, following the ball. The effect is shocking, disturbing as the pans are so fast. ... the next game is shot more placidly and conventionally in long shot: the viewer's eye rather than the camera follows the ball from side to side across the screen. ... the effect of a moving camera is radically different from the effect of an eye moving across an image. (Ellis, pp. 100-101).

Paradoxically, for a film so concerned with the visual, Peter and June fall in love without seeing each other; love at first sound wave rather than at first sight. And Conductor 71 begins the whole conflict over the possession of Peter's soul by an oversight; he missed him because he could not see him in the fog. The film proposes different modes of perception and the imagination is given priority. It is, after all, the world as seen through the eyes of two men with imagination: Emeric Pressburger and Michael Powell. And they determined that the 'Other World is seen only through the imagination of our Pilot, its limits are the limits of his imagination and of his knowledge and of his sense of awe and his sense of humour' (‘1945 Screenplay’, p. 1).

37 Badder, p. 12. They intended was to re-project it in back-projection, but Powell wanted David Niven to walk round June and Reeves. 'Livesey said, "I can stay absolutely still - even with a funny expression on my face - if Kim (Hunter) will." ... that was how we got it' (ibid., p. 12). In the screenplay the ping-pong ball as 'almost stationary in the air, but it is travelling so fast that its image is slightly blurred' (‘1945 Screenplay’, p. 41).
The film is based on our perception of two separate worlds of illusion presented to us as equally real, one in colour and one in monochrome. At that time colour film was associated predominantly with works of fiction: period dramas, romantic comedies, fantasies and musicals. Black and white film was associated with documentaries, social realist dramas, war films and, of course, newsreels. In A Matter of Life and Death the real world, the one we are familiar with, is presented to us in colour and the unreal world of dream or hallucination is in monochrome. Which, then is the real world, since neither is indicated as completely subordinate to the other? The film produces two realities,

... confronting the audience throughout with the discursive reality of the 'real' that they are 'witnessing'. What the film does, then, is to question the very basis of the analysis of films in terms of 'content' that is, the effect of reality which is usually produced silently through the operation of one discursive form with one position of intelligibility and truth (Ellis, p. 103).

The sequences on the beach at the beginning and in the hospital at the end of the film are deliberately made to look as close to the Other World of monochrome as possible by keeping the colour low-key, and the screenplay emphasises that the operating theatre should be black and white in effect: 'Even the lights are almost pure white. We should feel it is the nearest thing on Earth to the Other World' ('1945 Screenplay', p. 47).

While Powell and Pressburger were in Hollywood, Hitchcock had shown Powell some versions of the nightmare dream sequences which Salvador Dali had created for Spellbound (1945), in which nightmares are analysed as subconscious clues to the causes of the leading man's amnesia (Life, p. 522). It is a film about the workings of the mind, the importance of the subconscious and the importance of memory. A Matter of Life and Death also deals with the mind, the subconscious, and memory. Dali was both a Surrealist painter and, with Luis Buñuel (another of Powell's idols), a Surrealist film-maker. Surrealism explored and used the unconscious, the marvellous, dreams, madness, hallucinatory states, everything that was the other side of the logical and rational functions of the mind. André Breton, one of the foremost exponents of Surrealism, believed in 'the future resolution of these two states, in appearance so contradictory, which are dream and reality in a kind of absolute reality, surreality'. Also, that there is a certain point of the mind at which life and death, the real and the imaginary, the past and the future, the communicable and the incommunicable, the heights and the depths, cease

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to be perceived contradictorily.® The Surrealists claimed that humour was a recognisable manifestation of surreality and that the true revolution was the victory of desire.

According to Powell, it was Pressburger who had the idea of making a 'fantasy with supernatural beings' which would, in a way, be both period and modern: a 'kind of surrealism' (Life, p. 457). Powell claimed that all films are surrealist, but A Matter of Life and Death would appear to provide ample evidence of Surrealist movement credentials: humour; the use of dream and hallucinatory states; the creation of apparently contradictory states which are melded together; the encompassing of life and death, the real and the imaginary, the past and the future, the communicable and the incommunicable, the heights and the depths, so that they do eventually cease to be perceived as contradictions; and the victory of desire. June's tear is the sign of her active desire that influences the jury; her willingness to sacrifice her life to save Peter's, and his agony at the prospect of losing her, proves to them that their love for each other is deep and enduring. The last words spoken by Peter Carter, "We won", and June's reply, "I know, darling", indicate the victory of desire.

I do not believe, however, that either Powell or Pressburger were committed to the Surrealist movement. Even Humphrey Jennings, who had produced surrealist paintings and been instrumental in arranging the 1937 Surrealist Exhibition in London (attended by Breton, Paul Elouard and Salvador Dali), was not exclusively committed to Surrealism. Although many of his films used the Surrealist principle of the unexpected juxtaposition of images and sound, his method of assemblage was

documentarist-baroque in which the rhetorical modes of Pageants, Triumphs and Masques could be remobilised under the ideological aegis of the Churchillian renaissance. The poets had, he wrote, once more learned to be patriotic. So had film-makers, as the presence of the Pageant or Triumph in contemporary films by Powell and Pressburger bears witness.®

And, like Powell and Pressburger, his keenest awarenesses were of England, which for him were 'the England of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton, Gray; of Gainsborough, Cotman, Turner; of Nelson; of Ely and Winchester Cathedrals; the Industrial Revolution, the shipyards of the Tyne and the mills of Lancashire, the Essex marshes and the Suffolk wolds' With the declaration of war and the bombing of cities, he felt that 'his England was menaced - all that he knew and loved was in danger'. At the 1947 International Surrealist Exhibition in Paris, Jennings was denounced for having received the Order of the British Empire, and the

English Surrealists declared that Surrealism had not taken root in England, for the reason that irrationality has always been an element of English culture; that English thought and even English daily life have never been ruled by a “logic of a coercive nature”; that in English education the place which in France is reserved for Corneille and Racine is taken by the Elizabethan dramatists and the romantic poets; that “nonsense” and fairy tales are the staples of English children’s reading [and that] whereas in France the enemy is the sharply defined, monolithic Roman Catholic Church, in Protestant England, the enemy attacks man from within himself and is, in itself, divided and superficially liberal.42

Jennings, among others, ‘saw surrealism merely as a special example of something else which interested them more’, which made it seem ‘little more than an eccentric variation of what had always been available in English romanticism’ (ibid., p. 259).

In AMOLAD, as in IKWIG, A Canterbury Tale and, to some extent, Blimp, it is more the influence of Neo-Romanticism that can be seen or sensed. Pressburger was writing screenplays that bridged the past with the present, and AMOLAD was just more surrealistic. Neo-Romanticism was influenced by Surrealism, because ‘Cubism and Surrealism had too much to offer modern artists for them to be ignored, and the giant Picasso influenced every one of the Neo-Romantics, for better or worse’ (Ironsie, p. 23). But, like other artists of the period, Surrealism was merely something Powell and Pressburger used when it suited them.

Every film, no matter how mundane, is a collective work, but, for some, the collective production of films is a form of artistic creativity. The contribution of designers, composers, dancers and cameramen grew, and with A Matter of Life and Death and afterwards, ‘The Archers’ increasingly became a collective name for a group of collaborators. Powell and Pressburger operated The Archers like a theatre company, gathering together the best of talents and actively encouraging them to experiment, and to contribute to the finished product. Production meetings were held long before filming began, to discuss possibilities and exchange ideas. Emeric and Michael would explain what they wanted, but as often as not their collaborators would improve upon it (Emeric, p.254).

Junge acknowledged that the creative atmosphere brought out the best in him.

I had the pleasure and the privilege to work on such films as A Matter of Life and Death and Black Narcissus, where I was able to work as freely and imaginatively as ever, and to feel that I was helping to contribute creatively to the artistic results achieved .... Such opportunities are all too rare (Sureiwic, p.15).

The Other World exists only within the mind of Peter Carter, ‘who was both a poet and an airman. Because he was a poet, everything is coloured by his imagination, his knowledge and his sense of humour’ (Huntley, p. 105). According to Marius Goring, Junge’s designs for the film would have preceded the actual writing of the script.

The whole concept of Matter of Life and Death started to be formed with the making and building of the models and the making of the basic design of how one could show the

juxtaposition of Heaven and Earth, with this staircase going between the two and how the staircase would be contrived. By the time that this was being constructed the writing of the script took place and the actors came into it. This is where the full genius of those two men came out for at no time were they the only creators - everybody participated in it.43

The screenplay describes the High Court sequences as giving the impression that there is 'no limit to its size or to the number of great curving tiers where the audience sits. No human eye can see the end of it: in countless numbers the audience stretches upward and away in a vast, sunlit semi-circle'.44 And that is how they appear in the film. Herb Lightman felt that Junge's Other World sets had

a definite sweep, a modern, clean-cut elegance that seems quite appropriate to a repository for the sky-soaring souls of airmen. The settings have a vastness that seems to melt into space at the edges, so that one can readily imagine an ethereal domain beyond the heavier atmosphere of the Universe (Lightman, p. 237).

But Powell was not happy with Junge's designs for the Other World. "When I first saw Studio No. 4 at Denham filled to overflowing with Alfred's giant rocks and vast stadium full of costumed people, my heart failed me. I thought that I would never be able to get all this airborne'. There is a monolithic quality to some of the designs, particularly evidenced in the colossal statues that flank the giant escalator. But the dead-white, frozen representations of famous men are appropriate to the situation of a man who is desperate to find a defence counsel for his trial and is searching through his mind and memory. They are all, eventually, dismissed as unsuitable because they are too much men of their time and their time has passed. Powell was happier with Junge's creation of the universe: 'For the stunning scenes that opened the film, Alfred had designed and painted his own galaxies, and other film makers were borrowing them for thirty years until Stanley Kubrick and George Lucas outdid us all'. It is beautiful and, thanks to the help of Arthur C. Clarke, seemingly authentic (Life, pp. 628-629, 591).

Allan Gray's music for the film had to cover a spectrum from the ethereal to the romantic. 'Nobody who has seen A Matter of Life and Death,' said Powell, 'will forget the musical theme of the moving stairway, with its remorseless beat as it mounted heavenwards. That single theme on the piano made the stairway sequences the most exciting scenes in the film' (Life, p. 533). Unlike the dirge on the harmonica, which appears first in the Other World before being reprised on a reed pipe on earth, this 'hauntingly simple, slightly atonal piano theme which accompanies the staircase to heaven' (Emeric, p. 256) makes its first appearance in the scene in the picture gallery while Peter is playing chess. We hear it and see a pair of hands picking out the notes on the piano in the gallery (without any indication of who those hands belong to), so

43 Marius Goring, 'Lecture at Arundel Festival', 1 September 1984, transcript in 'Appendix 1', p. 9.
44 '1945 Screenplay', p. 65. 'This colossal set that seemed to stretch to infinity was in fact a hundred yards long' (Cardiff, p. 85).
that it exists prior to its appearance in the Other World. When it recurs, its repeated travelling motif, a *perpetuum mobile*, is the perfect musical accompaniment to the remorseless and steady upward movement of the stairway that is carrying a distracted Peter to the place he is trying to avoid: the final resting place.

Jack Cardiff had worked on many films as a cameraman and as a technician trained to use Technicolor, but *A Matter of Life and Death* was his first feature film as chief lighting cameraman, responsible for the cinematography. For him, Powell was a cameraman's dream because 'he nearly always accepted any ideas I put forward with enthusiastic support. Working with him I was able to use colour ideas I hadn't been able to use before' (Cardiff, p. 85). His use of Technicolor was imaginative, and he handled the transitions from colour to monochrome with flawless skill. His most testing task, however, was something very small in scale: a tear on a rose.

Hundreds of various liquids - even real tears - were tested, but none would produce a clear, colorless globule on the rose in the developed Technicolor film. After turning the set into a virtual chemistry laboratory, cameraman Jack Cardiff finally discovered the magic potion. The formula: equal parts of glycerine, mineral oil and gelatin.45

Two objects transgress the boundary between this world and the next: June's tear and Frank Reeves' chess book. The book is returned (with the same rasping sound from the canvas holdall that accompanied the Conductor's first appearance on earth, among the rhododendrons) but the tear, we assume, remains in 'heaven', its object having been achieved: the winning of the right to life and love. The chess book may symbolise Peter's intellectual capacity, with its return indicating that he will lose none of that capacity through his illness, or it could remind us of the medieval tradition of Death playing chess to win a human life, as in Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* (Svensk Filmindustri, 1957). There is, though, another possible reason for using chess as a symbol.

Pressburger discovered from his research in the British Museum that the first American to be killed by a British bullet in the American War of Independence was a schoolteacher named Abraham Farlan (*Life*, p. 459). The reason he chose a character from that war to be Counsel for the Prosecution at Peter's trial may have hinged on the fact that, in May 1941, Ronald Colman had offered Powell and Pressburger the rights to *The White Cliffs*, a narrative poem written by an American short story writer, Alice Duer Miller.46 Colman had bought the rights after it had proved popular on both sides of the Atlantic and a serialisation (read by Lynn Fontanne) had

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46 'Ronald Colman cabled we have the rights of the "White Cliffs". Mick very excited, rang Kenneth Clark at once. He is going to meet him tomorrow. Lunch at Walbrook's tom.' and 'Mick - went to see Kenneth Clark about 'White Cliffs'. He got a cable from Colman giving us the rights' ('1941 Diary', 7 and 8 May).
been broadcast on American radio. Clarence Brown bought it and directed it, with a screenplay provided by Duer Miller herself. The White Cliffs of Dover (MGM, 1944), premiéred in July 1944 and came to London that August. The poem 'was not an uncritical paean of praise for either nation. Rather by indicating the common roots of liberty, it appealed for understanding of the peculiarities and differences of the two nations'. The film kept the poem's basic narrative thrust, but extended the story line to include the Second World War (with the son doing his duty by joining the RAF) and made the narrator's father, a stiff, incalcitrant and anglophobic New Englander named Hiram P. Dunn, the central character in order that he could be persuaded to see the virtues of the nation he had always denigrated and apostrophised (ibid. pp. 10, 12, 18):

But whenever I go up Boston-way,  
I drive through Concord - that neck of the wood, 
Where once the embattled farmers stood, 
And I think of Revere, and the Old North Steeple, 
And I say, by heck, we're the only people 
Who licked them not only once, but twice. ^46

The argument, originally between father and daughter, is extended by an ongoing debate between Hiram and a retired English Colonel, and the symbol of the conflict between Britain and America becomes a chess set inscribed To Mrs. Dolly Madison, Christmas, 1811, which the retired English Colonel's grandfather had 'liberated' from the White House when the British had taken and burnt Washington in 1812. The chess set is given back when American soldiers come to Britain to fight as her allies in WW2 (Short, "White Cliffs," p. 18).

In the trial scene in A Matter of Life and Death, the right to life of an Englishman, who happens to be a squadron leader in the RAF, is debated by a sardonic and intolerant New Englander and a good natured and cultured Englishman. In the screenplay, the Judge at the trial allows the court to see each counsel as they see each other. Abraham Farlan 'looks like a caricature of the popular idea in England of the most objectionable kind of American. He is so bad he is laughable; and yet he is recognisable as American'. Frank Reeves 'looks even worse. He looks like a caricature of the popular idea in America of the most objectionable kind of Englishman. He is so bad he is laughable; and yet he is unmistakably an Englishman'. When the Judge instructs them to look at each other without prejudice, both are embarrassed by the reality: Farlan sees that 'the sour, cold, aristocratic Englishman falls off in chunks and reveals the Doctor as his normal, cheerful, civilised self', and the Doctor, who has not yet looked visibly at Farlan at all, 'turns reluctantly and gives Farlan a concentrated stare of cordial

dislike', only to see that he emerges as an angular, likable New Englander, 'his eyes keen and narrow, his voice strenuous, his hair thick and wild, his stance independent, his expression thoughtful, his complexion tanned by the East winds that blow ceaselessly over Boston Common' ('1945 Screenplay', pp. 69-71). They have, in the clear light of the Other World, abandoned the stereotypical generality for the individual reality. In the film this revelation is cut, but the debate still hinges on prejudice, and it is Farlan's prejudice that, like Hiram's in *The White Cliffs*, has to be addressed. Here, too, the shortcomings of both nations are displayed and the stress is on their shared ideal: the freedom of the individual provided by the democratic system. Reeves declares of England, "Where else in the world have the rights of the individual been held so high?" only to be told "In America, sir, where these rights are held to be inalienable". He counters with, "I doubt if you have more practical freedom in America than in England. An Englishman thinks as he likes in religion and politics".

Farlan's case depends on upholding national divisions; Reeves' case, on removing them. The jury selected by Farlan consists of six individuals whose nationalities (French, Boer, Russian, Chinese, Indian and Irish) would, he declares, automatically prejudice them against any Englishman because of old conflicts and grudges. When Reeves asks for a new jury of American citizens, the original nationally diverse members merely become updated. America has absorbed them while leaving their national characteristics still identifiable, demonstrating that it is a country which celebrates diversity while containing that diversity within one new national entity. This jury, Reeves hopes, will not be interested in old grudges against the British Empire and will view the love between an Englishman and an American girl as something credible. And when Farlan insists that national differences are vitally important to his case because "our ancestors had a deal to do with the shaping of us", Reeves agrees and ask where Farlan's grandfather had been born, "Could it have been in England?" He then quotes George Washington and hammers home the point that he, too, had been born an Englishman. Farlan seeks to show the stiflingly slow nature of the English by giving the court the benefit of a cricket commentary from Lords as the "voice of England, 1945." It is both laughable and credible, but Reeves reminds him of other voices that have represented England in the past: "John Donne, Dryden, Pope, Wordsworth and Coleridge, Shelley and Keats, Tennyson, Bridges". Farlan adds Milton and Shakespeare, and concedes the point that much of their cultural heritage is mutual.

Effective propaganda takes unpalatable truths and turns them to advantage. There were those critics who saw only the unpalatable truths and not the use to which they were being put, the most outspoken of them on the extreme left or right of the political spectrum. On the 'right'
were the Robsons, who reacted with hurt pride to the 'Britain-bashing' choice of jurors and the denigration of British institutions - like cricket (*My Cinema*, p. 67). They were Euro-sceptical, with an inbuilt distrust of everything that emanated from that quarter, and this film had not only a Hungarian script writer, but also a Polish composer and a German Art Director (they keep a special brand of vituperation for the architectural design of the Other World). They claim that the Americans are a convenient sub-conscious substitute for the *Herrenvolk*, and conclude that these British film-makers will continue to support that fascist state as junior partners (*ibid* pp. 68, 75). The Robsons were not alone in reacting negatively to 'misrepresentation' of the British.

Messrs. Powell and Pressburger again appeal to anti-British prejudices, particularly in America, by putting the Englishman on trial for his life, for the crime of being an Englishman and nothing else, and offering no defence at all. ... May [the average Briton] not remark, in a small mild voice, that Britons had freed slaves generations before millions of Americans fought to keep them chained? ... And finally, may he not smile faintly at the notion of being tried by an American jury which includes a negro still waiting for the vote promised 170 years ago last July 4?"^45

In Moscow, the cultural critic of *Kultura i Zhizn* (known only by the initials B.S.) contended that the court scene illuminates the reasons why the film was made. He, like the Robsons, leaps onto the cricket bandwagon, but finds its portrayal of the English character quite accurate. He is equally scornful of the American broadcast, describing the voice of contemporary America as 'strident, ribald, groaning, grunting and quacking sounds of jazz to the accompaniment of doleful, nasal singing'. But the Soviet writer comes to a similar conclusion with regard to Britain's position in her relationship with America, by claiming that Powell and Pressburger insistently recommend that 'Britain should harness herself to the end of the wheel of American imperialism and should serve it with loyalty and truth. ... Britain in this joint policy plays the unattractive role of second violin in American atom-dollar politics."^50 Whether as 'junior partner' or as 'second violin', this was an accurate portrait of Britain's dependence on the USA at the end of the Second World War; the Robsons and 'B.S.' were merely expressing a fairly obvious truth. And the reference to 'atom-dollar politics' reminds us that the USA had the trump military card at the time, as the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki had demonstrated.

Gough-Yates describes the Other World of *A Matter of Life and Death* as a grey and gloomy place, and the people who inhabit it as unsmiling, afraid of authority, regimented and bored, like the inhabitants of *Metropolis*. There is a delightful shot where the camera lifts high to reveal the record office, a kind of enormous computer system with details of everyone on earth and towering above it is a clock face like that which dominates the subterranean factory in which people slave in Lang's masterpiece.

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It is a comparison that I believe to be too harsh; several inhabitants, even those administering
the system, do smile, and I cannot recall a sense of boredom, more a sense of being at ease.
But Powell agreed that he had 'made earth look like heaven and heaven look like a particularly
dull earth - like Metropolis as you say', but added a revealing comment on how he and
Pressburger had compromised on the representation of this first scene in the Other World.

Emeric softened this treatment by putting in the line for Dickie Attenborough saying 'It's
heaven isn't it?' and the girl, Kathleen Byron saying 'for many people on earth, it would be
heaven to be a clerk'. Now, that's typical Emeric. I couldn't care less about such a remark.
I'm more brutal (G-Y, 1973, pp. 8, 17).

In Pressburger's pencil draft of 'A Matter of Life and Death', the Angel's response to Bob
Marley's comment: 'Well, if somebody would have told me that people are toiling here, just
like on earth', is: 'Oh, everybody who gets here, is allowed the fulfilment of his wishes. And
how many thousands on earth wished they could be clerks'. There is little substantial difference
between what Pressburger had originally planned and what was said in the finished film, with
the exception of Richard Attenborough's remark, "It's heaven, isn't it?" Perhaps Powell has
exaggerated the extent of his brutality. In his autobiography he reveals that the inclusion of the
references to clerks was a joke that Pressburger had inserted into the screenplay because he
knew how much Powell had hated the time he had spent as a clerk: 'A boy who aims to
emulate D.W. Griffith has not got the qualities that make a good clerk' (Life, p. 101).

Raymond Durgnat, who found the Robson's choleric views interesting but fatally flawed, 81
took their description of the Other World in A Matter of Life and Death as Fascist as a starting
point for his own analysis of it as being towards the other end of the political spectrum.

But surely this heavenly city isn't bestial enough for Nazism. It isn't even malicious, merely
coldly efficient. ... This Heaven is a futurist Utopia. It's a planned society. It's machine-like
(one mounts to it on an inexorable escalator). This stairway is flanked by the imposing, but
dead-white, statues of such great idealists as Plato (whose Utopia is, of course, thoroughly
totalitarian). As Tories claim planning drains colour from life, so, here, the Technicolor of
earth pales to celestial monochrome. Heaven's values are those of the collectivity (as
opposed to the selfless individualism of romantic love). Planned, bureaucratic, idealistic,
totalitarian, colourless, theoretic - all these are the words Tories like to use of Socialism
(Mirror, p. 30).

Nicholas Pronay also considered this heaven to be a sly criticism of post-war welfare
provisions.

It was through the cinema screens that the quintessential case against the "planned
society" was first put after the war, by Brendan Bracken's and Alex Korda's protégés
from the days of Sir Joseph Ball onward, Pressburger and Powell. They had been
commissioned by the Mol at the end of the war to make a film, a prestige production with

81 Russell Taylor also used the Robsons' choleric views as a springboard for his own analysis of Powell's films.
He maintains that, for all the Robsons' socio-political posturing, they were merely espousing jingoistic
patriotism and were, with the Powell and Pressburger films, reacting to certain things 'which seemed to them
not totally anti-German' ('Myths', p. 226).
money no object, which would help with Anglo-American relations by portraying our common ideals and such like. The funds provided came close to the cost of the whole Documentary campaign. They produced *A Matter of Life and Death*, in which there is portrayed two contrasting worlds: an untidy, messy, Earth on which little individuals are scurrying about blindly doing their own thing. Above Earth is Heaven: a perfectly organised, planned society conducted by superior intelligences. Earth and the doings of its infuriating, eccentric individuals which keep messing up the excellent schemes of their superiors in Heaven, was filmed in gorgeous colour - Heaven, and all its rational splendour, in grey monochrome.  

But I find Aldred's view more persuasive.

Powell and Pressburger seem to be offering the audience two possibilities for the post-war world: on the one hand, a 'technicolor' world of sensuousness, desire, a rich cultural heritage and rights for the individual or, on the other, the monochrome 'other world' whose corporate efficiency is maintained by an impersonal Law which may be Left or Right in political line. Peter Carter seems to be Powell's paradigmatic Englishman who will defend individuality, love, and art as human rights against a Law that attempts to repress them. Peter Carter's survival is also necessary because as an artist he will continue a British cultural tradition in the post-war world (*C T*, Paradise, p.120)

There are elements of mockery of planned societies in particular and bureaucracy in general in the representation of the Other World but, as envisioned by the Archers, that representation fulfils a greater function than either a mocking or congratulatory view of planned societies. It allows us to see the massed ranks of the dead, both from the distant past and, in particular, from the very recent past (the fatalities inflicted so close to the end of the Second World War). The sheer weight of numbers of the recent dead, both military and civilian, impresses on us the cost of the struggle.  

Powell explained why *A Matter of Life and Death* is called *Stairway to Heaven* in America; they were told that 'death' in the title of a film would be death to its hopes of wide distribution.

We had all of us survived a war with the greatest and most fanatical power in the world, and won it. In the last twelve years, sixteen million human lives had been sacrificed to overthrow one man and his lunatic ideas. The words 'life and death' were no longer the great contradictions that they had been. They were just facts. Out of this enormous holocaust, Emeric and I were trying to create a comedy of titanic size and energy. Two worlds were fighting for one man's life. And now we were told that we couldn't have 'death' in the title (*Life*, pp. 486-487).

The concepts of surviving and winning, of millions of lives sacrificed, of life and death no longer being great contradictions but just facts, of an enormous holocaust, are, I would maintain, the thematic basis of *A Matter of Life and Death*.

In the High Court in the Other World, where the light is blindingly clear, 'the impression is given that it would be impossible to fail to discover or to speak the truth in such a setting' ('1945 Screenplay', p. 65). It is a court where the truth is known and acknowledged, where prejudice is

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52 Pronay, "Peace Aims," pp. 72-73. He seems to imply that the MoI funded *A Matter of Life and Death*, but the funding was provided by J. Arthur Rank.

53 We see only the allied military dead. Does this mean that the dead of the Axis powers went to the 'Other Place', or that it was deemed to be too contentious to include them in this particular view of Heaven?
swept away, and where love is a just cause for appeal against a sentence of death. With so many lives lost to lunacy, it must have been cathartic to feel that you could plead your cause in such an ideal place. When the great escalator refuses to carry June away from Peter, Reeves claims that "nothing is stronger than the law in the universe but on earth nothing is stronger than love". The judge’s instructions to the jury are a quotation from Sir Walter Scott:

In peace love tunes the shepherd's reed,
In war he mounts the warrior's steed,
In halls in gay attire is seen,
In hamlets dances on the green.
Love rules the court, the camp, the grove,
And men below and saints above,
For love is Heaven, and Heaven is love.  

They unanimously find for Peter D. Carter, the 'uncommon man', who, against all the laws of logic, is allowed to live.

When the surgeon who is operating on Peter’s brain removes his surgical mask he reveals himself to be the same actor (Abraham Sofaer) who plays the judge in the Other World, which seems to imply that he is the arbiter of Peter’s fate in this world as well as the next. Christie has noted that the whole film balances on two of the possible meanings of the word ‘case’, medical and legal.

It is an epic that balances on the subtle point of what Chesterton termed ‘a tremendous trifle’... the story develops on two levels, linked by the majestic, metaphysical image of a giant escalator and by a pun. On earth, Peter Carter (David Niven) complains of headaches and his obsession with a heavenly trial to decide his fate is diagnosed as a 'case' of brain lesions producing 'highly organised hallucinations' (Arrows, p. 76).

Powell and Pressburger, in the ‘Guide to a Screenplay’, deliberately leave the conclusion to the argument unresolved.

The theoretical scheme should now be plain as well; did the parachute work after all, or was the pilot’s life preserved by heavenly negligence? Who can tell? Is this an entertaining theory of life after death, or is it meant to be the dreams of a wounded man’s brain? Take your choice. Is there meant to be a parallel drawn between the climax of the pilot’s appeal in the Other World and the crisis of his illness in this one? Your guess is as good as ours.  


When Peter regains consciousness he looks at June and says, "We won". In the screenplay he says, 'I ... won ... my case' (1945 Screenplay, p. 98). "We won" is more inclusive. It could mean that Peter and June have won, but it could include all those in this world and the next who helped Peter to win his case: the surgeon/judge, Reeves, the Conductor (definitely aligned with Peter’s standpoint by the end) and Bob Trubshaw, as well as June. There is, however, an even wider implication. Horne has suggested that

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the film’s action appears to end on VE Day, 8 May 1945. *A Matter of Life and Death* is in a way about survival and guilt, about the incredibility of having survived six years of war, of not having yet joined the hosts of the dead. Peter Carter has flown on 67 operations; the appalling rates of casualties in the RAF during the War make this alone a cause for wonder. And he has made up his mind to die, as illustrated by his quotation of Sir Walter Ralegh’s ‘The Passionate Man’s Pilgrimage/Supposed to be Written by One at the point of Death’. When Dr Reeves asks him ‘What was the cause of your father’s death?’, he spookily replies, ‘Same as mine.’ ‘Brain?’ ‘No, war.’ He has to reconcile himself to not having died in war as expected; and the force that impels him is love of June, which is love of life (Home).

If we assume that the end of the film could be read as occurring simultaneously with the end of the war in Europe, the “We won” taken with June’s reply, “I know, darling”, could embrace the victory of Britain and her allies as well as the victory of desire.

*A Matter of Life and Death* begins somewhere in the universe and thereby states its theme and its scope from the very first shot. This is a film that quite deliberately uses types, even stereotypes, in order to project its message, which is universal and eternal, yet, at the same time, very much of a particular time and place. Dilys Powell criticised the film’s characterisations, laying the blame for it at the door of the producers rather than the actors. ‘All one asks is that the artist shall make the individual real and, therefore, worth saving. The lovers here are cinema lovers, without depth as they are without virtue or sin; they meet, speak, vow by the rules of celluloid’. Another reviewer, however, appreciated that the film was attempting to give us something more significant than mere easily identifiable reality.

The human characters, with the exception of Roger Livesey’s convincing study of a doctor, are deliberately colourless; this “stratospheric joke” might have happened to anyone in any age against the cold background of space and stars. The film succeeds brilliantly in welding monochrome to colour and in conveying an impression of a facet of eternity - an eternity in which even two lovers matter and yet nothing matters at all in comparison with an ultimate which is never revealed.

And Peter Carter, whose life is saved, represents all those whose lives were saved, or lost, in the great conflagration that had just ended. I consider *A Matter of Life and Death* to be The Archers’ most complete and satisfying blend of fantasy and reality, one which hides its serious comments on that destructive war under a cloak of outrageous and colourful fabrication.

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56 It is possible. Peter bales out of his plane on the night of 2 May 1945, so it would be on the morning of 3 May that he wakes up on the beach and at least another day before Dr. Reeves sees him (4 May). The ‘Guide to the Screenplay’ tells us that ‘three days go by’ (‘Guide’, p. 13), so we can assume that the operation takes place on the night of 7 May and Peter wakes from his operation on the morning of the 8th of May (VE Day).

Dilys Powell, *Sunday Times*, 3 November 1946, p. 2. Christie agrees that *AMOLAD’s* characters are not realistic individuals, contending that they were never intended to be. Because of the film’s ‘masque-like story’, the characters are ‘emblematic and allegorical: the Poet, his Beloved, the Heavenly Messenger, the Magician’. They move in equally symbolic spaces: ‘the Other World; and on earth, the Seashore, The Wood, the Palace, and that modern temple of mysteries, the hospital’ (Christie: *AMOLAD*, p. 18).

During the making of *A Matter of Life and Death*, *The Red Shoes* was mentioned with bated breath, rather like a blushing maiden mentions marriage.¹

There is a strand of similarity between *A Canterbury Tale*, *I Know Where I'm Going* and *A Matter of Life and Death* which reflected, even pre-dated, a shift in the tenor and style of British films made towards the end of the war. Powell commented on the difference between British and American film production at this time.

By the end of the war, every Hollywood studio was pouring out combat films in which familiar faces glared or shouted at us from underneath uniformed caps or battle helmets, while around them the landscape blew up. The British, on the other hand, didn't seem to be interested in the fighting. Combat films were a rarity (ibid., p. 509).

Perhaps this was because the British had been fighting for longer than the Americans and had lost a great deal in the process. After 1943, when survival seemed assured by American involvement and victory possible by Hitler's strategic mistakes, the focus of attention shifted away from the needs of war to the inner lives and repressed desires of individuals. Charles Barr notes that,

far from being opposed in structure (fantasy vs. realism), *A Matter of Life and Death* and *Brief Encounter* (1945) can be grouped together as instances of a spectacular shift which occurs in British films around that time from the public sphere to the private, with a stress on vision and fantasy [and that] the modes of subjectivity and cinematic self-reflexivity which Powell and Pressburger are here foregrounding with characteristically flamboyant devices ... are equally operative, though less flamboyantly so, in *Brief Encounter*, and also in Ealing's *Dead of Night*, another film of 1945. *Brief Encounter's* narrative is the extended reverie of its heroine, and *Dead of Night*'s narrative is the extended dream of its hero; both films have an artful circular construction, folding back upon themselves.²

Barr's claim that *Dead of Night* (Ealing, 1945) demonstrates the 'return of the repressed ... elements in the psyche that have been rigidly kept down [and] find their way back to confront the repressor in a monstrous externalised form' (ibid., pp. 17-18), makes the excesses critics perceived in *A Canterbury Tale* seem tame and healthy by comparison. They would have more justification for their criticisms with the later Powell and Pressburger trilogy of *Black Narcissus* (The Archers, 1947), *The Red Shoes* (The Archers, 1948), and *Gone to Earth* (London Film Productions/Vanguard Productions, 1950), 'in which a series of intensely desirous women are thwarted and finally plunge over the edge to their death'. Peter Wollen also identifies a similarly tormented trilogy in Carol Reed's *Odd Man Out* (GDF/Two Cities, 1947), *The Fallen Idol*, and *The Third Man* (British Lion/London Films, 1948/1949), in which

¹ Huntley, p. 121.
'appealingly desperate heroes are caught in paranoid labyrinths of pursuit and betrayal'. He stresses the strength of this 'new romanticism,' as the parallel movement in painting and poetry was called, by pointing out that in 1945, 'the top box-office film was The Seventh Veil, a sublimely over-the-top drama of female desire, classical music, and psychoanalysis,' and in the same year, Cavalcanti 'made a small masterpiece of the grotesque in Dead of Night and followed this up, in 1947, with They Made Me a Fugitive, the definitive "man-on-the-run" film'.

But A Canterbury Tale, I Know Where I'm Going and A Matter of Life and Death are positive and life-affirming films, that display the diversity of British culture and deal with recuperating the past and constructing the future. They are films that favour reflection and speculation and weave their narratives round sexuality and eccentricity, neither of which are repressed, but seen as the unchaining and releasing of healthy needs and desires. They are concerned with visions and myths and with lifting restrictions, opening eyes to opportunities, celebrating the eccentric and odd, bending gender-roles and allowing passion its place.

Britain's cultural heritage is foregrounded in A Canterbury Tale, with Elizabeth I's bed, the old hop mills and, most of all, with Canterbury Cathedral itself. Elizabeth I is represented again in A Matter of Life and Death, since it is a portrait of the red-haired monarch which looks down with an inscrutable expression on the rehearsal of A Midsummer Night's Dream and is, in turn, examined with gum-chewing sangfroid by the shapely red-headed American playing Hippolyta. Literature is used to conjure up the past through direct quotation and indirect implication: in A Canterbury Tale, it is Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, The Ingoldsby Legends, John Dryden and John Bunyan; I Know Where I'm Going! relies on Norse legend, Celtic curses and, indirectly, Sir Walter Scott and Christopher Marlowe for its cultural heritage indicators; in A Matter of Life and Death we are given Marvell, Raleigh, Shelley, Shakespeare, Sir Walter Scott and, subliminally, Sir Thomas Browne. And Britain's cultural past is made to serve the present in another way, through 'the rhetorical modes of Pageants, Triumphs and Masques', in Blimp as well as A Canterbury Tale and AMOLAD.

In all three films landscape is an essential feature. Fifty percent of A Canterbury Tale was shot on location in and near the cathedral city of Canterbury, the countryside familiar to Powell

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3 The Small Back Room (London Film Productions/The Archers, 1949) was the closest The Archers came to this male-focused form of Neo-Romantic apocalyptic representation, but the pessimism regarding the hero’s ability to eventually overcome his problems evident in Nigel Balchin's novel is, in the film, dispensed with.

4 Peter Wollen, "The Last New Wave: Modernism in the British Films of the Thatcher Era," The British Avant-Garde Film, 1926-1995, ed. by Michael O'Pray. Luton: John Libby Media at University of Luton, 1996, p. 246. p. 142. Michael Balcon, who was persuaded by Monja Danischewsky to use Neo-Romantic artists for the promotion of his productions, claimed that it 'raised the whole level of cinema advertising. Artists of the standing of John Piper, Ronald Searle, James Boswell, Robert Medley. Edward Ardizzone, James Fitzton, John Minton, Edward Bawden... made our posters a by-word, equal almost to the reputation held by London Transport in the same field' (A Life time in Films, pp. 142-143). Hurry designed the poster for Dead of Night.
since childhood. A good deal of I Know Where I'm Going! was shot on location on the Isle of Mull in the autumn of 1944, and although most of A Matter of Life and Death was created in the studio, there were the beautiful sequences on Saunton Sands and in the North Devon countryside that Dr Frank Reeves speeds through on his motorbike. Shooting in authentic locations had been important for Powell long before this film trilogy: The Edge of the World was shot on the island of Foula, much of 49th Parallel shot on location in Canada, and homage is paid to English country houses with their landscaped gardens in Colonel Blimp. All of these locations were probably found by Powell in the way he had employed for most of his professional career: on foot. Esmond Knight recalled that, after finishing Contraband, 'Mickey and I decided to go for a short holiday in Cornwall to look at locations - just for future reference'. They went by train, with the two cocker spaniels 'bundled unceremoniously on to the baggage rack'. Powell related how he had found an ideal location for the sequence in A Matter of Life and Death where Peter Carter is washed ashore and we are not sure if he is alive or dead.

I walked yesterday to the North coast near Lynton: The valley of Rocks and Woody bay, fantastic and Dore-esque scenery. The sea was so calm that not even on the rocky shore was there any movement. The cliff road is a thousand feet above the sea there and you look down on the seabirds flying below. The coast looks like Corfu and yesterday there was a light haze over the landscape, making luminous colours on the cliffs and a flat milky sheet over the sea so that the coast of Wales floated like a mirage along the horizon. This might be the setting for the exterior scenes with the young airman: it could have been any country, here or hereafter, and further along where the coast flattens there is a great American camp. 'A Matter of Life and Death'! It has style - 'very much style'.

And this is how Christopher Challis describes finding locations for Gone to Earth. 'Micky and I spent 5 or 6 weeks staying in pubs in Shropshire and just walking so we didn't just pick the locations from the back of a car. We wandered for miles over the hills there and accessibility of the locations just didn't come into it'. Powell was almost as close to the land as two of the characters in A Canterbury Tale.

Nanette Aldred declares that A Canterbury Tale is 'a pastoral poem to the Kent countryside, a poem which operates a magical Kipling-esque facility to experience the past in the present and to recognise superhuman forces in nature', and that to be close to the land in this film 'is to be in a privileged state. Colpeper and Allison (both old English names) are so close to the land that they can hear the sounds of the past in it'.

The three modern pilgrims are framed according to their relationship with the land. Allison's is a struggle for proximity: before the war her access to the land was through fantasy (imagining the rural locations for the garden furniture that she sold as a shop assistant), she

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6 Michael Powell, 'Letter to Pressburger', Emeric, p. 242. 'All the exterior scenes for A Matter of Life and Death were taken at Saunton Sands, North Devon' (Warman, “Behind the Scenes,” photographs taken during the shooting of the film and positioned at the end of the book, pages not numbered).
7 Christopher Challis, interviewed by Rex Stapleton, ‘Appendix 1’, p. 25.
was able to spend 'one whole holiday' on the Pilgrim's Way through her relationship with a geologist working there and then the war provided her with the opportunity to work on the land as part of the Women's Land Army. Bob Johnson, the American, is represented as an investigator of the landscape which is spread out for his gaze. And the soldier from London, Peter Gibbs, only sees the landscape as the arena for his tank manoeuvres.

('CT', Paradise, pp. 120-121).

Aldred's article was published in David Mellor's A Paradise Lost, in which he states that, unlike other styles, 'Neo-Romanticism was spread across the arts in Britain; it flourished, for example, in films directed and produced by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger'. It was a style used predominantly by British artists, and two of the 'triumvirate of leading senior painters in the Neo-Romantic style were landscape painters: John Piper and Graham Sutherland' (Chron', Paradise, p. 12). Mellor maintains that John Piper's representations of country houses and churches arose under the conditions of a threat: 'Faced with the possible obliteration of a past from the Nazi bombing, a symbolic conservation of Britain, by recording in drawings and photographs its architecture and landscape, was urgently on the Neo-Romantic agenda in the early 1940s ('J P', Paradise, p. 34). Just as Piper recorded landscape and architecture on paper, Powell recorded landscape and architecture on film. He was aware of preserving the image of at least one building of historic significance in A Canterbury Tale. He recalled that, when he was a child, there had been two tall, weather-boarded, white-painted mills in the villages of Wickham and Ickham. Thirty-six years later, in the middle of the second great European war,

I dragged my film unit down to the Nailbourne Valley ... to get shots of my nursery memories. One of the great wooden mills was gone - burnt down, I fancy - but the other was still there, as fine a piece of timber building as ever and it is in the film A Canterbury Tale as long as it lasts - the film I mean (Life, p. 21).

Piper had a romantic vision 'distinctly descended from the English water-colourists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries'. Sutherland's landscapes were more dramatic:

his mountains burning at sundown are the theatre of human passions and his woods are the womb of human impulses. ... He is the most powerful and the most frankly emotional of contemporary painters. It was as a result of a visit, in 1936, to the noble but ominous scenery of Pembrokeshire in Wales, that he evolved his peculiar and eloquent conception of landscape forms.*

And Powell's most powerful evocation of landscape was to be the Welsh border country of Gone to Earth, described in the screenplay as:

A wild wintry landscape of little mountains, deep valleys, twisted thorns; of ancient forts, Roman outposts, green cattle-roads and Norman castles: The landscape of the Welsh border. Strange jagged rocks on a hill-top. (The Stiperstones) The sun is just sinking. A distant huntsman's horn is heard. A twisted thorn tree. A strange wind starts to blow through the branches. The horn sounds again.

* 'Ed's P', Paradise, p. 9. A view shared by Wollen: 'Neoromanticism fitted intimately with the experience of the war, in poems by Edith Sitwell, Dylan Thomas, or T. S. Eliot, in drawings or paintings by Moore and Piper, in films by Humphrey Jennings and Powell and Pressburger' (Wollen, p. 252).

The landscape is inhabited by frightened creatures seeking protection. As the wind increases to a hurricane, 'a wild dark-haired girl running through the bending trees and bushes, lashed by the wind', is pursued by the Phantom Hunt, which dashes by and over the cottage, vanishing into the air as it goes. 'Last of all is heard the voice of the Black Huntsman, yelling and mocking, his voice torn by the wind: 'Gone to Earth! Gone to Earth!'"

Neo-Romanticism was a wartime phenomenon, and whether it was 'a genuine attempt to communicate human experience on a higher level by transcending the harsh realities of wartime, or merely a refusal to come to terms with what was actually taking place,' its appeal was to the emotions, emotions most easily satisfied by music.

In ballet, music and painting came together. Besides extending Neo-Romantic imagery into the theatre, designing sets and costumes was a practical way to earn a living. The choreographer Frederick Ashton chose Graham Sutherland to design The Wanderer (to music by Schubert) for Sadler's Wells in 1941, and in 1943, ... used John Piper for The Quest (to music by William Walton)."

It was in 1941 that the ballet became the primary site of Neo-Romantic painting. Piper designed the curtain for the 1941 revival of the Sitwells' Façade, 'giving it a wildly romantic aspect across Renishaw lake by moonlight to the right of the gaping mouth in the centre, and rampant red foliage and a view of the stable-block to the left.' And, in 1941, Robert Helpmann became choreographer at Sadler's Wells and began to develop his new mime-dramas at the New Theatre. For his second production he commissioned Leslie Hurry, whose designs proved to be perfectly in sympathy with 'the violent, erotic and hysterical atmosphere' of Helpmann's Hamlet (1942). He adapted some of the devices of the Surrealists for his own ends: 'in Hamlet hands grow out of columns, eyes push out on stalks, etc.' And his décor was not only a background for the actors, but part of the choreography.

Helpmann's ballet starts with Hamlet at the moment of death. His life is then 'recapitulated in a feverish dream as events pass through his memory like a drowning man, and the curtain falls at

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10 Emeric Pressburger, 'Gone to Earth Screenplay', BFI, pp. 1-2.
12 Malcolm Yorke, The Spirit of Place: Nine Neo-Romantic artists and their times. London: Constable, 1988. p. 86. The original production in 1922 'was meant to rival Cocteau's Parade (1917) which had music by Satie and décor by Picasso', so the earlier performances of Façade 'had music by their protégé William Walton and a curtain ... with a hole in it through which Edith could read her poetry' (ibid., p. 86).
the same point where it rose. In this delirium his character is given a Freudian interpretation.'

The ballet's length was just eighteen minutes. Powell, whose interest in the ballet had been revived by his friendship with Helpmann, judged it to be 'a stunning Hamlet as a ballet, with a memorable decor by Leslie Hurry'. Helpmann became Powell's 'right-hand man' for The Archers' production of The Red Shoes, in which the "Ballet of The Red Shoes", described by Powell as 'an original Freudian film-ballet', is just fifteen minutes long (Life, pp. 604, 628).

Pressburger's original treatment for The Red Shoes (entitled 'Ballet Story') was written for Korda in 1939, with the help of a young novelist, Keith Winter. In December 1941, Pressburger made this entry in his diary: 'Gave Miss Page "Red Shoes" to retype. We want to send copy to Vivien Leigh. Rozsa asked Korda about it' (1942 Diary, 20 January). In February 1945, Independent Producers began to negotiate the purchase of the property on behalf of The Archers but it was not until 21 May 1946 that the negotiation was successfully concluded (Emeric, pp. 276-278). It would appear, however, that they seriously considered the making of the film before A Matter of Life and Death even went into production. Pressburger rewrote his screenplay and Powell made two stipulations: 'the part of Vicky Page had to be played by a dancer, and a dancer of exceptional quality; and a twenty-minute ballet, in which she would play the leading role, would have to be invented'. Pressburger had always been 'fascinated by the idea of actually creating and showing a genuine piece of art on the screen', and it gave Powell the opportunity to create a more complete and prestigious 'composed film' within a film than he had already achieved with Black Narcissus, in which the film's climax was planned 'step by step, bar by bar' by Powell and Easdale, and was rehearsed and shot to a piano track by Powell. It was about twelve minutes long and was, according to Powell, 'opera in the sense that music, emotion, image and voices all blended together in a new and splendid whole' (Life, p. 618, pp. 581-583; Emeric, pp. 279-280).


Korda almost became responsible for the completion of The Archers' production of The Red Shoes. With Pressburger present, Rank and John Davis had viewed the unfinished film. When they left 'in stony silence', Powell and Pressburger asked Korda if he would be willing to take over. He agreed, but then Rank gave them enough money to finish the film. (Paul Taborl, Alexander Korda. London: Oldbourne, 1959, pp. 272-273). In 1946, Korda acquired control of British Lion Film Corporation (a production/distribution company), and Sound City (Films)Limited, which owned Sound City Studios. Among the film-makers who transferred their allegiance from the Rank Organisation to Korda's British Lion/London Films set-up between 1945 and 1955 were 'Carol Reed, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, Frank Launder and Sidney Gilliat , David Lean, Ian Dalrymple, John and Roy Boulting and Laurence Olivier' (Threadgall, pp. 35-36, 45, 69).

For an earlier scene in the screenplay there is an inserted direction to the cameraman (the only one in the screenplay) 'I imagine the effect of this to be one shot, at great speed and in silence, the main sound effect the distant voices, which are heard at first, lost again and then heard louder and clearer: of course it can be several moving shots, at the same tempo, quickly dissolving one into the other: it starts with Sister Ruth in the foreground, the others on the Terrace; we never leave Sister Ruth who is in the foreground of the movement all the time: done carefully this should give the true effect of an eavesdropper.' (1946 Screenplay', p. 87).
A scene in the screenplay, set ‘on the terrace of the Café de Paris opposite the Monte Carlo Casino where Diaghilev had his ballet season every winter’, showed how Lermontov and his team of choreographer, composer, and designer collaborated together. It was shot but not used, because ‘everything that had been said in it had already been either said or implied in every scene I had directed since Julian Craster burst into Lermontov’s apartment’.

The way that these artists, including Lermontov, thought and worked in this closed world of music and dancing had been conveyed to the public in every scene. “The Ballet of The Red Shoes” itself was the fruit of all this collaboration and love.... In the same way, while preparing and shooting the film, I was working with my own dedicated bunch of creative artists. Gradually the ballet ceased to be a naturalist conception and became completely surreal (Life, pp. 614-617).

The ‘dedicated bunch of creative artists’ began to coalesce with A Matter of Life and Death. It was the film for which Jack Cardiff had been recruited as a Technicolor expert and was then given complete control of the cinematography, both Technicolor and black and white (despite the fact that he had never shot anything in black and white before). It was on Black Narcissus (1947), however, that he showed his true potential, with nearly every scene showing ‘exotic, hot-house sensuality’. And it was for Black Narcissus that the decision was made to ‘find a composer who thought operatically, and who could be entrusted with all the sound effects for the film, as well as the music itself. Brian Easdale had been stationed in Calcutta, where he had studied Indian music and befriended Rumer Godden’; he was hired and allowed to supervise the entire soundtrack, not just the music, so that the sound effects became part of the score - less naturalistic than dramatic (Emeric, pp. 269-270).

Alfred Junge recruited Hein Heckroth, who had won international acclaim for his costume designs for the avant-garde Jooss ballet, The Green Table (1932), to design the costumes for A Matter of Life and Death. Junge’s sets were meticulously planned, solid, architectural constructions, but something more impressionistic was needed for ‘The Ballet of The Red Shoes’.

On 4 June 1946, only two weeks into shooting Black Narcissus, Heckroth was asked to design the ballet segment of The Red Shoes - leaving the remainder of the film to Junge. But Junge himself was not informed of this new state of affairs within his new department. Only a month later did he discover, by chance, what was going on. He was enraged. He considered it an insult to his authority and immediately tendered his resignation (Emeric, p. 281).

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18 He studied the way famous artists used colour in order to enhance the colour tones of his light filters: “in the dawn sequence where Sister Ruth goes mad I used soft greens in the shadows, not only because this coolness is always evident at dawn, but because the juxtaposition of green and red is uncomfortable and suggestive of tragedy - like Van Gogh’s billiard room at Arles” (Magic Hour, p. 88).

19 Heckroth had fled from his native Germany in 1933, and came to England in 1935, where he continued to design ballets for Kurt Jooss at Dartington Hall. He exhibited his Surrealist paintings at the Modern Art Gallery in London in 1943. It was Vincent Korda who arranged to get Heckroth a job at Denham Studios as a costume designer on Gabriel Pascal’s epic adaption of Shaw’s Caesar and Cleopatra (Sureiwic, pp. 6-7).
So Heckroth was asked to design the entire film. This meant that the cinematographer, art designer and composer would all have complete control of their own departments but would have to liaise with the writer and director and each other in order to achieve their aims. And, for *The Red Shoes*, they would need to collaborate with yet other contributors to the finished whole: the choreographer and the dancers.

Helpmann was not only principal male dancer at Sadler's Wells, but also an actor on stage and screen. His first ballet as choreographer to the company, *Comus* (1942), was a modification of an early English art form, the Masque, in which movement, music and the declamation of poetry are blended. And after he had staged and appeared in his ballet of *Hamlet*, he played the part of Hamlet in a production of Shakespeare's tragedy in 1944. In the same year he created the ballet, *Miracle in the Gorbals*, in a revival of which Powell was able to see Moira Shearer dance. Léonide Massine, the most prestigious of the collaborators, was fifty-two years old when he agreed to play the part of the part of Grischa Ljubov, choreographer to the Ballets Lermontov in *The Red Shoes*. He had been only seventeen when Diaghilev had taken him from the Moscow Imperial school and ‘fashioned him into a new Pygmalion’ by throwing him into contact with modern painters like Picasso, and sending him to museums and concerts. Before he reached the age of twenty-three he had created three great ballets: *Les Femmes de Bonne Humeur* (1918), *La Boutique Fantastique* (1919) and *Le Tricorne* (1919), in which ‘there is a sharp evocation of a particular time in history and a particular place: the “local colour” is not applied from the outside, but becomes part of the very essence of the choreography’ (Fernau, pp. 51-52). In *La Boutique Fantasque* (décor by André Derain), Massine not only brought his dolls to life but also invested them with a definite character. In 1920 *Pulchinella* (music by Igor Stravinsky, décor by Picasso) was followed by *Le Chant du Rossignol*, Stravinsky’s opera adapted as a one-act ballet (décor by Henri Matisse). In 1924 he created *Mercure* (music by Eric Satie, décor and costumes by Picasso). *Les Presages*, (Monte Carlo, 1933), with costumes and décor by André Masson, began the series of Massine’s symphonic ballets, which included *Choreatrium* (London, 1933) and *Symphonie Fantastique* (Covent Garden, 1936) with scenery and costumes by Christian Bérard. In 1937, Massine became artistic director of “Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo”. During the Second World War the company was in the U.S.A., and among the ballets Massine’s staged there was *Labyrinth*, with scenery and costumes by Salvador Dali, and Balanchine’s “Danses

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20 Sureiwic, p. 7. 'In July 1970, Michael Powell paid a moving tribute to his old friend and colleague: “Hein Heckroth has been an elder brother to me for more than 24 years, ever since we worked together on the ballet of *The Red Shoes* and on the design of the whole film. It was, I think, the first time that a painter had been given the chance to design a film, including the titles” (*Ibid.*, p. 8).
concertantes" to music by Stravinsky.  

No wonder, then, that Powell should declare:

For me he wasn't just the famous Massine, one of the world's great mimes, one of the great choreographers - he was ballet, and for me that meant painters like Derain and Picasso, musicians like Stravinsky and Satie. Massine had been in the forefront of every modern movement in art ($ Million, p. 107).

Or that Macdonald should point out that, although Pressburger's original 1939 script, 'Ballet Story', had contained the line for Ljubov: 'When I, who have seen Pavlova and Karsovina dance, say "not bad" ... now that is something', it takes on an added significance 'when spoken by Massine who had indeed seen them dance - and danced with them' (Emeric, p. 283). Neither Massine nor Helpmann were very impressed with Allan Gray's score for 'The Ballet of The Red Shoes', but Brian Easdale had the experience to produce what the Archer's now needed: modern romantic-classical music fit for opera or ballet.

'The Ballet of The Red Shoes' was the nexus of the creative activity, and depended on frequent consultation between designer, composer, choreographer and cinematographer.

The score was written first and pre-recorded. Then Heckroth and his assistant Ivor Beddoes did hundreds of preparatory sketches, literally constituting a storyboard fitted to the music, bar by bar, frame by frame. Both artists had considerable ballet experience, and worked closely with the choreographer, the composer and Powell and Pressburger in working out their ballet visuals.

Easdale had Heckroth's sketches for the ballet scenes by his side as he was composing the title music, and Helpmann liaised with Easdale to give him the tempos he needed for the choreography. All this careful preparation meant that Cardiff had little room for manoeuvre when filming the ballet.

Easdale's brilliant and powerful music was recorded (conducted by Sir Thomas Beecham) and sealed up before we started. The decor by Hein Heckroth - no less brilliant than the music - was photographed in Technicolor like a cartoon and cut exactly to the music. The choreography was, of course, made to the music with little possibility of change, so my wedged precisely into the particular bar of music, and as we have forty sets in fifteen minutes' screen time we hadn't much room for admiring our own work! (Huntley, p. 123).

And for Reggie Mills, the editor, there was also little room for manoeuvre, since 'the pictures were virtually cut the way they were shot ... the way Powell shot pictures didn't give much leeway any more than did Carol Reed or Billy Wilder' (Challis, 'Appendix 1', p. 23).

The imaginative use of Technicolor in these three films, A Matter of Life and Death, Black

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22 He had written his first opera, Rapunzel, at the age of 18 and by the time he was 20, his Death March had been performed by the London Symphony Orchestra under Sir Malcolm Sargent (Kevin Macdonald, "Music with a touch of magic," Guardian, 31 November 1995).

Narcissus and The Red Shoes, could in some measure have been due to its unconventional use by Olivier, Sheriff, Furse and Krasker for Henry V. But there may have been an earlier and more powerful influence. In 1938, Paul Nash - a British landscape painter who had exhibited in the International Surrealist Exhibition in 1936 - wrote an article in which he contended that the average colour picture lacked everything an artist prized - 'form, definition, subtlety' - and emphasised everything he strove to overcome - 'realism, banality, false values'. He maintained that colour as used by Technicolor experts did not function as it should for their purpose. Its failure to reinforce form was due, in part, to the ignorance of directors and cameramen.

They use too much colour; they have no understanding of its proper use; they are like the children in the nursery again. They have been given a box of paints and they are having a fine time laying it on thick anywhere they can. ... What should be studied, of course, is the infinite variations of contrast. But not only is contrast hardly practised, it seems to be unrealised as a constructive factor in producing harmony.

He concludes that, 'If only the best intelligences of direction, photography and mechanics could collaborate with artists of sound and colour, that might make either an incalculable chaos, or a new world'. That collaboration came close to being effected in The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp (even though it was, according to Powell, only 'a conventional film, a black and white film coloured'), but by 1948 The Archers had achieved the new world of colour cinematography that Nash had only dreamt of in 1938.

The end of the war, coinciding with the activity of our powerful little group, gave a great opportunity to break down barriers and surge forward. The fact that A Matter of Life and Death, Black Narcissus, and The Red Shoes are still regarded, nearly forty years later, as three peaks of achievement in colour photography, speaks for itself (Life, p. 536).

By casting Léonide Massine as choreographer to the Ballets Lermontov in The Red Shoes, the connection with Diaghilev was inevitable, as, by extension, was the connection with Cocteau. Massine had choreographed Cocteau's Parade (décor by Picasso) for the Ballets Russe in 1917. Picasso also designed the scenery for Cocteau's production of Antigone, the production which so impressed Stravinsky that he asked Cocteau to write 'an opera in Latin on the subject of a tragedy of the ancient world', the opera-oratorio Oedipus Rex. Cocteau's first film, Le Sang d'un Poète (1930) (cinematography by Georges Périnal),

24 Paul Nash, "The Colour Film," Footnotes to the Film, ed. by Charles Davy. London: Lovat Dickinson, 1938, pp. 118, 119, 122, 125, 134. He also claimed that Walt Disney was 'one of the few geniuses of the cinema. He stands beside Chaplin as one of the real entertainers' (ibid., p. 128), a view shared by Powell.
25 Parade was a reaction against naturalism. Cocteau felt that naturalistic presentation, the realism of accessories, 'showed an ignorance of a vital truth of the theatre', and that 'a thing can rarely be and, at the same time, seem true' (Cocteau, p. 2).
26 Paul Griffiths. Stravinsky: The Master Musicians. London: Dent, 1992, pp. 80, 87. First performed in 1928, a concert performance of Oedipus Rex was given in London in 1959, with Cocteau narrating in French and Igor Stravinsky conducting their joint effort. They were lifelong friends.
was produced by le Vicomte de Noailles, who also financed Buñuel's *L'Age d'Or* (1930).

Charles de Noailles had asked me to do an animated cartoon. I soon found out that animated cartoons required a method and teamwork that were still unknown in France. So I suggested doing a film as free as an animated cartoon, choosing faces and places which would correspond to the freedom a designer has when inventing a world of his own.

*Le Sang d'un Poète* is reflexive, playing with the medium it is using with no attempt to deceive its audience. At the beginning of the film we see a towering smokestack begin to crumble, 'an image reminiscent of many of the Lumières' one-shot films. At the end of the film the smokestack completes its fall'; between those two shots the whole of the action of the film has occurred. In 1946 Cocteau filmed a fairy tale, *La Belle et La Bête* (Discina, 1946), which used simple tricks to telling effect: disembodied arms holding candelabra were thrust through black velvet; Beauty flowing through a wall was achieved by dropping her through a white sheet with a split in it and reversing the film; and it was reversed film that made jewels accumulate in Beast's hand. Though the subject matter was fantastic, 'and would perhaps accommodate itself better to portrayal through a sort of nebulous fairy tale, Cocteau repeatedly emphasises the necessity for precision and realism'. He mourned the loss of the film's designer, Christian Bérard, and pointed out that he was 'the only one to understand that the marvellous cannot be evoked through vagueness, and that the mystery exists only in precise things. He also knew that nothing is easier to create than false fantasy in the film world'. This film added to Cocteau's 'gallery of mythic protagonists in the eternal contest between love, death and poetry' which had been seen in his first film, *Le Sang d'un Poète* (1930) and his stage play, *Orphée* 1925. In *Orphée* the poet enters the abode of death and returns, and Death and her assistants operate clad in surgical gowns and masks.

In *A Matter of Life and Death* the poet enters the abode of death and returns, and his life hangs in the balance as a surgeon and his assistants operate clad in surgical gowns and masks. Cocteau said of time and space, 'Film art is the only art form that allows us to

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29 Simple cinematic tricks which are used in abundance in the Giulietta sequences of *The Tales of Hoffmann* (The Archers for London Film Productions, 1951).


31 First produced in London in 1937 with Esmond Knight as Orpheus (Cocteau, p. 27). Powell, an avid theatre-goer and admirer of Knight, might have seen this production.

32 There may have been cross-fertilisation between *A Matter of Life and Death* and Cocteau's film *Orphée* (André Paulvé/Films du Palais Royal, 1949), since Death's servants ride motor-bikes and Orphée receives ethereal messages through his radio.
dominate both' (Fraigneau, p. 115), and he referred to his films 'as studies of “the frontier incidents between one world and another.” The frontier he meant is that between the real and the apparent, between the actual world and the camera's world, between dreams and art, and between death and life'. In 1948, the year that The Archers' fairy story The Red Shoes reached the screen, the ballet was still 'a major focus of the Neo-Romantic sensibility' and Christian Bérard made his ‘final visit to London to design Massine's The Clock Symphony for Covent Garden’ (‘Chron’, Paradise, p. 14).

Powell and Pressburger continued to make films inspired by Neo-Romantic sensibility, and Powell planned a series of films, which he called Powell's Tales: 'twenty hours of entertainment, of art, by the most famous artists in the world: painters, sculptors, dancers, actors, musicians, composers, architects and poets' ($ Million, pp. 161-162). Henri Matisse had agreed to do the décor for Massine’s story from The Thousand and One Nights, and both Sutherland and Piper had agreed to contribute, but the most ambitious tale would have been an episode from The Odyssey, with Orson Welles as Odysseus, a screenplay by Dylan Thomas, and music by Igor Stravinsky. Stravinsky recalled that Powell came to see him in Hollywood in January 1952, with a project that he found very attractive: 'a short film, a kind of masque, of a scene from the Odyssey; it would require two or three arias as well as pieces of pure instrumental music and recitations of pure poetry.' In October Stravinsky replied to yet another enquiry from Cocteau about the project, that there was no news, and he feared 'this may be one of those innumerable schemes that fade into oblivion. But I hope this will not in turn silence you' (ibid., p. 122). The scheme did not immediately fade into oblivion, but in the end none of the projected Tales were realised because Powell could not raise the funding. Powell did make a short film with Heckroth, The Sorcerer's Apprentice (20th Century Fox/Norddeutscher Rundfunk), and Pressburger managed to arrange piecemeal and precarious funding for Oh Rosalinda! (Michael Powell/Emeric Pressburger, 1955), a filmed version of a Strauss's Die Fledermaus, in which the central conceit was to superimpose a 'rose-tinted Belle-Epoque Vienna on to the grim and dreary reality of the modern post-war city' (Emeric, pp. 354, 356). But this was the last composed film based on a musical score that they made together.

Powell, though, continued to pursue his dæmon, and in 1959 made Luna de Miel (Suevia/Everdene, 1959). A mixture of travelogue and art (with two ballets: El Amor Brujo, with music by de Falla, and Los Amantes de Teruel), it was an attempt to recreate the romantic

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agony of *The Red Shoes* that was only partially successful, despite the contributions of Sir Thomas Beecham, Léonide Massine and George Péral.

It was not a great critical or box office success, but *Bluebeard’s Castle* (Norman Foster Productions/Süddeutscher Rundfunk, 1969), a film version of Béla Bartók’s opera, made in Germany and designed by Heckroth, was an artistic triumph. With superb colour and settings, it is

an intense expressionist psychodrama, where lighting and abstract decor convey the gradual revelation of Bluebeard’s inner torment to his last wife [and] stands as a final proof of The Archers’ and Powell’s claim that the essential unity of art can best be realised in cinema (Arrows, p. 90).

Raymond Durgnat’s well-known assertion that Powell seemed born into the wrong period, and that had he, ‘and the cinema, and Technicolor, been born during any of the periods celebrated in Mario Praz’s *The Romantic Agony*, he might have been working with the cultural grain instead of against it’, is substantially true if we consider the direction that a large number of British film makers pursued for most of the war and well into the post-war period. But if we broaden the cultural spectrum to include music, literature, drama, ballet, and painting, then Powell and Pressburger were working with the cultural grain in Britain from 1943 until 1950, and it would be British cinema that was working against it. Only when the cultural tide had turned after renewed contact with the rest of Europe did they find themselves swimming conspicuously in a perverse-seeming direction, one that had been abandoned by almost every other artist in Britain.

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35 The ballet of the *Amor Brujo* was Massine’s idea; one of his best ballets, *Le Tricorne*, had music by de Falla and décor by Picasso. Powell tried, but failed, to persuade Joan Miró to design *Amor Brujo* (*Million*, pp. 373, 319).

Conclusion

Some of the results of the cultural, political, social and economic upheaval created in Britain by the Second World War are apparent in Powell and Pressburger’s films of this period. The blackout is exploited for dramatic effect in *Contraband*, *A Canterbury Tale*, and *Blimp*. The losses inflicted by the German bombing campaign are also evident: Clive Candy’s bomb-shattered home and the newspaper announcement of the death of Murdoch in *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*; the graphic images of Canterbury’s bomb-damaged city centre in *A Canterbury Tale*; the scale of the damage to housing and the loss of life among the civilian, as well as military, population in *A Matter of Life and Death*. In the latter there is also an oblique reference to the political shift from right to left: Peter Carter’s remark that he is ‘Conservative by nature, Labour by experience’. But, apart from the references to shortages of food and manpower in *I Know Where I’m Going* and the casual reference in *A Matter of Life and Death* to ‘whisky being hard to come by’, austerity measures are not conspicuously apparent. The films do, however, indicate more fully some of the social changes brought about by the experience of war, particularly in the status of women. In *The Spy in Black* and *Contraband*, the characters played by Valerie Hobson are cool, clever and attractive and independent; in *One of Our Aircraft is Missing*, women are shown to be capable of assuming the roles of resistance workers, positions of authority that require courage and judgement; and *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* presents us with the changing roles of women over a forty-year period, particularly in relation to professional employment and social class. Similarly, *A Canterbury Tale* indicates the beginning of a breakdown of class divisions and shows women taking on men’s work for the duration of the war, while also demonstrating a range of female sexual attitudes which are presented as perfectly acceptable. In both *A Canterbury Tale* and *I Know Where I’m Going*, women are seen as the motive force that releases men from outmoded notions and traditions.

The propaganda content of Powell and Pressburger’s films in this period was primarily based on wartime political and diplomatic necessities as perceived by the British Government. With the assistance of the Ministry of Information and other government ministries, they produced films with a propaganda message aimed principally at the USA. *Contraband* exploits the diplomatic tension between Britain and Germany over the latter’s treatment of ships bringing vital supplies, establishes that the British checking of neutral shipping is regrettable but necessary, highlights the difference in tactics of the British and
German Governments, and implies that the enemy was supplying the Admiralty with false information in order to provoke a war between Britain and America. *49th Parallel* (initially funded by the Ministry of Information) was designed to persuade the United States to enter the war on Britain's side by revealing the true nature of the enemy. The Mol file entitled ‘Roman Catholic Section: Counteraction of German Religious Propaganda’ details the nature of the propaganda being disseminated to Catholic countries by the Nazis and the threat that it posed to Britain’s influence. This, I believe, is the reason there is so much emphasis on the Catholic faith of French-Canadian Johnnie in *49th Parallel* and on the Roman Catholic church's resistance to Nazism in *One of Our Aircraft is Missing*. Rather less subtle is the other propaganda point this latter film makes: justification of the British bombing of countries occupied by the enemy.

In *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, the propaganda is designed to justify Britain's behaviour in the past as well as the present. Through the Mol, Powell and Pressburger had seen a number of German propaganda films. *Ohm Krüger* would have alerted them to the need to defend the British Army's behaviour during the Boer War. The 1901 sequences set in London and Berlin defend the British use of camps in South Africa, while emphasising the humanity of the British tradition compared with the efficiency and military rigidity of the German. The presence of Major Van Zijl, as a Boer officer fighting on the British side in the First World War, implies that the British treatment of the Boers was not as bad as German propaganda suggested, while his pragmatism and duelling scar mark him as closer to the Germans in spirit. Theo's treatment in a British prisoner of war camp is represented as eminently humane, and the offers of assistance to get Germany 'on her feet again' at the end of that war appear to exonerate Britain from any blame for Germany's post-war financial collapse. In that war, also, the cooperation between British and American troops against a common enemy is emphasised. The Second World War sequences aim to show that the British Army has shuffled off Blimpery, is now thoroughly modern and enterprising, and will not endanger the lives of American soldiers.

In *A Canterbury Tale*, Anglo-American relations are demonstrated as amiable by the friendship between an American soldier, a British soldier and a Land Girl, and by the ease with which the American establishes friendly relations with the residents of the Kent village in which the film is set. Shared interests and the acknowledgement of a shared cultural inheritance are the cornerstones on which the friendships are based. The head of the Ministry of Information's Film Division, Jack Beddington, impressed by Powell and Pressburger's skilled and subtle use of propaganda, asked them for a film to improve deteriorating Anglo-American relations.
A Matter of Life and Death, like A Canterbury Tale, presents us with friendships based on mutual respect between British and American servicemen, but also demonstrates that love between the two nationalities is possible and justifiable. The argument in the trial scene hinges on outmoded American attitudes towards England: Farlan's prejudice against the English, in part demonstrated by his choice of jurors. Reeves' defence stresses the ideals shared by both Britain and America: the freedom of the individual provided by the democratic system, and a rich cultural heritage.

Pressburger's drafts, treatments and screenplays are invaluable for what they reveal of the development of the films and of the creative process within the Powell and Pressburger partnership. Some, especially The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp, indicate scrupulous research into authentic detail, and others, like A Canterbury Tale and Black Narcissus, include directions to the designer or cinematographer. Yet others demonstrate the shape the film was intended to have: the loop in time structure of Blimp; the end as a reflection of the beginning in A Canterbury Tale and Gone to Earth; and the Chinese box effect of One of Our Aircraft is Missing, where the text is enclosed within three separate frameworks. More interesting, perhaps, are the cuts and additions. The early versions of Confrabancf (entitled 'Blackmail') include a lengthy preamble which never made it to the screen, and the references to concentration camps in the 49th Parallel screenplay were cut, possibly because they were felt to be too strong for a then still neutral America. The published edition of the screenplay of Blimp, together with a notation of the film as it appears on the screen, makes clear just how much was cut and why. The combined credit, 'Written, Produced and Directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger', makes the division of responsibilities between the partners hard to unravel, but it would seem that Powell directed all the films in this period, Pressburger handled most of the production side, but both were involved in writing the screenplays and editing the films. It was, I believe, both in the writing of the screenplays and the editing process that the possibility of friction between the partners was most likely to occur, and the combination of the pencil draft, screenplay and novelisation of A Matter of Life and Death is invaluable for identifying cuts and additions (especially those made after the film went into production), which indicate some of the creative tensions between the partners.

Pressburger's diaries reveal some of the earlier differences of opinion that affected their partnership. He resented Powell's behaviour during their exploratory trip to Canada for 49th Parallel (accusing him of having 'dictator ambitions'), and he was unhappy, both with the changes made to the film's ending, and with the liberties taken with his screenplay by Leslie Howard. But other entries in his diaries for 1941 and 1942 illustrate the cooperation between
Pressburger and Powell on both the script and novelisation of *One of Our Aircraft is Missing*. The diaries also reveal many of the difficulties he experienced as an enemy alien, the frustrating attempts he made to obtain British citizenship (not granted until the war was over), and his passionate support and admiration for Winston Churchill. *The Volunteer*, possibly the most idiosyncratic film that Pressburger wrote during this period, was the one which Powell seemed to find the least compatible with his own ambitions. By the time they made *I Know Where I'm Going*, Pressburger had become something of a dictator himself and insisted on cutting some of the footage shot by Powell (whose accounts of the arguments between them on what should or should not be included in the finished film illustrate the division of creative responsibility within their professional relationship). Powell then proceeded to strip much of the fantasy from Pressburger's 'Pencil Draft' of *A Matter of Life and Death*, adding poetry, medical reasons for the hallucinations, time freezes, a camera obscura, and something not even in the 1945 screenplay: the rehearsal of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Their disagreement over which shoes Vicky should be wearing at the end of *The Red Shoes* ("It's the Red Shoes that are dancing her away to her death, and so she's got to be wearing them"/"Vicky cannot be wearing the Red Shoes when she runs out to commit suicide") was, Powell maintained, typical of their two functions and mentalities. But while claiming that Pressburger had the finer mind, he was dismissive of Pressburger's two solo efforts at production, calling *Twice Upon a Time* (1953) a 'piece of schmaltz', and labelling *Miracle in Soho* (1957) 'the kind of story and script from that period when plays like Molnar's *Liliom* and films like *Here Comes Mr Jordan* were going the rounds'. He analysed its mixture of fantasy, realism and mysticism, as a typically Central European, especially Hungarian, mixture that had been in evidence in *A Canterbury Tale*, in the curse laid upon the lairds of Kiloran in *IKWIG*, and most of all in *A Matter of Life and Death*. This clash of ideas on the use of fantasy in the visionary trilogy of films they made together is yet another illustration of the tension between the partners. It would appear that Pressburger was more inclined to represent the mystical, the visionary and the miraculous without the need to establish explicable causes for their manifestation, while Powell was more concerned with representing internal emotional realities by images alone, achieving telling touches of authenticity and transparent accuracy, and establishing a solid basis in reality for irrational behaviour, hallucinatory states, and fantastic narrative structures. The footage which Pressburger insisted should be cut from *I Know Where I'm Going* was intended to show the unspoken emotional link between Catriona and Torquil. Peter Carter's hallucinations in *A Matter of Life and Death* are based on sound medical reasons, and the hallucinatory sequence in *The Small Back*
Room was designed to demonstrate Sammy’s emotional dependency on whisky.

The fantasy in all of their films of this period, with whichever Archer it originated, resides both in the narrative content and the style of the cinematography. The narratives are based on reality but the characters in the narrative are often based on types, even stereotypes, rather than ‘real’ individuals. The six members of the crew of the German U-boat in 49th Parallel are types, as are the representatives of democratic freedom with whom they come in contact; like a morality play, it is a representation of the struggle between good and evil. In One of Our Aircraft is Missing, the six members of the crew of an English bomber are typified by provenance, religious affiliation and pre-war occupation, and the women’s characters in A Canterbury Tale are similarly established by their temporary wartime occupations. But the decision to take a two-dimensional cartoon character as the basis for the hero’s characterisation in Blimp throws into relief the question of using universally identifiable types. The woman in Clive’s life has to represent the changing role of women over a forty year period, and the screenplay’s cast list declines to give her a name, indicating her three manifestations only by occupations and dates. The ‘Guide to a Screenplay’ for A Matter of Life and Death, also identifies the main characters only by occupation or nationality, thereby reinforcing the impression that what these characters represented was, initially, more important than who they were. It is the directions in the screenplays on feelings, perceptions and motivations, as well as the actor’s performances in all these films, which give each character its warmth and individuality.

In The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp there were very personal reasons for the stereotypes to achieve individuality: Anton Walbrook (Theo), as an anglophile European Jewish refugee categorised as an enemy alien and desperate to contribute to Britain’s war effort against Nazi Germany, can be identified with Pressburger, while Powell later claimed to have completely identified with Clive Candy because the character was sentimental and loved women and dogs. But the individual still, for the most part, has to represent Everyman; an attitude, I would maintain, shared by both Pressburger and Powell. Just as the death of one man in Edge of the World represents the death of a whole community, the life or death of Peter Carter in A Matter of Life and Death represents all the British servicemen whose lives were lost, or miraculously saved, in the Second World War. But it was Pressburger who played more consciously with character representation. In the 1945 AMOLAD screenplay he presents two images of Farlan and of Reeves: first as caricatures of a stereotypical American and Englishman as they look at each other with prejudiced eyes; then, when they regard each other without prejudice, as the likable individuals that they really are. This was not in the finished
film, and I believe that the final screenplays and the shooting scripts were the result of much
discussion and compromise between Pressburger and Powell.

Some of the fantasy resides in the genres invoked and often parodied by these films,
which include elements of the spy thriller, of political and religious allegory, of the rural idyll and
of musical comedy and operetta. The depiction of apparently supernatural events in an
imaginary world would qualify as generically fantastic, as would another genre, the period film.
*Colonel Blimp*, as Christie has pointed out, is a fantasy of history, in which historical realities are
used to weave a narrative that is a nostalgic reworking of a vanished past, and contemporary
realities are used to present a somewhat over-optimistic view of the preparedness of the
British Army in 1942 to face the harsh realities of total warfare. Much of the fantasy, however, is
indicated by the style of the cinematography. Although Powell and Pressburger used realism
as the basis for all their films of this period, their use of other stylistic devices, such as
expressionism, naturalism and surrealism, followed a specific trajectory over the course of the
war.

There are shots in *The Spy in Black* and *Contraband* which pay homage to the German
Expressionism of many films made by Fritz Lang or featuring Conrad Veidt. They are spy
thrillers (similar to Hitchcock’s *The 39 Steps* and *The Lady Vanishes*), which conform to the
genre’s inherent fantasy and convoluted plots but are tempered by the realities of the war that
was about to engulf most of Europe: in one case by the uncanny prescience of its storyline; in
the other by the chance to exploit the conditions that the declaration of war had created. When
the ‘phony war’ ended in 1940, everyday life became charged with dramatic significance, and
Powell and Pressburger moved closer to documentary realism. It was a movement shared by
many other feature film makers (Thorold Dickinson’s *Next of Kin* was released in 1942; the
next year saw Launder and Gilliat’s *Millions Like Us* and Anthony Asquith’s *We Dive at
Dawn*, and 1944 Carol Reed’s *The Way Ahead*). In *49th Parallel* there is extensive use of
location shooting and of real people instead of actors (the native Indians and Inuits in Canada,
and the German refugees from Hitler who acted as extras for the Hutterite scenes in the
studio). The location footage has a grainy and realistic appearance, which gives it the
authenticity of newsreel footage (somewhat at odds with the smoother and blander effect of
the sequences shot in the studio). The initial sequences in *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* are
similar to Harry Watt’s *Target for Tonight*, but though the film begins in the style of
documentary realism, its development is that of a conventional narrative, the multiple framing
devices ensuring that audiences are aware of being given only the illusion of reality. This was,
however, the period when Powell and Pressburger came closest to adopting the
documentary aesthetic. Arthur Elton claimed that Pressburger's pictures had been deeply
influenced by the documentary movement's realist techniques, and, in 1941, Powell defended
the representation of the grim reality of war in feature films, declaring that they had to be in
touch with present-day life and should not pander to escapism.

Both Powell and Pressburger had exploited forms of documentary realism in some of their
early work for the cinema. Although Pressburger's *Emil und die Detective* (1931) and *Dann
Schon Leiber Lebertran* (1931) demonstrated his preoccupation with fantasy, *Abschied*
(1930) and *Eine von Uns (Gigli)* (1932) proved that he was quite capable of producing
scripts which dealt with the contemporary reality of some aspects of life in the Berlin of the
Weimar Republic. And though Powell's film-making career began with Rex Ingram, whose
*Mare Nostrum* he declared had left him with little taste for 'kitchen-sink' drama, some of the films
he wrote and directed during the thirties did include a measure of social realism. *The Fire
Raisers* (1933) and *The Red Ensign* (1934) dealt with topical realities and had storylines
based on contemporary news headlines, and his most ambitious film of the period, *The Edge
of the World* (1937), was again based on contemporary reality. Despite his argument that it
would not be a documentary but a drama using actors mixed with real people, his concern to
have a sound basis of reality for his flights of imagination shows that he shared some of the
aims of documentary realism. This does not mean, however, that either Pressburger or Powell
were completely committed to the kind of social realism espoused by the more dedicated
members of the documentary movement, only that they were determined to pursue their
'truth' in whatever form would most effectively transmit their message to an audience.

Although Powell said he had decided on 'complete naturalism' for *One of Our Aircraft is
Missing*, it was a claim he did not make for *The Small Back Room*, even though he repeated
the seemingly naturalistic device of using (with one exception) only sounds and music
generated from sources within the narrative. By 1949 his position on naturalism had been well
articulated. He promoted Independent Frame as an anti-naturalistic revolution in 1944,
contrasted naturalism unfavourably with illusionism in 1947, asserted that it was not
economically viable in 1972, and, in the second volume of his autobiography, railed against
the naturalistic element of Heckroth's studio sets for *Gone to Earth* because he hated simulated
exterior scenes in the studio. But his reaction against naturalism probably began in the year he
directed the film which came closest to complete naturalism.

1941 was the crucial year of change. After working with Olivier on *49th Parallel*, Powell and
Pressburger cast actors from the legitimate theatre in both *One Of Our Aircraft is Missing* and
*The Silver Fleet* (Ralph Richardson, Pamela Brown, Joyce Redman and Robert Helpmann
had all played at the Old Vic, as had Olivier and Vivien Leigh). It was the year that Powell
directed his first production for the stage (Jan de Hertog’s Skipper Next to God), and it was in
1941 that the ballet became the primary site of Neo-Romantic painting, and Helpmann began
to develop his mime-dramas at Sadler’s Wells (the first of which was Comus, a modification of
Milton’s masque). In December of that year, Pressburger indicated that he wanted to buy his
original screenplay of The Red Shoes, and though Vivien Leigh may have been one of the
reasons for renewed interest in the screenplay, Powell’s friendship with Helpmann would have
been an equally compelling reason for plans to make a film about ballet. It may also have
been Helpmann’s influence that led to so many of the sequences in The Life and Death of
Colonel Blimp being choreographed like a musical comedy or operetta.

From 1942 onwards, Powell and Pressburger, as Rank’s first Independent Producers, were
in a position to embrace a more personal style of film-making sooner than most other film
makers in Britain. The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp makes idiosyncratic use of historical and
contemporary realities, and the tapestry that provides the backdrop to the credit titles,
together with Allan Gray’s musical leitmotifs, indicate the style and mood of the film: ridicule of
outmoded chivalry in a time of total war, paradoxically combined with nostalgia for that more
chivalrous and romantic age. It is conjured up with a meticulously accurate representation of
each period’s manners, modes of address and values, with Technicolor used artistically to suit
the period being portrayed: rose-tinted for the 1901 sequences in London and Berlin;
expressionist for the landscape reduced to the colour of mud, and men to the colour of their
uniforms, on the battlefields of the First World War. In A Canterbury Tale there is
expressionist use of light and shadow in the blackout sequences at the beginning and with the
single intense beam of light that penetrates the darkness of the Elizabeth Room at “The Hand
of Glory, and I Know Where I’m Going”'s cinematography delights in the misty half-lights and
shadows of the Western Isles. Stylistically, both films employ a form of mystical realism.

Whereas the surrealist touches in IKWIG and The Volunteer are almost tongue-in-cheek, A
Matter of Life and Death exploits Surrealism both in content and style. Its two realities, internal
and external, form the basis of apparently contradictory states which are melded together, so
that life and death, the real and the imaginary, the past and the future, are no longer perceived
as contradictions. June’s willingness to sacrifice her life to save Peter’s and his agony at the
prospect of losing her, prove that their love for each other is deep and enduring, and his
survival indicates the victory of desire. In The Red Shoes, Heckroth’s designs for ‘The Ballet of
the Red Shoes’ are stylistically indebted to Surrealist painting, and most of that ballet is a
surreal presentation of what passes through the dancer’s mind as she is dancing, a fantasy of
the life of artistic creation. And the subdued expressionism of *The Small Back Room* is temporarily fractured by a surreal, Dali-esque sequence to indicate Sammy's dependence on whisky and his lover. I am not, however, contending that Surrealism was of value to Powell and Pressburger in its own right. In *The Tales of Hoffmann*, for example, the four acts are defined by their décor, and surrealism has to share the stylistic credit with expressionism, classicism and mock-gothic. Surrealism was, however, one of the major influences on Neo-Romanticism, the artistic movement which came to dominate the content and style of most of the films made by Powell and Pressburger from 1942 onwards.

Neo-Romanticism embraced poems by Edith Sitwell and Dylan Thomas, plays by Samuel Beckett and T.S. Eliot, drawings and paintings by Graham Sutherland and John Piper, and films by Humphrey Jennings, Alberto Cavalcanti and Carol Reed, but its most sustained cinematic exploitation was by Powell and Pressburger. A renewed concentration on Christian values was a wartime phenomenon which influenced some Neo-Romantic artists, and *A Canterbury Tale*, inspired by Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, is concerned with spiritual values, specifically Christian values. It centres on the blessings and penance received by four modern pilgrims when they reach Canterbury. The shadow of the blessed martyr, Thomas à Beckett, lies (metaphorically) over the scenes in Canterbury Cathedral, while the ghosts of the Canterbury Pilgrims haunt the road that leads to it. And it combines spiritual values with the kind of homage paid to English landscape and architecture which had been established by the Neo-Romantic painter, John Piper. *Colonel Blimp* presents the English countryside and its country houses as symbols of cultural importance, and *I Know Where I'm Going* celebrates the landscape of the Western Isles, its people and its language. All three films are, to some extent, faithful records of landscape and architecture, which romanticise the present and its links with the past, while acknowledging the need for change. *A Matter of Life and Death*, as well as reminding us of the English cultural heritage of playwrights and poets, displays the landscape of Devon and one of its stately homes in glorious Technicolor, while giving an intimation of our place in the universe and of a possible life after death. But *The Red Shoes* was the film in which Powell and Pressburger's Neo-Romantic inclinations were first realised most completely, by the uniting of music, movement, colour and design into an artistically and emotionally satisfying whole. This film was also part of The Archers' trilogy (the others being *Black Narcissus* and *Gone to Earth*), in which a passionate woman plunges to her death. These films, together with *The Small Back Room*, indicate a sense of post-war apocalyptic despair similar to that evident in Carol Reed's *Odd Man Out* (1947), *The Fallen Idol* (1948), and *The Third Man* (1949), and Cavalcanti's *They*
Made Me a Fugitive (1947).

The Red Shoes was inspired by Hans Christian Andersen's fairy story, and fairy stories, like myths, epics, legends and morality plays, are designed to convey universal truths rather than everyday realities. The film's basic reality is the team-work of those who create the ballet, a reality distilled to give the audience a glimpse of the company's dedication to art as to a religion. But the film exploits another kind of reality. The staging of 'The Ballet of the Red Shoes', initially realistic, quickly becomes pure cinema, presented to us as a work of the imagination showing the emotional images in the dancer's mind. This internal reality was also rendered in The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp, by having Clive Candy's three loves played by the same actress. Clive habitually deludes himself by imaginary perceptions; by casting the same actress to play all three of the women in his life, we share his emotional viewpoint and perceive them as he does, a transferable identity that may exist only in his mind, his ideal embodiment of woman. We are encouraged to be aware that an individual's perception of reality (promoted by desire) may override logic. In I Know Where I'm Going, Joan's emotional turmoil is represented to us by the imagery of her dreams and, symbolically, by the maelstrom which prevents her reaching her avowed destination. Powell also wanted to convey to the audience, by images alone, the love felt by Catriona for Torquil, the emotional reality which lies beneath surface impressions. And in A Canterbury Tale, the representation of internal reality embraces sound as well as vision. When Alison reaches the bend of the Old Road to Canterbury and hears the pilgrims, they are the sounds she was predisposed to hear by Colpeper's lecture, sounds which do not exist in real time, but somewhere else on time's wavelength, like the snatches of radio broadcasts in the prologue to A Matter of Life and Death.

It is A Matter of Life and Death which most skilfully plays with our perception of both external and internal reality. We are told at the beginning that it is the story of two worlds, 'the one we know and another which exists only in the mind of a young airman whose life and imagination have been violently shaped by war'. By providing a medical reason for Peter Carter's highly organised hallucinations, the film is anchored to reality, and by making those hallucinations take place in space, not time, the Other World is established as timeless and eternal, a realm where almost nothing changes, whereas our world is seen as specific and particular and ruled by time's tyranny. The film is based on our perception of two separate worlds of illusion presented to us as equally real, one in colour and one in monochrome, with our perception of the relative reality and fantasy of each world complicated by colour being used for the 'real world', and monochrome for the 'Other World'. A further complication is
created by the representation of the 'Other World' as not completely subordinate to the 'real
world'. On one level we are aware that both worlds are illusory, while submitting to the
temptation to see one or other (or both) as manifestations of reality.

Underpinning this playful exploitation of modes of representation, however, is a very
potent reality: the experience of living through, and surviving, the Second World War. The
concepts of surviving and winning, of millions of lives sacrificed, of life and death no longer
being great contradictions but just facts, of an enormous holocaust, are the thematic basis of A
Matter of Life and Death. Its message is universal and eternal, yet of a particular time and
place. Peter Carter is both a warm and identifiable individual and a representative of all those
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Two Crowded Hours (1931). d. Michael Powell; w. J. Jefferson Farjeon.


The Volunteer (1943). d/p/w. Michael Powell, Emeric Pressburger. **


Words for Battle (1941). d. Humphrey Jennings. *


Young and Innocent (1937). d. Alfred Hitchcock; w. Charles Bennett, Alma Reville.

* Viewing copies held at the Imperial War Museum, Department of Film.

** Viewing copies held at the National Film Archive.