***La France à l’heure Anglaise*: Embodied Timescapes and Occupied Landscapes in**

**Storm Jameson’s *Cloudless May***

Beryl Pong, University of Cambridge

‘In no way dare we who were in Britain compare ourselves with the French’, Elizabeth Bowen wrote in 1945.[[1]](#endnote-1) The frustrations and horrors of occupation precluded some British authors from writing fiction about an experience they have not yet had, although many feared they would. Others were more bitter, as France’s capitulation to Germany appeared hasty to them after one month of intense fighting. Now partially displaced from the Allied cause, the country fractured into a German occupation zone in the north and west, and a smaller Italian occupation zone in the southeast. Writers had a difficult time reconciling the ambivalent position of simultaneously fighting for, and against, the French nation.

A longstanding and vocal pacifist, Storm Jameson is an exception to the relative lack of British writing about occupied France. She was a prolific writer of fiction, journalism, and many reviews and essays, though her oeuvre is not always consistent; as several critics have pointed out, her early novels are unsophisticated relative to her later work, and financial pressures often forced upon her the necessity of ‘writing too much and too quickly’.[[2]](#endnote-2) But Jameson’s writing would become increasingly political, and by the interwar years, she was already producing texts that envisaged and warned against a future of fascism. Most notably, *In the Second Year* (1936), set in the future of England 1942, offers a disturbing critique of those who approved of what came to be known as appeasement.

While Jameson’s decades-long involvement with P.E.N. (Poets, Essayists and Novelists) has received critical attention, and while scholarship has examined her feminist as well as political activism overall, very few, sustained analyses have been made on her novel about wartime France, *Cloudless May* (1943).[[3]](#endnote-3) This is still a little-known work by a writer who still remains on the margins. Where *In the Second Year* draws its power from a chilling foreshadowing of fascism, *Cloudless May*’s primary mode is that of retrospective anticipation. Conceived between May 1941 and March 1943, the novel goes back to the country on the eve of her surrender to gather sympathy and support from a primarily British readership. On one hand, retrospective anticipation generates pathos from the reader’s knowledge of France’s inevitable occupation. On the other hand, it is used as a strategy to garner backing for the Allies’ impending invasion of Normandy a year later in 1944. And while the novel takes place almost entirely in France, itis as much about wartime in another country as it is about the author’s own.

 Jameson had a lifelong fascination with France and French culture and history; one of her strongest proponents, Jennifer Birkett, has on several occasions mined the way they shaped Jameson’s work in the 1930s, thematically and stylistically.[[4]](#endnote-4) Jameson’s influences include Balzac, Giraudoux, and Stendhal, and aspects of French realist fiction can be found in *Cloudless May*, a novel that, according to Chiara Briganti, is similar to ‘la simultanéité narrative’ in France in depicting a synoptic cross-section of French society.[[5]](#endnote-5) Here, though, I am more interested in the inverse side of this cultural relationship as it unravels in wartime. Focusing on Jameson’s treatment of soon-to-be-occupied France, I argue that *Cloudless May* is informed by understandings of place, identity, and national chronology that were strongly resonant in the British cultural imagination of the period.[[6]](#endnote-6) As a political project to bring the two countries closer together, the novel fleshes out the psychological as well as material connections between inhabitant and home, individual and landscape. Therefore, while Jameson’s novel is a ‘community-centred’ rather than ‘subject-centred’ text, as Jean-Christophe Murat has it, I also think that Jameson, far from undermining her characters’ subjectivism, *uses* it in service of communalism.[[7]](#endnote-7) The novel’s very political vision and sense of redemptory collectivism relies on the intimate and highly personal interactions between individual, community, and place, however abstracted they may seem. These are the ties that bring characters to one another and bind them to their country—and that, in Jameson’s larger scheme, link France to Britain.

This article first examines the historical-cultural dynamics whereby the relationship between war, temporality, and nationhood are realised, particularly in international time zone changes, and in filmic representations of Britain’s national chronology during the Second World War. It then suggests that by conjoining representations of temporality, geography, and phenomenology, *Cloudless May* reaches out to its readers by highlighting an embodiment of space and time. The deep connection between people, history, and landscape has long been central to discourses surrounding England’s own national identity, not least with Stanley Baldwin’s famous declaration that ‘England is the country, and the country is England’.[[8]](#endnote-8) During the Second World War, this relationship was prominently espoused, since a sense of national, temporal continuity was seen to be threatened by its rupture in wartime by Nazism and fascism. At a political juncture when identification between Britain and France was most needed, Jameson’s book responds to certain issues that proliferated in the cultural consciousness of the day: the apparent misalignment of France with the Allied cause, and the war as the dislocation of national continuity. Ultimately, *Cloudless May* stages a complicated interaction between ideas of regionalism, nationalism, and internationalism to depict the loss of chronology as a collective, rather than domestic, anxiety. It is a salient example of how one writer reconciled geopolitical and artistic concerns to fashion together a form of politically-engaged, experimental writing in the late modernism of the Second World War.

**War Time Zones and Allied Temporal Guardianship**

Nowhere is the relationship between war, temporality, and nationhood more apparent than in shifts in time zones during a period of conflict. Since World War I, the history of time zone changes is intertwined with the history of warfare. In 1916, Summer Time, also called Daylight Saving Time, was first instigated when European countries adopted the change to conserve resources like fuel and electricity. At 11pm on 20 April 1916, Germany and Austria advanced their clocks by one hour, and *Sommerzeit* was in effect until the following October. Britain followed suit three weeks later, passing the Summer Time Act and entering Daylight Saving Time on 21 May 1916 at 2am.[[9]](#endnote-9) *The Times* opined in response, endorsing the time change, that Daylight Saving Time would ‘help to defeat the inevitable economic consequences of black-out…. by saving every possible moment of daylight for the conduct of the nation’s business’.[[10]](#endnote-10)

Seen as strategies that contributed to the war effort, shifts in time zones were similarly implemented during the Second World War. Britain, notably, experienced the phenomenon known as the unique time zone of British Double Summer Time. Between 1940 and 1945, clocks were moved forward twice a year in February and May, and backward twice a year in August and November. This was the first instance of its kind in British history.[[11]](#endnote-11)

When France joined Britain and Germany in adopting Daylight Saving Time in World War I, it was called *l’heure d’été* to Britain’s Summer Time and Germany’s *Sommerzeit*. At the beginning of World War II, France resisted following *l’heure d’été*, opting to follow standard time instead, which was referred to as Paris Mean Time.[[12]](#endnote-12) But after the country asked for armistice on 17 June 1940, it was obliged to follow a German-imposed summer timetable. One of the measures that Germany forced on occupied nations was the adoption of its own time, *Mitteleuropäische Zeit* or *MEZ* (equivalent to Central European Time), and *Mitteleuropäische Sommerzeit* or *MESZ* (Central European Summer Time). After capitulation, France trailed the footsteps of occupied Holland, which took up Germany’s time on 19 May 1940.[[13]](#endnote-13) While there were French loyalists who clung to the old French time, which was two hours behind the Berlin-based time, France was officially on Germany’s time zone by 1941.

The loss of national time or ‘French Time’—its secession to ‘German Time’—became a metaphor for the loss of a specifically French way of life, forcibly replaced by a foreign way of life. The title of Philippe Burrin’s history of that period, *La France à l’heure Allemande* (1995), is an evocative reference to that perception, although this meaning is lost in its American and British translations.[[14]](#endnote-14) As Burrin writes, ‘The enemy set the rules for daily life, even upset the temporal order: no sooner were they ensconced than the invaders imposed their own summer time.’[[15]](#endnote-15) The notion of being French on German time involved waiting ‘for a superior force to bring liberation and to reset the clock…. as they saw it, the French had to resign themselves to living in the German hour.’[[16]](#endnote-16) The moment of defeat was disruptive to their daily routines, and devastating to the country’s morale and sense of national chronology.

Across the channel, the day following the French armistice, Winston Churchill countered news of this temporal rupture by declaring that it would be ‘their finest hour’ should the British repel the Axis forces and win the war thereon after. Projecting futurity onto his country at the moment when another was losing its own, he exemplified the common attitude of politically-minded Britons that involved such optimistic, forward-looking prognoses. From Churchill’s speeches to J. B. Priestley’s radio broadcasts, one of the most significant characteristics of wartime propaganda was ‘its orientation toward the future.’[[17]](#endnote-17) Priestley’s broadcast on 5 June 1940, immediately after the Allied evacuation of Dunkirk, for example, couches that event in the rhetoric of triumph and anticipatory retrospection by imagining the future’s placid gaze onto the present. When future generations ‘learn how we began this war by snatching glory out of defeat and then swept on to victory, [they] may also learn how the little holiday steamers made an excursion to hell and came back glorious,’ he said.[[18]](#endnote-18) The war was part of a knowable transition into a future of victory and posterity.

The idea that war caused the rupture of national continuity and history proliferated in Britain in the lead-up to the Second World War, although its outbreak fed and exacerbated such anxieties. The cultural phenomenology of the 1930s and 1940s emphasised British history as the slow accumulation of centuries of civilisation, which was now about to be swept away. The nation’s past and future appeared at risk of being obliterated in an instant by Nazism—whether abstractly in the form of ideology or physically in the form of a bomb. From *Picture Post*’s photographs, which often focused on ruins or bomb damage of historic structures, to Bill Brandt’s photographs for the National Buildings Record, which similarly took long-standing heritage sites as their subject matter, the visual media of wartime insisted that national chronology was the very target under enemy fire.[[19]](#endnote-19)

Popular films of the time also complemented such ideas. The works of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, in particular, provided long tracking shots of the British landscape to mediate on the intertwining of time, national identity, and the natural environment. In addition to *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943) and *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946), *A Canterbury Tale* (1944), especially, drives home the wartime threat to this relationship. A film designed to visualise, in Powell’s words, ‘why we fight,’ its opening scenes cut between a medieval pilgrim and a modern-day soldier, between a soaring hawk in the past and a fighter plane in the present. It encapsulates how wartime interrupts temporal continuity, how the present inflicts violence upon the rest of history. [[20]](#endnote-20)

War’s intrusion into the relationship between history, time, and landscape is most manifest in the GPO-commissioned documentary, *Words for Battle* (1941). Directed by Humphrey Jennings, the film juxtaposes images of untouched bucolic landscapes alongside centuries of English literary culture, through Laurence Olivier’s narration of poetry from Milton, Browning, Kipling, and Blake. This historic, national continuum is then interrupted by scenes of rolling tanks and bombed streets, ending a long-standing pastoral peace. Accompanying the disruption are the words of Abraham Lincoln from the Gettysburg address, as he resolves, through the voice of Olivier, that the ‘government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.’ Beginning with pastoral harmony and ending with wartime jingoism, the film renders the conflict as a fight for national chronology. And while many literary texts paralleled this rhetorical assemblage of national identity, few mirror the aesthetics of *Words for Battle* as much as Collie Knox’s *For Ever England* (1943). An anthology of poetry and prose that again uses England as a substitute for Britain, Knox presents a coherent package of what ‘Englishness’ means by consolidating quotes from various epochs, including literature by Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Kipling, and Browning, and speeches by Churchill, Asquith, and Disraeli.[[21]](#endnote-21)

What is remarkable about *Words for Battle* is the explicitness with which the film aligns Britain’s vulnerable chronology with that of her Allies and would-be Allies. ‘What was at risk, it seems, was not just human life or property but temporal continuity. War gave Britain a chance to represent itself (to itself and—crucially—to America) as the guardian of time’, Kitty Hauser observes.[[22]](#endnote-22) Hauser has explored ways in which wartime representations of the British landscape appealed to America, but how this in turn obscured ‘horrified accounts of unplanned development and documentary images of urban deprivation’ from the 1930s: a decade when many saw urbanisation and modernisation as conditions that severed the country from a romantic past.[[23]](#endnote-23) The wartime characterisation of Britain as a ‘guardian of time’ is thus a strategic one that restores coherence to a chronology that was already somewhat displaced.

Jennings’s film is part of a larger project in British propaganda that spoke directly to the United States to draw the latter into the war. Churchill’s ‘finest hour’ speech, delivered six months before Pearl Harbor, pointedly includes America in Britain’s guardianship of time: ‘if we fail, then the whole world, including the United States, including all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new dark age.’[[24]](#endnote-24) Brandt’s photographs of London’s bomb shelters for the Ministry of Information were sent to Washington to help the other visualize war’s impacts. In film, *Words for Battle*’s ventriloquising of Lincoln is not unlike the cross-cultural deployment of American journalist Quentin Reynolds to narrate Jennings’s other popular documentary, *Britain Can Take It* (1940).[[25]](#endnote-25) And by the time of *A Canterbury Tale* in 1944, a real-life American sergeant (John Sweet, who was serving in the U. K. when he was spotted by Powell) would become one of the main characters in joining two English characters on their pilgrimage to Canterbury Cathedral.

While British films concentrated on presenting temporal alignment with America, the country’s relationship with France languished since the armistice. In literature, the tensions between the two countries are cogently realised in Arthur Gwynn-Browne’s *Gone for a Burton* (1945), whose depiction of this alliance inspires little confidence. The plot involves a British bomber that is shot down in Vichy France, and the crew’s efforts to escape reveal the French as unreliable and suspicious allies, and the British themselves as nearly incapable of withstanding the stress of being behind enemy lines. Unsurprisingly, the book was finished in 1943 but denied publication until 1945, well after D-Day, when victory seemed imminent.[[26]](#endnote-26) During the war, stories of this kind were typically spun on their heads for more morale-boosting consumption. As Rod Mengham points out, Gwynn-Browne’s plot is almost identical to the popular Powell and Pressburger film *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* (1942). In the latter, though, the British bomber goes down in a Dutch community, and its members ‘are looked after by an efficiently organized Resistance cell’ who are then ‘spirited away to freedom with a renewed faith in their allies.’[[27]](#endnote-27)

To go back to the moment of France’s surrender, one film that does deal with its uncertain political aftermath is the GPO Film Unit Production *Britain at Bay* (1940). Produced immediately after the fall of France, it is conspicuously positive in its treatment of the country. Like many propaganda films of the time, it prioritises British values by focusing on British landscapes, and it again highlights British history as one of continuity that is disrupted by wartime. Priestley’s commentary begins:

For nearly a thousand years, these hills and fields and farmsteads of Britain have been free from foreign invasion. They’ve not even known civil war for close to two hundred years. We have been a fortunate people…. until there suddenly came upon us the menace of war.

The film then draws attention to the plight of France, noting that the ‘Nazi Machine’ operated ‘at expense of decencies and amenities of civilised life’, so that ‘it compelled the [French] government to ask for armistice.’ The film is propagandistic and primarily focused on Britain, but it also makes a point of putting France in a sympathetic light. Together, it asserts, the two countries are engaged in an effort to salvage civilisation itself, which must not end with France’s collapse.

*Britain at Bay* is a tentative attempt at presenting joint temporal guardianship between Britain and France, and this endeavour most characterises Jameson’s novel three years later. As George Orwell said of his country in 1940, somewhat sardonically: ‘Yes, there *is* something distinctive and recognizable in English civilization.... it is continuous, it stretches into the future and the past, there is something in it that persists, as in a living creature.’[[28]](#endnote-28) In the political rhetoric of the day, England oftentimes stood for Britain as a whole, problematically.[[29]](#endnote-29) Nevertheless, Orwell’s description would be a remarkably apposite one for Jameson’s portrait of France in *Cloudless May*, as the impending loss of an organic, national ‘French Time’ constitutes the very core of the narrative.

**‘Europe in England and England in Europe’: International regionalism in *Cloudless May***

Informed by a strong global outlook throughout most of her life, Jameson began humanitarian work with P.E.N. in 1922, after the death of her brother Harold during the Great War. In tandem with P.E.N.’s evolution from literary dining club to proponent of freedom of expression, Jameson became increasingly interested in writing activist fiction. In 1935, she summarised her concern in the relationship between Europe and England thus: ‘I am a Little Englander on one side (the left—the side of the heart) and on the other I try to be a good European’.[[30]](#endnote-30) Although the term ‘Little Englander’ later took on connotations of narrow patriotism, Jameson used it to mean, as it did originally, someone who was anti-imperialist and who supported England as one jurisdiction within the United Kingdom. [[31]](#endnote-31)

When she became President of P.E.N. England at the outbreak of World War II, Jameson’s urgent belief in the reciprocal interrelations between Britain and Europe led her to organise an international conference in 1941. She helped to assemble a gathering of writers in London, and it was attended by members of P.E.N. from England as well as other branches of Europe who lived in the capital; London was often the destination for those refugee intellectuals and émigrés she helped to resettle. At the conference, Jameson described the political and cultural co-dependency of Britain and Europe in the very terms of temporal survival and guardianship elucidated above:

Here we are and here we intend to remain, Europe in England and England in Europe…. The agony of this war must give birth to a new and better Europe, and it is up to writers to create the vision of this better Europe, to keep it before the eyes of the men and women who are fighting and enduring, so that they don’t lose faith and in losing faith lose heart, and in losing heart lose England, lose Europe, lose the future.[[32]](#endnote-32)

Speaking to an international coterie that represented ‘Europe in England and England in Europe’, Jameson openly highlights her distress about war in terms of its implications and resonances for British politics, even the future of Englishness itself, but she celebrates internationalism equally. Squaring nationalist sentiment with internationalist rhetoric, Jameson’s balancing act between Englishness and Europeanness marks one of the ways in which she attempted to bring the war on the continent to the home front.

Her view of Anglo-European relations is in part a response to the feeling of newfound insularity from Britain’s ‘anthropological turn’ in the 1930s. According to Jed Esty, in the period of late modernism, England began turning inward to question her own status and history in an increasingly globalised setting, and ‘a new *national-cultural* mediation of the universal and the local’ emerged.[[33]](#endnote-33) As England faced national crisis, some writers began to be less concerned with aestheticism as a priority, instead retrenching themselves in discourses surrounding English culture, English identity, and the meaning of Englishness itself. Jameson does exhibit a provincialism that counterpoints her internationalist work, particularly in her earlier texts, which are clustered around northeast Yorkshire where she grew up. Her political messages in the 1930s and 1940s, though, are striking for their engagement with cosmopolitan internationalism. She poses questions of a precisely national-cultural kind that ask how England, and Britain more generally, might fit within the larger, globalised sphere. Rather than withdrawing into domestic insularity, as Esty argues of the late works of Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster, and T. S. Eliot, Jameson incites political awareness and engagement. For her, England, Europe, and ‘the future’ are one. This commitment to internationalism is clear in *Cloudless May*, which goes to extraordinary lengths to create an empathetic portrait of a country seemingly fallen from political grace.

Set in the weeks leading up to the German victory, the novel presents the fictional town of Seuilly, which is geographically close to Saumur in the Loire valley, as a ‘sounding’ for France as a whole.[[34]](#endnote-34) ‘Soundings’, Jameson says, is a way in which the microcosmic might express the macrocosmic. The novelist ‘must wrestle faithfully… with the life of his age…. If he cannot deal with the whole contemporary scene he can take soundings in it’.[[35]](#endnote-35) As she interprets the term, soundings enable the reader and writer to gain insight into a problem, issue, or crisis by inspecting a sample community or specimen through which the larger entity might be seen or understood. In the case of *Cloudless May*, a ‘sounding’ not only allows for the representation of Seuilly as France-in-miniature; it also enables Jameson to describe and emphasise specificities of topography and place.

Many critics have identified Jameson’s sensitivity to the contours of regional and provincial landscapes as a key aesthetic of her fiction. David James, for example, has argued that Jameson, alongside Sylvia Townsend Warner and Rosamond Lehmann, moved between the legacies of the avant-garde and a need for social engagement. She often sets her interwar narratives in provincial landscapes, all the while incorporating the modernist experimentalism that is typically associated with the urban scene.[[36]](#endnote-36) In his analysis of her novel *A Day Off* (1933), which takes place in the metropolis, James explores how Jameson reconciles the complexities of ‘locatedness’ and the cosmopolitan aesthetics of mobility by imaginatively superimposing different landscapes: the regional one of the protagonist’s past with the urban one of her present.[[37]](#endnote-37) Quoting from F. W. Morgan, he highlights a distinguishing feature of provincial writing as ‘that of the absorption in a particular locality: absorption and not merely interest’.[[38]](#endnote-38) By the wartime writing of *Cloudless May* a decade later, this element of provincial writing would be reincarnated for very different purposes. The two topoi now being superimposed, albeit implicitly, are not those of the provincial and the urban, but the regionalism of France and the regionalism of Britain. A sort of ‘international regionalism’ thus takes place in the novel, where the intense absorption in the locale of Seuilly is meant to evoke the same kind of absorption in the English landscape that characterised the British cultural consciousness. Therefore, while several of Jameson’s contemporaneous novels take for their subject matter a changing rural way of life, they do not have the same distinctive thematic and formal ambitions of *Cloudless May*. Here, modernist experimentalism is applied to another country’s rural scene with a geopolitical agenda.

In highly affecting and affective terms, Jameson fleshes out the deep and ineluctable relationship between history and landscape, inhabitant and home, through the characters’ phenomenological intimacy with their surroundings. This comes through in her treatment of Émile Bergeot, the well-meaning but misguided Prefect of Seuilly. Bergeot is torn between his love for the town and his love for Marguerite de Freppel, who tries to convince him to leave for someplace safer, where their fortunes would not be ruined in the event of defeat. As he thinks through his options, the depth of his feeling for Seuilly, and for France as a whole, is described as a unique familiarity with the town’s materiality:

The centuries-old walls of France can still ripen a superb fruit….

.... If only he could embrace the town, with its old houses, churches, barracks, its bridges across the Loire, its sun. He felt under his hand on the wall of the embankment the veins starting off to join it to all the other towns and villages of France and to the living wall of men on the frontier, placing between themselves and an invader their memories of just such days as this, just such houses as that one with its shabby iron balconies and narrow door, just such a light, firm, bounding, as was falling on all the rivers of the only flawlessly human country in the world.[[39]](#endnote-39)

The passage moves from the individual, to the collective, and back to the individual again. What begins as a specific, personal connection with the landscape develops into a communal, shared experience, as Bergeot’s touch enables tactile communication with the entire French landscape. The pulse in his veins connects him to a national heartbeat, and his bodily empathy enables him to imagine all the other villages of France in a psychophysical embrace. Jameson grounds Seuilly as the conduit through which Bergeot knows his country; it is only through the embankment wall, and through the precise dance made by the sunlight on the local river, that he can access the national.

The style in this passage is characteristic of the way Jameson writes throughout the entire book: elongated, descriptive sentences that connect place to time, subject to home, through an aesthetic of textual immersion. The style bears out Raymond Williams’s well-known argument that the provinces are seen less in terms of cartography, and more as ‘social, generational, and familial structures of feeling that a given community develops with its surroundings over time’.[[40]](#endnote-40) Williams sees the lived experience of the provinces as an affective one, wherein the communal and the personal intersect. In country writing, he states, ‘what we have then to see… is not just the reality of the rural community; it is the observer’s position in and towards it; a position which is part of the community being known’. [[41]](#endnote-41) What is being shown to us is not just Seuilly, but Seuilly as seen, felt, experienced, and lived by a person who wholly belongs to it.

More germane to our discussion about Jameson’s formal innovations, her emphatic evocation of sights, smells, and sounds, as telescoped through the subject, has hints of the Proustian and the Woolfian. While invoking aspects of high modernist style, her writing conjures up and aggregates a group identity and history, instead of prioritising individual psychology. For although Jameson is often read through the lens of the middlebrow in her desire to cater to all levels of readership, she was not polemically anti-modernist. In her book about the state of the modern novel, *The Georgian Novel and Mr. Robinson* (1929)—a text written in the tradition of Woolf’s *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* (1923), and itself conveyed in topographical metaphors of ‘the countryside of modern fiction’—Jameson expressed admiration for high modernism even if she had reservations about its apparent limitations in ‘Story’ and plot. [[42]](#endnote-42) She does take into consideration worries that modernist aestheticism might deprive the reader of self-awareness and social-moral direction, leaving him ‘with something so fluid and nebulous that it will slip through his fingers altogether and leave him staring at the pattern made by the sunlight on the floor of the room.’ [[43]](#endnote-43) But she also believes that future masterpieces cannot but incorporate modernist style and combine both Victorian and Georgian modes. Future fiction ‘will take the form we shall recognise as that which traditionally belongs to the novel. But the spirit will not be traditional.’ [[44]](#endnote-44) By the time of *Cloudless May*, we can see how Jameson’s writing aims to be mnemonically hypnotic in a modernist vein, but how the sunlight on the local river is far from nebulously dazzling. It pointedly calls up a group past, a repository of memories shared by a nation, to render a collective psyche in response to war.

Another character in *Cloudless May*, Bergeot’s childhood friend Colonel Rienne, also depicts this shared emotional and physical relationship between inhabitant and environment to moving effect. [[45]](#endnote-45) Sent to defend Seuilly against the anticipated German invasion, Rienne conceives of the bond between people and landscape as it manifests through the sense of touch, telescoped through the hands. His soldiers are ‘[i]gnorant, patient, docile, men whose hands remembered some woman, who knew how to prune vines, balance a ledger, bake bread for a village’. [[46]](#endnote-46) What Rienne holds most dear is the phenomenological intimacy that his militia has with the environment, even though he acknowledges that this psychophysical bond does not make up for their inexperience when it comes to war. He also remarks how his men are ‘held in suspense’ about fighting the enemy, and he connects this to the state of suspension in France itself, caught ‘between night and day, dying and living.’[[47]](#endnote-47) The dissolution of temporal boundaries comes with wartime patrols and around-the-clock vigilance; both negate the typical schedule in the countryside, which is usually regulated according to sunrise and sunset.

This suspension also speaks to anxieties about the wartime threat to the town’s history, as it seems to at risk of disappearing in the event of defeat. Rienne explicitly articulates the fear of their history’s cessation when he visits his home village of Thouédun. Meditating in a twelfth-century church, he remarks upon the ghostliness and endurance of his town, which is again representative of France as a whole:

The word Ur, the word Mycenae, had fallen into silence, without the world being any the worse for it. But the word France must go on, since the whole world had been waiting for it, for this frail new point piercing a young branch, smelling of the leaf, of autumn, promising Chartres and Tours, and foreknowing or remembering Ronsard, Hugo, Péguy, the battle of the Marne, Verdun. All this, which was still hidden in the future, still wrapped in the fresh bud, must not be lost.[[48]](#endnote-48)

Rienne sees the fate of his own village as inextricably linked with that of his country, and their entire history (‘the battle of the Marne, Verdun’) as well as culture (‘Ronsard, Hugo, Péguy’) are at stake. Situating his village’s time scale alongside those of ruins from centuries past, elevating Thouédun above ancient civilisations from the Middle East and Greece, Rienne is mythologizing his town and country, to say the least. But his view is not dissimilar to the way that the nation as timeless ‘word’ or text appeared in the cultural phenomenology of wartime Britain. Jameson’s consolidation of France’s important moments and personages echoes the kind of cataloguing that takes place in Knox’s *For Ever England* or Jennings’s *Words for Battle*. This acquisitive literary-historical mode would have been familiar to her readership, consciously or otherwise. With her activist sights set on France, she uses a common structure in the cultural expression of the day to stress a very British preoccupation: war’s threatening of national-cultural chronology, its severing of the redemptive connection between people and place.

Again and again, the novel would draw attention to this fear of disconnection through the imagery and metaphors of nature. When Bergeot imagines the defeat of Seuilly, the idea of surrender appears through the image of a German soldier crushing the grass beneath his feet. Temporal rupture and the stamping out of history are captured by the way his boots ‘would cut off the voices rising under the roots; he would crush, because he was deaf to them, the real memories of the village’.[[49]](#endnote-49) History is once more given soil and flesh, figured in terms of the material, the topographical, and the phenomenological: what will be lost is ‘the way one woman lifts her bread from the oven... the earth worn to the bone under the centuries-old walnut.... All these habits, ancient and new’.[[50]](#endnote-50) Because national chronology is defined by the interactions between psyche, body, and landscape, invasion would catastrophically destroy this relationship. As if to echo Priestley’s screenplay for *Britain at Bay*, where war threatens the peace of centuries-old farmsteads, Jameson writes: ‘after all these hundreds of years the village would cease.’ [[51]](#endnote-51)

 Through embodied timescapes, and through her awareness of the cultural scene of the day, Jameson’s novel reconciles her geopolitical concerns with formal and rhetorical innovations. But bearing in mind that *Cloudless May* was written after the fall of France, the pessimism with which she depicts the country’s potential occupation might appear to speak of resignation. Jameson counters this view by insisting that one does not give up on temporal continuity even after defeat. While Seuilly’s surrender is inevitable, the novel also hints that, in spite of this outcome, a deeper sense of ‘French Time’ will manage to survive under the surface. The narrative invokes—as well as responds to—the discourse surrounding war’s obliteration of culture and history by envisioning a time both long before and long after Nazi occupation. Jameson maintains a macrocosmic temporal coherence that consolidates history to transcend the ravages of the war-torn present. This is most apparent in another scene of Rienne in Thouédun, and the passage is worth quoting in length:

Thouédun sleeps on the edge of a hill. Its thirteenth-century ramparts protect it from everything except progress…. Birds—the trees were full of birds—skimmed the points of the reeds, hurled themselves under the arches of the bridge, with an inconsequence they have been a million years learning. A million years after the last aeroplane has foundered in the last trickle of human blood they will not have learned a single new trick or forgotten any of the regular ones….

After all, why wish to be marked off from the generations who made this a French village? French not simply in its walls and their formidable clumsy gates, its fifteenth-century chateau. But French still more in the roots plunging deeply into its earth, in the dead who never left their descendants’ elbows, jogging them when they fell asleep in old beds, when they married neighbours and second cousins in the twelfth-century parish church, when they used the same words, when they were born in low-ceilinged rooms, when they died. All this death thrusting into them toughened the shabby houses to stand together against the fierce light. They were tougher than the strong columns of the church. They, and not the church, were France’s immortality.[[52]](#endnote-52)

The free-indirect discourse that springs from one man’s personal connection to a specific place again becomes a meditation on both the regional and the national past. The topography of Thouédun is foregrounded through Rienne’s familiarity with its various structures, his awareness of its specific history. But Thouédun is a ‘sounding’ for France, and notably, Rienne’s psychophysical sense of local-national belonging is a reversal of *A Canterbury Tale*’s depiction of temporal violence. Where Powell and Pressburger’s jump-cut would transform a medieval hawk into a World War II fighter jet, in Jameson’s tale, the birds bypass war and dramatically continue to soar a million years after the last aeroplane. Furthermore, the narrative tone elides a sense of temporal rupture, as it lies somewhere between the individual subjectivity of Rienne and that of an omniscient, near-mystical narrator speaking from outside the confines of history. This voice has the temporal and spatial distance to remark upon the vast elongation of time scales, to assert the redemptiveness of French history and its ability to survive.

Jameson’s writing links Thouédun’s inhabitants together into a trans-temporal narrative, bringing the town’s current population with the ghosts and dead from centuries past into a metaphysical army through which French Time can be defended and sustained. Deep French Time, as conceived of here, is the centuries-old marriage of lived experience, human and natural geographies, and culture and heritage, all brought together through a recurring word: ‘roots’. This intertwining of the natural and the anthropological is key to Jameson’s political message near the end of the novel. When the Germans arrive and Seuilly is imminently overtaken, Rienne, angry at Bergeot’s last-minute desertion, ‘confused Émile’s failure… with the failure of France.’ But the ‘moment he had thought this, he felt France protesting in him against such a foolish lie. There was another France—a child a thousand years old, a seed which was a tree with its seeds—living, unborn, immortal’.[[53]](#endnote-53) Rienne’s earlier formulation of France’s future as a ‘fresh bud’ has now gone backward to its original seed. Describing France’s cyclical rebirth and perpetual reincarnation, Rienne’s version of an organic, deeper national chronology is a direct response to the German’s crushing of their ‘ancient and new’ habits. The hour of defeat is not final, precisely, because France is both ancient and new, an immortal child that can be reborn.

The description of ‘France protesting *in* him’ (emphasis added) is a case in point: Rienne’s country is conceived in metaphoric as well as bodily terms. Like one of those bodies he imagines in the church, deep French Time can go on within him and offer the wisdom and insight to continue the fight. The novel ends with Rienne’s new beginning in London and with his reunion with Lucien Sugny, Bergeot’s former private secretary. Together, the two exiles plan their resistance—they are the seeds from the tree. Whatever they do in Britain, Sugny thinks, ‘we shall have a son with eyes like a hawk.’[[54]](#endnote-54) This hawk is not a victim of war’s temporal intrusions, but an avenger working to suture the rift. Carrying France within them, and along with the ghosts of the country’s past, Rienne and Sugny will watch for the opportunity to restore their country to their own culture and their own history: ‘to bring liberation and to reset the clock’.[[55]](#endnote-55)

A decade earlier, in her autobiographical work *No Time Like the Present* (1933), Jameson’s anger against World War I led her to discourage her own son from engaging in any future conflict: ‘I shall tell him... that war is not worth its cost, nor is victory worth the cost.’[[56]](#endnote-56) By World War II, while no less a pacifist and no less opposed to war, Jameson felt that something had to be done to end the occupation of a country she held so dear. Hauser notes how, in wartime Britain, ‘[l]andscape subjects.... framed by war, [...] appeared both vulnerable and resilient, often representing “what we are fighting for”, or at least what could be lost, in a looming apocalypse.’[[57]](#endnote-57) In the face of a ‘looming apocalypse’, Jameson’s re-alignment of French Time into a collective, Allied chronology is not so much a depiction of *la France à l’heure Allemande*, as it is that of *la France à l’heure Anglaise*.

Jameson’s work, then, is a significant counterpoint to consider in discussions of late modernism’s response to war. While some writers turned retrogressively and parochially away from transnational issues, others had a radically different approach and used aestheticism strategically as a response. Combining her activism with her art—without wholly shunning the experimentalism of which she was ambivalent—Jameson is an example of the broader heterogeneity of the period’s literature that is still being explored.[[58]](#endnote-58) Marina MacKay, notably, has queried the intersection between wartime politics and British late modernism, arguing that the 1920s’ ‘aesthetic habits... found their political realisation when modernism reached middle age twenty years later.’ [[59]](#endnote-59) For her, ‘Late modernism gives the critical and affective content to the story of England’s cultural remaking.’ [[60]](#endnote-60) Such cultural remaking sometimes involved a look outward as well as inward. An understanding of the evolution of fiction after modernism requires a continued examination of writers’ emerging geopolitical commitments.

Address: Beryl Pong, Murray Edwards College, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, CB3 0DF.

Email: beryl.pong@gmail.com

1. E. Bowen, *Collected Impressions* (London, 1950), p. 50. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. J. Birkett and C. Briganti, ‘Introduction: The Writer’s Situation’, in J. Birkett and C. Briganti (eds.), *Margaret Storm Jameson: Writing in Dialogue* (Newcastle, 2007), pp. 1-14, p. 4. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. The first (and only) edited volume of critical essays on Jameson’s oeuvre mentions *Cloudless May* no more than three times throughout (J. Birkett and C. Briganti (eds.), *Margaret*). Critics sometimes use the novel to illustrate a larger point but give it limited room for critique, as with J.-C. Murat, ‘Community-centred versus subject-centred representation in the narrative fiction of the 1940s’, *E-rea* 2.2 (Autumn 2004), n. pag. http://erea.revues.org/431 [Accessed 18 Jul. 2012]. The most sustained discussion of the novel thus far is found in Jennifer Birkett’s biography, *Margaret Storm Jameson: A Life* (Oxford, 2009). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. J. Birkett, ‘Beginning Again: Storm Jameson’s Debt to France’, *Critical Survey* 10.3 (1998), pp. 3-12. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Briganti writes that ‘la simultanéité narrative’ refers to ‘the panoramic, or synoptic novel’ in the 1930s and that it had a prominent presence in continental Europe, although it was less successful in Britain. C. Briganti, ‘Mirroring the Darkness: Storm Jameson and the Collective Novel’ in Birkett and Briganti (eds.), *Margaret*,pp. 71-91, p. 85. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. This is not to say that France did not view her own chronology and landscape in this manner, or that French literature did not highlight the relationship between people, time, and place in wartime. Rather, I am considering the novel within the milieu in which Jameson was writing at the time, and the readership for which *Cloudless May* would have been targeted. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Murat, ‘Community-centred’, n. pag. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Quoted in J. Giles and T. Middleton (eds.), *Writing Englishness 1900-1950: An Introductory Sourcebook on National Identity* (London, 1995), p. 74. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. D. Prerau, *Saving the Daylight: Why We Put the Clocks Forward* (London, 2005), p. 60. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. *Ibid.*, p. 142. The sensitivity to time during the war also sometimes produced a near-obsessive compulsion for accuracy. In October 1944, the clock at Greenwich Observatory was upgraded from a pendulum clock to one with a quartz plate, because ‘[n]ew requirements have arisen… very largely for war purposes, that demand a precision of at least one-thousandth of a second a day’. Previously, the Greenwich clock was accurate to a few hundredths of a second (‘New Clocks Being Installed at Greenwich,’ *The Listener* (5 October 1944), p. 374). [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Prerau, *Saving the Daylight*,pp. 141-6. The clocks in Britain reverted to GMT at the end of summer in 1945, but British Double Summer Time was observed briefly in 1947 due to severe fuel shortages. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. France resisted following Greenwich Mean Time for many years at the turn of the century, even after it was established as the world’s Prime Meridian in 1884. The country finally succumbed to international pressures in 1911, but the French officially called their new time ‘Paris Mean Time, retarded by 9 minutes and 21 seconds’, which meant they were on Greenwich Mean Time without having to use the British name (D. Howse, *Greenwich Time and the Longitude* (London, 1997), p. 149). [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. P. Burrin, *La France à l’heure Allemande, 1940-1944* (Paris, 1995), p.1; Howse, *Greenwich Time*, p. 150. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. The British translation is J. Lloyd, *Living with Defeat: France under the German Occupation 1940-1944* (London, 1996). The American edition is J. Lloyd, *France Under the Germans: Collaboration and Compromise* (New York, 1996). [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Burrin, *La France*, p. 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. *Ibid.*, p. 2 [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. J. Freedman, *Whistling in the Dark: Memory and Culture in Wartime London* (Lexington, 1999), p. 75. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. *Ibid.*, p. 111. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. K. Hauser, *Shadow Sites: Photography, Archaeology, and the British Landscape 1927-1955* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 201-10. The title of Cecil Beaton’s wartime book of photographs also exemplifies this (C. Beaton and J. Pope-Hennessy, *History Under Fire: Fifty Two Photographs of Air Raid Damage to London Buildings, 1940-41* (London, 1941)). [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Pressburger, it should be noted, was one of many émigrés from fascist Europe, a native Hungarian who moved to Britain in 1935. His fixation with the British countryside came to match that of Powell’s. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. C. Knox (ed.), *For Ever England: An Anthology* (London, 1943). The text also brings together essays on the British military, the institution of the church, and the role of cricket, among other topics. Knox’s book is only one in a spate of similar publications, including *Portrait of England* (London, 1942) and A. Bryant (ed.), *English Saga 1840-1940* (London, 1940), a Book Society choice. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Hauser, *Shadow Sites,* pp. 215-6. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. *Ibid*., p. 215. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. W. Churchill, ‘Their finest hour’, *Speeches of Winston Churchill, The Churchill Centre and Museum At the Churchill War Rooms* (1940; 2010). http://www.winstonchurchill.org/learn/speeches/

speeches-of-winston-churchill/122-their-finest-hour [accessed 17 Jul. 2012]. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. In the United States, Jennings’s film was re-titled *London Can Take It*, and it was nominated for an Academy Award in 1941 (for Best Live Action Short Film). [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. A. Gwynn-Browne, *Gone for A Burton* (London, 1945). [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. R. Mengham, ‘British fiction of the war’, in M. MacKay (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of World War II* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 26-42, p. 39. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. G. Orwell, *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, 4 vols., eds. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (Harmondsworth, 1977), *Vol 2:* *My Country Right or Left: 1940-43*, p. 76, his emphasis. For more on Orwell’s response to ‘Englishness’ in wartime, see P. Lowe, ‘Englishness in a Time of Crisis: George Orwell, John Betjeman, and the Second World War’, *The Cambridge Quarterly* 38.3 (September 2009), pp. 243-63. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. According to Raphael Samuel, after the French armistice, ‘possibly because of the ethnocentric panic which swept the country in the wake of Dunkirk (in the face of the imminent threat of invasion, aliens of all kinds, even Jews, were interned), “English” was the favoured idiom in which the idea of nation was couched’ (R. Samuel, *Unravelling Britain: Island Stories. Theatres of Memory, Vol II.*, ed. A. Light, S. Alexander and G. Stedman Jones (London, 1998), pp.48). For more on the appropriated usages of ‘Englishness’ and ‘Britishness’, see R. Weight, *Patriots: National Identity in Britain, 1940-2000* (Basingstoke, 2002), pp. 49-58. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. E. Maslen, ‘A Cassandra with Clout: Storm Jameson, Little Englander and Good European’, in Kristin Bluemel (ed.), *Intermodernism: Literary Culture in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain* (Edinburgh, 2009), pp. 21-37, p. 34, fn. 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. *Ibid.* See also J. Birkett, ‘Margaret Storm Jameson and the London PEN Centre: Mobilising Commitment’, *E-rea* 4.2 (Autumn 2006), n. pag. http://erea.revues.org/256 [accessed 25 Feb. 2012] [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Quoted in Maslen, ‘Cassandra’, p. 29. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. J. Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton 2004), p. 36, his emphases. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Birkett, *Margaret*, p. 243. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. S. Jameson, *The Novel in Contemporary Life* (Boston, 1938), pp. 23-4. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. D. James, ‘Localizing Late Modernism: Interwar Regionalism and the Genesis of the “Micro Novel”’, *Journal of Modern Literature* 32.4 (Summer 2009), pp. 43-64, p. 48. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. *Ibid.*, p. 59. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. *Ibid.*, p. 52. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. S. Jameson, *Cloudless May* (London, 1943), pp. 26-7. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. James, ‘Localizing’, p. 53. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. R. Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York, 1973), p. 165. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. S. Jameson, *The Georgian Novel and Mr. Robinson* (New York, 1929), p. 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. *Ibid*., p. 23. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. *Ibid.*, p. 74. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. Birkett has argued that Rienne is a figure akin to Louis Aragon, who went underground during occupation and was praised for translating wartime suffering into lyrical poetry. Part of his poem *Le Crève-Coeur* forms the novel’s epigraph. (Birkett, *Margaret*, p.242). [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. Jameson, *Cloudless* *May*, p. 25. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. *Ibid*. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. *Ibid.*, p. 174. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. *Ibid.*, p. 54. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. *Ibid.* [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. *Ibid.* Jameson and Priestley did not have the friendliest relationship, and each wrote harsh critiques of the other’s writing, although they eventually made peace. See Birkett and Briganti (eds.), *Margaret*, p. 172, fn. 13. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. Jameson, *Cloudless May*, pp. 91-2. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. *Ibid.*, p. 434. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. *Ibid.,* p. 513. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. Burrin, *La France*, p. 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. S. Jameson, *No Time Like the Present* (London, 1933), p. 238. [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. Hauser, *Shadow Sites*, p. 16. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. See especially M. MacKay, *Modernism and World War II* (Cambridge, 2007) and L. Mellor, *Reading the Ruins: Modernism, Bombsites and British Culture* (Cambridge, 2011). [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. MacKay, *Modernism*,p. 17. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. *Ibid.*,p. 5.

LAST [↑](#endnote-ref-60)