

Sept 29, 2018
Correspondence: One-Day Forum
Post-War Imagination and Narrative of History
Keynote Speech

Post-War Imagination and the Narrative of (Future) History in the *To-Day and To- Morrow* Book Series

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Introduction to the Book Series *To-Day and To-Morrow*

The *To-Day and To-Morrow* book series came about by accident. Not a very auspicious beginning, you might think, for an experiment in predicting the future. It was edited by C. K. Ogden, who was president of the Cambridge debating society, the Heretics. Ogden is now best known for his BASIC English project, simplifying the language down to 850 words as an international auxiliary language; and also for being a collaborator with the pioneering literary critic I. A. Richards. Ogden had invited a young biologist, J. B. S. Haldane, to give a paper. The paper was spectacularly good, and Ogden, who acted as adviser to the publishers Kegan Paul, arranged for it to be published, as *Daedalus, or Science and the Future*, in 1923. There was no talk of a series at this stage. But the book did well, and Ogden started asking his friends to write companion volumes. Bertrand Russell wrote a pessimistic counterblast to *Daedalus*, calling it *Icarus, or the Future of Science*. Soon the publishers started advertising these and other volume as a series. Initially there appear to have been two aims in mind for it (both embodied by *Daedalus*). First, to find a popular readership for

academic expertise that might otherwise remain hidden in specialist journals. Those volumes could focus on the present, or even the past. But the other aim, which soon became the guiding rationale for the series, was to try to imagine the future of whatever subject the writer chose.¹

This is what distinguishes *To-Day and To-Morrow* from the many other popularising book series of the period: its unique rationale. Writers took a topic; described its present state—the “Today” part; then projected its future, its “Tomorrow”—usually for the next 50-100 years, sometimes much further. The series eventually ran to 110 pamphlet-length volumes by the time it wound up in 1931.

It is an unusual product: a product of Ogden’s eccentric but creative mind. What is unusual about it is the assembling of an archive of so many texts by people all thinking about the future. There had been numerous book series before, but none had done that. There had been magazines and collections of science fiction too. But *To-Day and To-Morrow* is not presented as speculative fiction (though it slides in and out of the genre as required. It is speculative, certainly; but its primary mode is what might paradoxically be termed speculative non-fiction. This gives it considerable interest in terms of genre, demonstrating that future thinking in the period was not confined to journalism, politics, or science fiction. There have been other futurological series since, and endless magazine features rounding up the architects, designers, scientists, or engineers of the future. But they shouldn’t detract from a sense of the originality of Ogden’s vision; and also his judgement in signing up many of the best writers of the interwar period: not just outstanding literary writers, though there were enough of them—Vernon Lee, Robert Graves, Vera Brittain, André Maurois, Winifred Holtby, Hugh MacDiarmid, Lewis Grassie Gibbon, and others. It included experts in many other fields, such as James Jeans, Liddell Hart, Sylvia Pankhurst, Russell Brain, or C. E. M. Joad. There was

some sharp humour and satire in the project, as well as some brilliant inventiveness. The tone was established by Haldane and Russell, who could be searching and suggestive while being intensely readable: witty, and intelligent. “Brilliant” was the word most often used by reviewers to characterise the books, which by and large had an extremely positive reception, as can be seen from the quotations from reviews used on the dustjackets and, as the project grew, in a publisher’s catalogue of the series appended to each volume.

To-Day and To-Morrow constitutes a highly significant body of work. It included some of the best writing in the interwar period. It changes our sense of the literature of that period, including modernism; not least because prominent modernists were following it closely—such as Eliot, Joyce, Lewis, Huxley, and Waugh. Virginia Woolf must have known about it, since Leonard Woolf reviewed nine volumes himself, and included reviews of others in the literary section he edited for the *Nation and Athenaeum*.² The series is an extraordinarily rich resource for the literary and cultural history of the period, and for modernist studies.

The subjects range widely, from sciences, technology, society, sexuality, arts, humanities, language, education and geo-politics to everyday-life topics such as clothes, food, housing, leisure and the countryside. The Classified Index (Figure 1) carried by later volumes indicated the range, and the organization of knowledge the series constructed.

To-Day and To-Morrow includes significant contemporary responses to modern literature, art, theatre and cinema, as well as to social changes in labour, and in attitudes towards imperialism and war. In particular—as one might expect from such a radical project of the period—arguments about women, marriage, and sexuality are strongly represented—as for example in Dora Russell’s powerful volume *Hypatia; or, Woman and Knowledge* (1925).

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In short, given its quality, its engagement with issues of persisting or renewed interest, and its contemporary impact, it is surprising how little attention it has received from scholars outside the history of science. Even the near-complete reissuing of the series by Routledge in 2008 attracted scant interest.

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Figure 1. Classified index from *Aphrodite*, one of the last two volumes (1931)

War in the *To-day and To-Morrow* Series

One area where it is particularly illuminating—especially in this current period of the centenaries of the First World War—is in its discussions of warfare. The war inevitably figures continually through the series, and not just in the volumes devoted to warfare. The books started appearing just five years after the Armistice, and many of the

writers had taken part. The series begins with images of destruction and war. J. B. S. Haldane's *Daedalus* starts by juxtaposing two scenes. In one, presented like a couple of clips from a film of a battle on the Western Front, Haldane shows the difference made to soldiers by the introduction of tanks; infantrymen running in terror from the inexorably advancing machines, which, like the huge clouds of smoke thrown up by shellfire, seem to be controlling the human actors, rather than the other way round. In the other scene, Haldane is in India, where he was recuperating from a shrapnel wound, and describes going out to look at the stars in the middle of a dance, and seeing a star explode. He wonders what the cosmological process might have been, but then also considers the possibility that an alien civilisation had developed to the point where it had the technology to destroy its own habitation.

Haldane's book was a sensation, and often reprinted; not so much for these thoughts, but for what he said about what he called *ectogenesis*: the gestation of embryos in artificial wombs. Many of the subsequent volumes referred back to *Daedalus*, which influenced fiction writers too. Haldane's close friend Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) is partly set in an ectogenetic lab; and the concept is referred to in Evelyn Waugh's *Black Mischief* (1932). Haldane focused on the beneficial potential of science in *Daedalus*. But as we shall see, he would return to warfare in a second volume for *To-Day and To-Morrow*.

For the most part, the legacy of the war figures in the series in the form of visions of major cities—usually London—being blown up, and usually in some form of aerial bombardment. London had been the main target of the German bombing campaign during the war, and there had been thirty or so air raids on the capital between May 1915 and May 1918, causing over 2,500 casualties—more than half the national figure from the air raids.³ Memories and reports of these events doubtless contributed to the visions of future destruction. But two

further factors are also relevant. First, it is a trope of the fiction and memoirs looking back on the First World War, and the attempt at regeneration and reconstruction after it, that soldiers returning from the war found it hard not to project their visions of the conflict onto the home city. For example, here is Ford Madox Ford, in his memoir *It was the Nightingale* (1933) about starting again after being demobilized; and recovering to the point where he was able to begin his fictional masterpiece about the war, *Parade's End*. In *It was the Nightingale* there is an extraordinary section dealing with his decision to leave London, and indeed England, soon after the war. He is in Kensington, and describes his thought processes while he is stepping off the kerb of Campden Hill Road. He is on one leg, poised at the moment of taking the decisive step, and it is as if all his earlier life, and his future, rush into that moment. The sequence includes this haunting passage:

You may say that everyone who had taken physical part in the war was then mad. No one could have come through that shattering experience and still view life and mankind with any normal vision. In those days you saw objects that the earlier mind labelled as *houses*. They had been used to seem cubic and solid permanences. But we had seen Ploegsteert where it had been revealed that men's dwellings were thin shells that could be crushed as walnuts are crushed. Man and even Beast . . . all things that lived and moved and had volition and life might at any moment be resolved into a scarlet viscosity seeping into the earth of torn fields . . . it had been revealed to you that beneath Ordered Life itself was stretched, the merest film with, beneath it, the abysses of Chaos. One had come from the frail shelters of the Line to a world that was more frail than any canvas hut.⁴

That “merest film” is a kind of frail gossamer web which is all that

protects civilised life from the abysses of Chaos. But it also conjures up another kind of film: the cinematic film that allows us to project a vision of a different world onto a wall; just as Ford is doing here, seeing the war through the walls of the houses around him, like a newsreel of his past. That sense of being pursued by visions of horror and destruction is characteristic of trauma. How could the combatants' minds do anything other than compulsively flash back to the appalling sufferings they had witnessed? How could their feelings of terror or anger or helplessness not get projected onto their postwar situations and relationships, by "transference"? How could a civilization ever not seem a war zone?

Second, even had London not experienced the Zeppelin and Gotha raids, such a scenario had famously been anticipated by H. G. Wells in *The War in the Air* (1908), in which many cities are obliterated, including New York and Paris as well as London. The post-war imagination drew upon the pre-war imagination: the earlier imagination of wars of the future. That is how a number of *To-Day and To-Morrow's* authors represent the destruction of cities: as being not just attacked, but devastated, by an air power massively greater than anything experienced in the First World War. Take for example *Paris; or, the Future of War* (1925), by Basil Liddell Hart, who would become one of Britain's leading military historians, writing about what he called "The Air Weapon:"⁵

In the Great War aircraft filled but an auxiliary *rôle* to the established arms, and their action against the moral objective was merely sporadic. The blow planned against Berlin, which might have revealed beyond question the decisive influence of the new arm, was still-born because of Germany's haste to conclude an armistice. Those who depreciate the value of the air attack point to the comparatively small damage wrought by

any particular attack in the Great War, arguing also that the influx of recruits after some of them showed that such “frightfulness” brought its own recoil in a stiffening of the national “upper lip.”

The best answer to this short-sighted deduction is to present a few facts. Between the 31st of May, 1915, and the 20th May, 1918, the German air-raids over the London area were carried out with an aggregate force of 13 Zeppelins and 128 aeroplanes, dropping in all less than 300 tons of bombs. The total result was 224 fires, 174 buildings completely destroyed, and 619 seriously damaged, a damage estimated in money at something over £2,000,000. This was achieved for the most part in face of strong air and ground defences, and in a war where the total British air force was never markedly inferior in size to its enemy, indeed generally the reverse. (43-44)

Liddell Hart compares these figures to the situation in 1925, arguing that as France by then had 990 aeroplanes and Britain 312, were they to wage air war, “it would be easily possible for a greater weight of bombs to be dropped on London in one day than in the whole of the Great War, and to repeat the dose at frequent and brief intervals;” and that these quantities would increase rapidly with the development of civil aviation. His envisioning of the effects of such bombardment are even more striking:

Witnesses of the earlier air attacks before our defence was organized, will not be disposed to underestimate the panic and disturbance that would result from a concentrated blow dealt by a superior air fleet. Who that saw it will ever forget the nightly sight of the population of a great industrial and shipping

town, such as Hull, streaming out into the fields on the first sound of the alarm signals? Women, children, babies in arms, spending night after night huddled in sodden fields, shivering under a bitter wintry sky – the exposure must have caused far more harm than the few bombs dropped from two or three Zeppelins (45-46)

Those pundits who prate about the “armed forces” objective appear to forget that an army without munitions is a somewhat useless instrument. Imagine for a moment that, of two centralized industrial nations at war, one possesses a superior air force, the other a superior army. Provided that the blow be sufficiently swift and powerful, there is no reason why within a few hours, or at most days from the commencement of hostilities, the nerve system of the country inferior in air power should not be paralysed. A modern state is such a complex and interdependent fabric that it offers a target highly sensitive to a sudden and overwhelming blow from the air (46-47)

Imagine for a moment London, Manchester, Birmingham, and half a dozen other great centres simultaneously attacked, the business localities and Fleet Street wrecked, Whitehall a heap of ruins, the slum districts maddened into the impulse to break loose and maraud, the railways cut, factories destroyed. Would not the general will to resist vanish, and what use would be the still determined fractions of the nation, without organization and central direction? (47-48)

Liddell Hart presents his argument as a moral one; as articulating a morality of war—what he calls here “the moral objective.” He thought the leaders in the First World War had descended into a kind of frenzied blood lust and had confused the means—killing enemy troops—with

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the end, to achieve victory with the least cost of lives or wealth. He wants to remain detached from the violence, and to warn against possible future violent attacks. But that conflation of morality with money is disturbing, as is his comparison between the demoralising effects of military strikes and industrial ones.

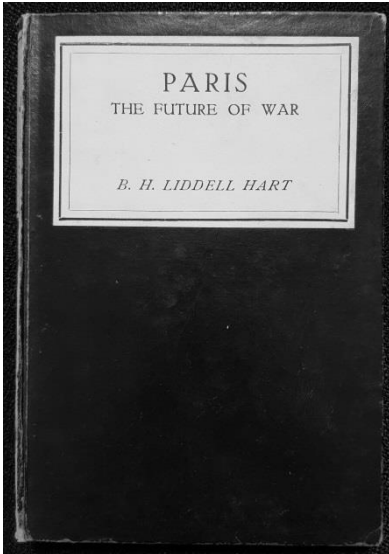


Figure 2. B. H. Liddell Hart,
Paris: The Future of War

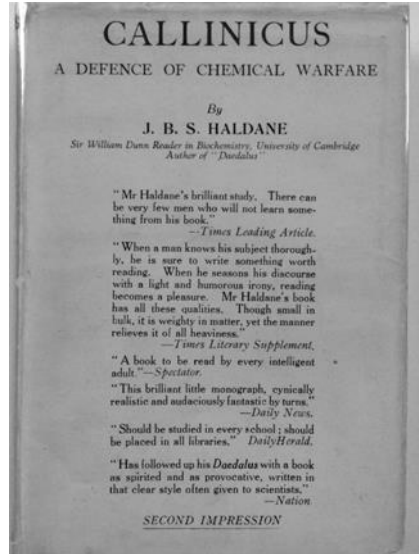


Figure 3. J. B. S. Haldane,
Callinicus: A Defence of Chemical Warfare

J. B. S. Haldane's second volume for the series shares Liddell Hart's view that aerial bombardment had become a much more destructive threat than was generally understood. But he takes that view as a reason for advocating an alternative. It is almost inconceivable that anyone would write a book today with the subtitle of Haldane's *Callinicus: a Defence of Chemical Warfare* (1925). Even

states that continue to use them, such as Russia or Syria, feel they need to deny doing so. It cannot have been an easy subject to broach so soon after the First World War. In many ways the book is indicative of Haldane's delight in being provocative and opinionated. But he was certainly not the kind of right-wing contrarian it might make him sound. He remained true to his Marxism, even when it had damaging consequences for him later on, during the Lysenko affair in the 1930s and 1940s. *Callinicus* received excellent reviews.

Haldane was primarily a mathematician and scientist, a pioneer in approaching genetics in mathematical terms. He compares the relative merits, or otherwise, of conventional and chemical weapons, on mathematical grounds too. If he sounds like Liddell Hart in that respect, he might also in taking a moral line on the military technologies. But note that his argument is not that chemical weapons are justified because they win wars; but that conventional weapons are even more inhumane. Haldane was uniquely positioned to know, since he had suffered an agonizing wound; and had also voluntarily had himself subjected to chlorine gas in experiments to determine the effects of gas and how to combat them.

The use of international law to ban chemical weapons has made them taboo; though it has not stopped regimes gassing their civilians. Yet to make them taboo as opposed to conventional weapons does not seem such moral high ground to take up when the conventional weapons are designed to maim, burn, or bury alive. The subsequent development of the far more destructive and contaminating nuclear arsenal only adds to the case for the kind of open debate Haldane's volume represents. The *Spectator's* reviewer grasped his motivation: "Everyone who has any interest in the prevention of war for the future should read Mr. Haldane's volume."⁶

Haldane's point is that aerial bombing was now capable of being much worse than a gas attack, by subjecting unprotected civilians to

severer injuries, and making the Home Front more like the Western Front. So like the other volumes under discussion here, *Callinicus* too imagines the catastrophe of an intense aerial bombardment of a major city (56-57). Haldane asks:

Can aeroplanes do more against a hostile town with gas than with high explosive and incendiary bombs? We were threatened with gas bombs during the War Was there anything in the gas-bomb scare? . . . In one calculation which was made to show how easily London could be poisoned a decimal point went astray in one place! As the calculation was concerned with volumes of gas, the result came out as 10 metres cubed or 1,000 cubic metres, in place of one. For this reason it appeared that ten aeroplanes could do the damage which would actually have required ten thousand. However, most of the prophets of disaster from gas-bombs made no calculation at all. Let us try to make a rough one. On the nights of March 11th to March 14th, 1918, just before the great offensive of March 21st, the Germans fired 150,000 mustard gas shells into the villages and valleys of the Cambrai salient, an area of about twenty square miles, the same as that of central London. This caused 4,500 casualties, of whom only fifty died (all of them because they took off their respirators too soon). The area was not evacuated. In central London, if the population had had gas-masks, the casualties would have been perhaps ten times greater.⁷

Then he makes the comparison with a conventional bombing raid:

But we have to compare this hypothetical air-raid, not with any raid that actually occurred, but with a bombardment

of 150,000 high-explosive shells or their equivalent in bombs. This would hardly have left a house in central London untouched, and the dead would have been numbered not in hundreds, but in tens of thousands. Such an attack would have required the visits on repeated nights of something like 1,000 aeroplanes. Such a number is not yet a practical possibility. We are, perhaps, inclined to under-estimate the potentialities of town-bombing with high explosive and incendiary bombs. In London, for example, there were never too many big fires started at any given time for the fire-brigades to deal with. An attack by ten or twenty times as many aeroplanes as ever bombed London simultaneously might well ring round a given area fairly completely with wrecked streets or burning houses, in which case most of the buildings and a good proportion of the inhabitants would perish. In one or two air-raids on other towns it seems probable that the Germans were not far from outstripping the capacities of the fire-brigades and producing very large conflagrations.⁸

The kind of escalation Liddell Hart and Haldane imagine here is of course exactly what did happen in the Second World War—to some extent in the London Blitz, but especially in the later fire-bombings of Dresden or Tokyo. “The reasons why explosives are more likely to be effective than poison on a town are as follows,” he continues:

Houses are far more vulnerable to explosives than earthworks, and do far more damage to their occupants in collapsing, besides being inflammable. And, on the other hand, they contain far more refuges which are nearly gas-proof. A shut room on a first or second floor would be nearly proof against gas released in the neighbourhood if it had not got a

lighted fire to drag contaminated air from outside into it. Moreover, civilians could, and would, rapidly evacuate an area which has been heavily soaked with mustard gas, whereas soldiers have to stay on at the risk of their lives.

Gas-bombs would certainly be far less effective than high-explosives on a town whose inhabitants were provided with respirators, probably even if they were unprovided. But, so long as London is undefended in this respect, it constitutes a standing temptation to any power desirous of making this kind of experiment.⁹

Haldane's attempt to calculate the relative effects of different categories of weapon may seem too utilitarian for our times. But that last turn, in which it is the military strategist in search of the "moral objective" who becomes the scientist, conducting an "experiment" on his human victims in the mass, surely gets Haldane off that hook. After all, he wants to defend people from gas attack, but you cannot get the defence right if you get your decimal places wrong.

William McDougall's *Janus: The Conquest of War: a Psychological Inquiry* (1927) represents yet another approach. *Janus* offers the most haunting visions of the destruction of a city:

[T]he development of aircraft, of the explosive bomb and of the poison gases, have made it only too clear that in the next Great War the civilian populations, and especially the populations of the great cities, will be the first and greatest sufferers, that wounds, mutilation and death, terror and famine, will be broadcast among them with awful impartiality; that no woman, no family, no little child, no church, no treasury of art, no museum of priceless antiquities, no shrine of learning and science will be immune; but that in a few days or hours great

cities may be levelled with the dust, while their surviving inhabitants scrape for crusts amid mangled bodies of fair women and the ruins of the monuments of art and science.¹⁰

The Future and Trauma

Such writing from the immediately post-war period, the 1920s, might seem like further evidence for the argument put forward in a compelling recent study, Paul Saint-Amour's *Tense Future: Modernism, Total War, Encyclopedic Form* (Oxford UP, 2015). This is an excellent book in many ways, with some superb argumentation, and innovative readings of modernists such as Joyce, Woolf and Ford. It is also particularly relevant to our focus on the interwar period. Saint-Amour argues that the term is not just a convenient label reached for by literary historians in retrospect. He is interested in how writers in that period thought about the future; and he shows how "interwar" describes of what people felt *at the time*; that their period was characterised by being a lull between two storms. As fascism grew stronger, and certainly from the remilitarization of the Rhineland and the Spanish Civil War, another major war came to seem inevitable.

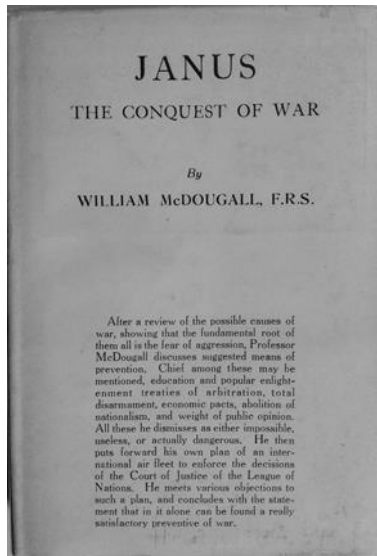
What Saint-Amour says about this sense of the prospect of a future war is especially ingenious. He talks about developments in trauma theory. Trauma theory has, as he suggests, become the dominant way we tend now to conceptualize the experience of war. Try to imagine someone writing a book about either world war now without using the words "trauma," "traumatic" or "traumatized." Saint-Amour is also interested in the notion of a collective trauma affecting a whole society. But his chief exhibit is the book by the Russian-born psychiatrist Eugène Minkowski, *Lived Time* (1933). Minkowski poses that whereas classic trauma is understood as a response to past shock, we can also think of the prospect of future disaster as so appalling and disturbing that it might make sense to think of that too as traumatising.

Part of the strength of Saint-Amour's book is its non-chronological reading, so he can use the experience of the Cold War, and how people responded to the possibility of human annihilation in an atomic apocalypse, as indicative of what they might have felt in the 1930s, the horrors of the First World War still in the air, and as the possibility of a more destructive conflict loomed ever larger.

The notion of forward-facing trauma is intriguing, and enables us to be more reflective about how we tend to use trauma as an unthinking critical reflex nowadays. It enables illuminating readings of some of the works Saint-Amour discusses, such as Cicely Hamilton's novel of 1922, *Theodore Savage*, which imagines just the kind of human self-extinction feared in the Cold War. However—and this is where I want to bring the argument back to *To-Day and To-Morrow*—the question is, how widespread or dominant was that kind of thinking. One of the surprising things about *Tense Future* is that for a study of how people thought about the future in the 20s and 30s, it does not discuss the collection of works that has most to say about exactly that topic: *To-Day and To-Morrow*. This is all the stranger because Saint-Amour does discuss just one of the books—Liddell Hart's *Paris*—without seeming to realise that it is part of an extensive series about the future.

This *To-Day and To-Morrow*-shaped hole at the centre of his book limits Saint-Amour's account of inter-war future thinking in two ways. First, the series could have provided some prime examples for his arguments about writers contemplating the consequences of a future war. It would be hard to find a book which is better situated at the intersection of future thinking, air-power theory, and psychology, for instance, than McDougall's *Janus*. McDougall was a psychologist, and he understood fear. He writes very well about how the inadequacy of the defences against air attack fosters an unmitigable terror. That is what makes *Janus* “a Psychological Inquiry.” He also quotes an

extraordinary essay by Winston Churchill, called “Shall We All Commit Suicide?”: another surprisingly visionary set of predictions about possible future war horrors, including not only aerial bombing but atomic, chemical and biological weapons, and even drones. Churchill had been First Lord of the Admiralty at the beginning of the war; then Minister of Munitions towards the end. After the war he was both Secretary of State for War, as they still called it, and Secretary of State for Air, from 1919-21. He was certainly well-informed about military technologies for all the services. Saint-Amour has a lengthy discussion of military thinking about air war, that would have benefited from including this essay too—which incidentally, was prompted by Churchill’s reading of Haldane’s *Daedalus*.



**Figure 4. William McDougall. F. R. S.,
*Janus: The Conquest of War***

But the second way in which *Tense Future* might have benefited

from knowing about *Janus*, is that McDougall does not see airpower as only the problem; he also sees it as the solution. By 1927, when *Janus* was published, there was little confidence that the League of Nations would be able to keep the peace. So McDougall's proposal is to create an international air force for that purpose; like an armed version of the UN. That's what he means by the *Conquest of War*: The book is *Janus* because it turns war against itself in order to defeat it.

The three books on war discussed above—*Paris*, *Callinicus* and *Janus*—provide a very small sample of *To-Day and To-Morrow*, if an important one. But they illustrate two benefits in attending to the series. First, because of its massive scope and energy, whatever topic someone is researching in the period, there is likely to be a book, or at least a passage, that is likely to transform or challenge their thinking.

Second, books like *Callinicus* and *Janus* can transform our sense of the literature and psychology of the period. What they show is that a writer can confront the future, and profound fear of the future head on, without being traumatized. For all McDougall's vivid imagining of such terror, his attitude is not one of mesmerised, disempowered trauma; but that something constructive, utopian even, needs to be set against it. He was aware of the problems with his proposal; not least that it relies on warmongering countries not developing air forces; and on speed restrictions being imposed on civil aviation to stop people developing fast planes that could be converted to military use during war. Nonetheless, his attitude is telling; and it is indicative of a tendency in *To-Day and To-Morrow* more generally that cannot be accommodated by Saint-Amour's account of interwar anxiety as the dominant paradigm.

This suggests that the trouble with Saint-Amour's theory of future trauma, for all its interest, is that it is still trauma. What is so striking about much of the writing in *To-Day and To-Morrow* is the way it manages to hold on to utopian hope about the future, regardless

of how faith in man's ability to use technology to make the world a better place had been shaken by the war. Nowhere is this tension between bitter experience of war and optimism about the future more starkly apparent than in Haldane's *Callinicus*:

I regard the type of wound produced by the average shells as, on the whole, more distressing than the pneumonia caused by chlorine or phosgene. Besides being wounded, I have been buried alive, and on several occasions in peacetime I have been asphyxiated to the point of unconsciousness. The pain and discomfort arising from the other experiences were utterly negligible compared with those produced by a good septic shell-wound. (21-22)

What do we make of a man who has been wounded, buried, and gassed, and yet who can remain so nonchalant and jaunty in describing his experiences? Perhaps he didn't feel fear or danger as much as most people. But the general point is more relevant to our deliberations on the idea of "interwar." The series foregrounds an aspect of the mentality of the period which tends to escape our conceptual models for understanding postwar culture. The received account of the interwar period tends to focus on the disenchantment and disillusion expressed by the flood of war books appearing in the late 1920s.¹¹ Then the 30s are seen as dominated by a cynical mode, whether the farcical cynicism of Evelyn Waugh, or the sombre, politicised version of the Auden circle. After the Second World War and the Holocaust, these gave way to a trauma-theory-shaped account, which was subsequently projected back onto the First World War.¹² This is not to deny that these models capture real qualities in people's experience. But they also exclude certain qualities, which have consequently become harder to discuss.

One such quality is the progressive, utopian feeling that the ending of the war left some with: the feeling that they were now in a period of reconstruction, or even of beginning anew; of being able to reimagine the world in ways that could make it better. One feature of this attitude is its light-heartedness; a kind of Nietzschean tragic gaiety, perhaps. A further example is offered by Oliver Stewart's *Aeolus, or the Future of the Flying Machine* (London: Kegan Paul, 1927), which ends with a fictional report of a massive air raid threatening the destruction of London, but which is eventually averted and proves survivable (74-75).

Countering War Anxiety with Utopianism

One thing *To-Day and To-Morrow* demonstrates, then, is that the experience of devastation, and of the consequent interwar predicament, could lead to optimism; and even to high spirits, allowing for elements of humour to coexist with intimations of war suffering. Robert Graves' two books for the series are among the best examples of this: *Lars Porsena; or, the Future of Swearing and Improper Language* (1927); and the second, which even took humour as its subject: *Mrs Fisher, or the Future of Humour* (1928). These books seem far from the note of *Goodbye to All That*, which Graves was working on at around the same time, for all its cool irony.

Or take *Lucullus; or, the Food of the Future* (1926) by food writers Hilda (Mrs C. F.) Leyel and Olga Hartley (who also wrote novels and detective fiction). Surprisingly, Hartley and Leyel join the ranks of contributors speculating about atomic science and cosmology—perhaps to sound suitably futuristic. But where this leads them is to yet another vision of major cities destroyed:

[I]n about 1942, in experiments on the atom, scientists blew up the whole of North-west London; it simply disappeared in a

cloud of dust and fire. There was a question asked in Parliament about it, by the Member for North St. Pancras or Hampstead, who was left without a constituency, but beyond that nobody complained, nobody seems to have objected.¹³

Then a Scottish scientist uses magnets to try to bring Mars near enough for radio contact, but it goes wrong and “it was Glasgow that was torn up by its roots and whisked up to Mars” (60-61). Such recklessness sparks a “great reform movement” (62) to hold scientists in check.

An even better example is provided by Vera Brittain. Readers of her harrowing *Testament of Youth* will be amazed by *Halcyon; or, the Future of Monogamy* (1929). Or, to be more precise, they will not be surprised at its advocacy of women’s rights; of the inevitability of gender equality being established in the law; and of pacifism. But they are likely to be surprised that this book, which again, she was working on at the same time as the memoir, is so light-hearted, witty, and optimistic. Reading *To-Day and To-Morrow* reveals the interwar period as a much more complex place than we might have thought.

Halcyon is written in a mode which several of the writers use: what I term “future history.” Rather than writing the future as prophecy from the point of view of now, they imagine a historian in the distant future looking back, to a point somewhere between now and then; and writing our future as their history. *Halcyon* imagines a feminist future historian writing the history of the developments in women’s rights still unachieved at the time Brittain was writing. Emancipation she could only hope for is presented as achieved fact. Such as strategy not only short circuits embarrassment about sounding like a deranged prophet. It also serves her progressive cause by presenting a world in which such battles have been won; showing them as achievable, and as nothing any sensible person need worry about. Yet from another point of view, what the trope gives us is something odd; certainly very paradoxical: history;

but the history of something that has not happened, or at least not yet.

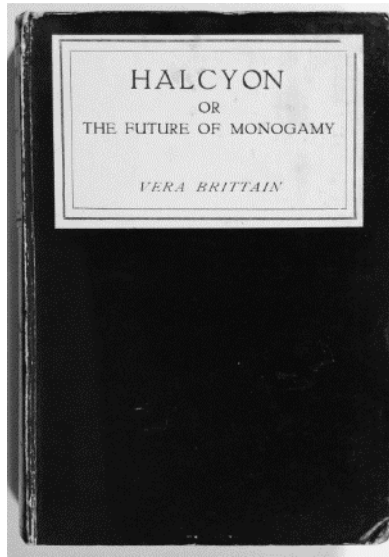


Figure 5. Vera Brittain, *Halcyon or the Future of Monogamy*

Robert Graves' contributions both draw on this future history trope too, and again in ways which make us sceptical about history (as we might expect from a writer who, in *I, Claudius* [1934] and *Claudius the God* [1935], was to excel in fake ancient history). He argues that both humour and swearing are so context-dependent that today's practices will be unintelligible to our descendants. Not least because, where they involve taboo, as with swearing, the crucial evidence will be asterisked out of the record, so future historians will have no chance of recovering what it was.

Finally, Haldane too, in *Daedalus*, which inspired the series, does future history for part of it, which he writes in the form of "some extracts from an essay on the influence of biology on history during the

20th century which will (it is hoped) be read by a rather stupid undergraduate member of this university to his supervisor during his first term 150 years hence.”¹⁴ Again, the device has the effect of making radical new inventions seem familiar.

Future history, I want to suggest, is a trope which fosters non-traumatic future thinking. Saint-Amour is interested in narratives which imagine the annihilation not just of society and humanity, but of the historical record of their having existed at all—the kind of nuclear narrative common during the Cold War, but which he sees as anticipated in the interwar period. The future history in *To-Day and To-Morrow* tells another story though; one in which humanity has a future, and one that can lead to improvements, not just repeat past disasters. Yes, these writers all entertain visions of terrible urban destruction. But they are determined not to let the fear conquer them, but to use their expertise—whether in strategy, mathematics, biology, psychology, literature, even humour—to overcome it, and thus to overcome war itself. Their visions of destruction are thus in the service of a thoroughgoing utopianism; a determination to make the future better than the past; to ensure that, for all the technological capability, future war will not be as inhumane as the First World War. That seemed a tenable aspiration in the 1920s, when all these books were written; though it became much less tenable throughout the following decade.

As a product of its age, then, *To-Day and To-Morrow* is illuminating about its period’s ways of thinking about the future, and about what it was possible to think about the future between the wars. It shows other forms and discourses of the period in a new light: science fiction, modernism, progressive social thought. But such a concentrated set of examples of future thinking from a century ago seems to me to have a broader, trans-historical, significance. A study of the forms and modes of futurology in the past can also sharpen and revitalise future thinking today.

Notes

1. The development of the series is discussed more fully in my book on it, *Imagined Futures* (Oxford UP, forthcoming).
2. Detailed in Saunders, *Imagined Futures*.
3. Air raids on Great Britain, using airships, bomber aircraft, and seaplanes, ran from December 1914 to August 1918.
4. Ford Madox Ford, *It Was the Nightingale* (Heinemann, 1934), 48-49.
5. Liddell Hart, *Paris*, (Kegan Paul, 1925), 43-48.
6. "Books," *Spectator*, 134:160 (31 January 1925), 160.
7. J. B. S. Haldane, *Callinicus* (Kegan Paul, 1925), 54-56.
8. Haldane, *Callinicus*, 56-58.
9. Haldane, *Callinicus*, 58-59.
10. William McDougall, *Janus: The Conquest of War: a Psychological Inquiry* (Kegan Paul, 1927), 17-18.
11. See Andrew Frayn, *Writing Disenchantment: British First World War Prose, 1914–30* (Manchester UP, 2014).
12. See Max Saunders, "War Literature, Bearing Witness, and the Problem of Sacralization: Trauma and Desire in the writing of Mary Borden and others," in *Memories and Representations of War: The Case of World War I and World War II*, edited by Elena Lamberti and Vita Fortunati (Rodopi, 2009) 177-91.
13. Hilda (Mrs C. F.) Lyeal and Olga Hartley, *Lucullus; or, the Food of the Future* (Kegan Paul, 1926), 53.
14. Haldane, *Daedalus or Science and the Future*, 56-57.

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