

- I. *Adventures with Britannia* (1995)
 - II. *More Adventures with Britannia* (1998)
 - III. *Still More Adventures with Britannia* (2003)
 - IV. *Yet More Adventures with Britannia* (2005)
 - V. *Penultimate Adventures with Britannia* (2007)
- and
- Burnt Orange Britannia* (2005)

PENULTIMATE ADVENTURES WITH

BRITANNIA

Personalities, Politics and Culture in Britain

Edited by Wm. Roger Louis

I.B. TAURIS

LONDON · NEW YORK

HRC

HARRY RANSOM CENTER

Published in 2008 by I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd
6 Salem Road, London W2 4BU
In the United States of America and Canada, distributed by
Palgrave Macmillan, a division of St. Martin's Press
175 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10010
www.ibtauris.com

Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center
University of Texas at Austin
P.O. Drawer 7219
Austin, Texas 78713-7219

Copyright © 2007 by British Studies
University of Texas at Austin

All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations in a review, this book, or any part of it, may not be reproduced, stored in, or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Photographs by Cecil Beaton are used with the permission of the Trustees of the Imperial War Museum, London.

Paintings by Feliks Topolski are reproduced by permission of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin.

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—
Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials

ISBN 978-1-84511-693-4 hardcover
ISBN 978-1-84511-711-5 paperback

A full CIP record for this book is available from the British Library
A full CIP record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

Library of Congress Control Number 2007933720

Typeset, printed, and bound by Communication Specialists, Inc.
Austin, Texas

Table of Contents

List of Authors	vii
Introduction	1
<i>Wm. Roger Louis</i>	
1 Lloyd George, the French, and the Germans	17
<i>Kenneth O. Morgan</i>	
2 The Story of Frances Stevenson and David Lloyd George	33
<i>Susan Pedersen</i>	
3 The Changing Shape of Historical Interpretation	43
<i>Keith Thomas</i>	
4 Kipling in South Africa	53
<i>Dan Jacobson</i>	
5 Tolkien in the First World War	67
<i>Martin Gilbert</i>	
6 The Age of Auden	71
<i>Grey Gowrie</i>	
7 Air Control and the British Idea of Arabia	77
<i>Priya Satia</i>	
8 Arthur Marder and the Battles for British Naval History	93
<i>Barry Gough</i>	
9 Cecil Beaton's Wartime Art	109
<i>Martin Francis</i>	
10 England and India, 1939–1945	125
<i>Indivar Kamtekar</i>	
11 Reassessing Paul Scott	141
<i>Hilary Spurling</i>	

12	The Myth of Malicious Partition <i>Geoffrey Wheatcroft</i>	153
13	Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard: A Great Englishman Nonetheless <i>John Davis</i>	169
14	No-Man's-Land: C. Wright Mills in England <i>John Summers</i>	185
15	"Decline" as a Weapon in Cultural Politics <i>Guy Ortolano</i>	201
16	A Glance Back at Fifty Years in the British Book Trade <i>Graham Greene</i>	215
17	The Controversial Portraits of Feliks Topolski <i>Larry Carver</i>	229
18	All Souls and Suez <i>Wm. Roger Louis</i>	245
19	Britannia's Mau Mau <i>John Lonsdale</i>	259
20	Empire in the Twenty-First-Century English Imagination <i>Stephen Howe</i>	275
21	The Break-Up of Britain? Scotland and the End of Empire <i>T. M. Devine</i>	289
22	Placing American Empire in a British Imperial Perspective <i>Dane Kennedy</i>	303
23	An Accidental Criminal <i>Felipe Fernández-Armesto</i>	317
24	British Studies at the University of Texas, 1975–2007	325

List of Authors

Larry Carver, Professor of English and holder of the Doyle Professorship in Western Civilization, has taught at the University of Texas since 1973. His scholarly work focuses on Restoration and eighteenth-century British poetry and drama. His works include *The Plays of Hugh Kelly* (1990). He is Director of the Liberal Arts Honors Program. He was the curator of "Feliks Topolski" at the Humanities Research Center.

John Davis is the Warden of All Souls College, Oxford. He taught for twenty-two years at the University of Kent. In 1990 he became Professor of Social Anthropology at Oxford. He was Chairman of the European Association of Social Anthropologists, 1993–94, and President of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 1997–2001. His books include *Libyan Politics: Tribe and Revolution* (1987). He is a Fellow of the British Academy.

T. M. Devine, OBE, D.Litt, FRSE, Hon MRSA, FBA, is the Sir William Fraser Professor of Scottish History and Palaeography in the University of Edinburgh, the first-ever Chair (1908) established in the subject. He has published nearly 30 books and over 100 academic articles and chapters. In 2003 he was awarded the Royal Gold Medal by HM the Queen, Scotland's supreme academic accolade, and is currently the only historian elected to all three national academies in the British Isles.

Felipe Fernández-Armesto is Professor of History at Tufts University. His books include *Columbus* (1991), and *Millennium* (1995), an iconoclastic history of the last thousand years. He has edited *The Times Atlas of World Exploration* (1991) and is the General Editor of the *Folio History of England* (1997–2001). His recent books include *So You Think You're Human?* (2004) and *Pathfinders* (2006).

Martin Francis is Henry R. Winkler Associate Professor of Modern History at the University of Cincinnati. He is the author of *Ideas and Policies under Labour, 1945–1951* (1997) and co-editor of *The Conservatives and British Society, 1880–1990* (1996). His next book, *The Flyer: Men of the Royal Air Force and British Culture, 1939–1945*, will be published by Oxford University Press.

“Decline” as a Weapon in Cultural Politics

GUY ORTOLANO

In 1963 the satirical magazine *Private Eye* published an “All Purpose ‘What’s-Wrong-With-Britain’ Graph.” It consisted of five lines steadily descending between 1900 and 1962, the implication being that whatever it was that might want measuring, it had surely been getting worse. The headline at the top of the page posed the question “How, Now, Does Britain Stay At the Top?” a problem made all the more pressing by laments about everything from athletics (“the Olympic Games has not been held in Britain since 1948!”) to the weather (“Britain’s weather in 1963 has already been worse than AT ANY TIME SINCE 1754”). These and other findings were supported by evidence of undeniable power, including statistics (“45% of our State schools have pianos but no music teachers, 32% have music teachers but no pianos, while 27% have NO TEACHERS AT ALL!”) and xenophobia (“WHO WERE FAHRENHEIT, REAUMUR AND CENTIGRADE IF THEY WERE NOT ALL FOREIGNERS!”).¹ In 1963, as the winds of change were blowing through what remained of the Empire and the Profumo scandal was blowing apart the credibility of the government, *Private Eye* appeared to be marking Britain’s ignominious decline with its trademark brand of gallows humor.

Yet the actual target of *Private Eye*’s ridicule was less the sorry state of Britain’s international position than the apologetic state of its national punditry. What was being skewered, that is, was not a state

of affairs but a mode of discussion, as betrayed by the disclaimer that preceded the laments above: "What the Cassandras Say." Hence the mockery of a graph that would offer pessimistic interpretations regardless of the facts, as well as the ironic tone couching those supposedly dire complaints about athletics and the weather. Overblown anxieties about the state of the nation were clearly ripe for satire in 1963, as were the kinds of arguments typically mustered on their behalf: misleading statistics that failed to add up and appeals to national chauvinism that were strained at best. In short, this snapshot from *Private Eye* makes clear that discussions about national decline were prevalent in British culture in the early 1960s, but its skepticism toward the form and content of those discussions suggests that something more was at work than merely the unproblematic reflection of obvious realities.

This lecture suggests another way of thinking about Britain's "decline" in the early 1960s. The focus falls on another document published the same year as that special edition of *Private Eye*, the "Suicide of a Nation?" number of *Encounter* magazine, in July 1963.² That issue, edited by Arthur Koestler and featuring some of Britain's most well-known intellectuals, advanced a powerful critique of British society and politics, one that has since enjoyed influence through multiple reincarnations: first as a stand-alone volume published in 1963, and most recently as a Vintage paperback published in 1994.³ Moreover, because of its historical significance as part of the national political culture, "Suicide of a Nation?" has also come to figure as a touchstone in historiographical debates about Britain's decline.⁴ A re-reading of this central text in the literature of decline will show that the discourse of decline in this period consisted of a malleable set of assumptions and anxieties that could be harnessed to competing—indeed, contradictory—ends. In this light, decline appears neither an obvious fact nor a shared experience, and it may be better understood as a rhetorical weapon deployed by advocates of rival positions in the cultural politics of postwar Britain.⁵

NATIONAL "DECLINE" HAS LONG FIGURED AT THE CENTER of historical accounts of twentieth-century Britain. A slippery concept, it has been invoked to refer to everything from a loss of influence in global politics to the dismal fate of the English gentleman.⁶ Most commonly, however, Britain's decline refers to the diminution of national economic performance, the sense stated most clearly in the opening sentence of Martin Wiener's influential *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit* (1981): "The leading problem of modern British history is the explanation of economic decline."⁷

In the past two decades, however, historians have challenged the concept of economic decline on a number of fronts. These challenges may be divided into two broad groups, the atheistic and the agnostic: the former denies the fact of economic decline, whereas the latter attempts to direct attention toward alternative developments.⁸ The atheistic critique stands at the opposite pole from Wiener in its denial of the existence of economic decline, a denial that derives from the distinction between relative economic decline (which may have happened) and absolute economic decline (which did not).⁹ Once that distinction is made, and the British economy is not thought of as having declined straightforwardly, then discussions of decline cannot be explained as merely the cultural articulation of an economic fact. Jim Tomlinson has thus shown that the invocation of decline emerged in response not to economic trends but out of political debate, and David Edgerton has recently published a "post-declinerist" history of twentieth-century Britain that treats decline as a cultural myth rather than an economic reality.¹⁰ The agnostic critique, by contrast, reserves judgment on the question of the reality of economic decline, aiming instead to displace that narrative from its central position in the historiography. Harold Perkin's social history, for instance, resists a characterization of the twentieth century that would de-emphasize the fact of rising living standards enjoyed by the majority of the population, while Lawrence Black and Hugh Pemberton have recently (and reasonably) suggested that the focus on decline be set aside in favor of alternative—and less muddled—terms of analysis.¹¹

Whatever the verdict of even the most polarized historians on the factual matter of economic decline, it is difficult to dispute the agnostic contention that decline is merely one concept among many that might be selected to structure accounts of recent British history. Given the availability of competing developments, the question becomes why the historian should adopt a narrative of decline over any other. One justification might be the claim that it was the perceived experience of the historical subjects—that despite whatever numbers revisionist historians might cobble together, Britons believed themselves to be living through a period of decline, and so an experience central to twentieth-century history should retain a position central in twentieth-century historiography. Wiener, for instance, has responded to skeptics on the reality of decline by arguing, "It is as if all of the people who have talked about decline in twentieth-century Britain are suffering from false consciousness, a kind of mass delusion. As in anything else, one should generally look for a more straightforward explanation."¹² That more straight-

forward explanation, Wiener was suggesting, would be the shared recognition of real economic problems. Yet upon closer examination, the evidence testifying to the experience of decline is no more coherent than that attesting to the fact of the matter.

It will come as no surprise that as the world wars receded and the Cold War got heated, Britain struggled to find its feet internationally. The outlines of this story are familiar: after the war, the United States terminated lend-lease and begrudgingly granted Britain an emergency loan, and shortly thereafter the Americans assumed the burdens of communist containment and European development through the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan. Clement Attlee's Labour government, meanwhile, took the decision to develop an atomic bomb while withdrawing from India, abandoning Palestine, nationalizing industry, and extending the welfare state. The trajectory of this story continues into the 1950s with Winston Churchill's disappointed efforts to play the honest broker among equals vis-à-vis the United States and the Soviet Union, Anthony Eden's disastrous intervention at Suez, and Harold Macmillan's acceptance of the transformation of the Empire into the Commonwealth.

Despite these developments, however, evidence at both the popular and elite levels resists falling into a simple narrative of steady decline. In 1951 the planners of the Festival of Britain promoted a modern, optimistic, and scientific vision of Britain, and in 1953 the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II provided an occasion for celebrating continuing—indeed, renewed—national greatness.¹³ Even after Suez, many Britons remained proud of their country's international stature, particularly its position as first among equals in Europe. Kenneth Morgan points out that Moscow continued to behave publicly as though Britain remained a military and industrial power, and even the humiliation of Suez did not prevent the Conservative Party from cruising to re-election less than three years later. Tory Britain was affluent Britain, as memorialized in Macmillan's famous remark on the stump, "You've never had it so good."¹⁴ In short, while developments overseas helped create a context in which discussions of decline would eventually flourish, they did not automatically generate those discussions in and of themselves.

If not the direct result of economic or international experience, how did decline become so prominent in public discourse by the dawn of the 1960s? It is necessary here to distinguish between three concepts: declinism, economic decline, and national decline. "Declinism" refers to the articulation of cultural anxieties related to Britain's shifting economic and international status—it is an histori-

an's word for a cultural phenomenon, and another way of referring to the same idea would be to put *decline* in quotation marks ("decline"). "National decline" predated the post-war decades and surfaced in any number of debates and discussions, making it at once a more tenacious and amorphous concept. But "economic decline" has a more discrete history: born after the war, it did not figure prominently in political discussion until the end of the 1950s.

Ironically, the same decade that saw the pleasures of affluence supplant the experience of austerity also saw economic decline emerge as a topic of concern. Tomlinson has shown that this emergence was made possible by a combination of factors, including the availability of statistics for comparing the economic performance of nations as well as a shift in the assessment of economic performance from the rate of unemployment to the rate of growth.¹⁵ While these developments rendered economic decline thinkable in ways that it had not been before, what initially pressed the issue to the fore was the political leverage it offered to the out-of-power Labour Party. Labour embraced the rhetoric of declinism after its defeat at the polls in 1959, finally finding its feet by lambasting the Tories for their hidebound policies and by promising to reverse Britain's decline through technological modernization. The governing Conservatives were understandably more reluctant to adopt a narrative of decline, but when they embraced the pursuit of accelerated growth, they implicitly agreed that it had thus far been insufficient. By 1961, then, and for very different reasons, both parties had embraced the politics of decline, as testified to by the government's establishment of the National Economic Development Office and the opposition's policy document *Signposts for the Sixties*. In the general election of 1964, Labour and the Conservatives fought over the mantle of modernization, which promised to offset economic decline.¹⁶

To prove politically useful, however, decline had to be plausible as well as thinkable. Its plausibility resulted from the grafting of these new concerns about economic decline onto existing anxieties about national prestige. Relative economic decline was thus presented as evidence of more profound problems, and the two concepts became conflated into a single phenomenon: national decline. Between the disastrous intervention at Suez in 1956 and Labour's victory in 1964, laments of this malaise flourished among analysts and commentators, in Penguin's "What's Wrong with Britain?" series, Andrew Shonfield's *British Economic Policy since the War* (1958), Michael Shanks's *Stagnant Society* (1961), Bryan Magee's *New Radicalism* (1962), Anthony Sampson's *Anatomy of Britain* (1962), and Perry Anderson's "Origins of the Present Crisis" (1964).¹⁷ These writers

had no doubt that Britain faced a grave crisis, but they ranged so widely in their diagnoses and prescriptions that they can hardly be said to have been discussing the same thing at all. The idea of decline proved compelling in part because it could be yoked to a range of positions, from Shonfield's critique of international economic overstretch to Shanks's critique of Shonfield. The common ground in each case was that *something* was wrong with Britain, a lament so hackneyed that it came in for ridicule from *Private Eye* in 1963.¹⁸ The declinist craze peaked by the mid-1960s, but not before it had made an indelible mark on public debate.¹⁹

The prescriptions that emerged to combat this newfound decline frequently entailed a liberal dose of technocratic modernization. Critics of Tory Britain presented national decline as the result of hidebound institutions and practices, so reversing it would require that existing institutions, such as universities and industries, be brought into line with the latest scientific developments. A widespread commitment to science and technology was characteristic of the period, surfacing in discussions of university education, economic practices, scholarly methodologies, and national politics. These arguments reflected a consensus on the desirability of scientific solutions even as they insisted upon the marginalized status of science in contemporary Britain—a curious spiral of self-flagellation that secured prominent attention for increasingly familiar laments about Britain's lack of esteem for science. In fact, however, that esteem spanned the political spectrum, from Harold Wilson's well-known embrace of the "white heat" of the scientific revolution to Harold Macmillan's less-familiar program of economic modernization. At the same time, initiatives designed to harness science and technology flourished, from the opening of Churchill College, Cambridge (inspired by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology), in 1960, to the enthusiastic support of science education in the Robbins Report of 1963.²⁰ In short, as anxieties about decline gained prominence in the early 1960s, politicians and commentators rushed forward with proposals to reverse its course by embracing science and technology.²¹ That program, and the assumptions that underlay it, were most clearly on display in a special number of *Encounter* in July 1963.

AMID THESE ONGOING DISCUSSIONS ABOUT THE CRISIS of decline and the need for modernization, the Hungarian-émigré-turned-British-man-of-letters Arthur Koestler proposed an issue of *Encounter* devoted to the subject of the state of England. *Encounter*, the well-heeled monthly of politics and culture (still several years from

the revelation that it was secretly funded by the CIA), promised to be the ideal forum to address the issue, and its editors, Stephen Spender and Melvin Lasky, invited Koestler to edit the issue himself.²² He asked some of Britain's most prominent commentators to discuss the state of England, and those taking him up on the offer included Cyril Connolly, Malcolm Muggeridge, Michael Shanks, Andrew Shonfield, and John Vaizey. They were joined by an array of writers, journalists, dons, and members of both houses of Parliament. These prestigious contributors combined to produce an influential polemic against British society, one that offers an ideal point of entry through which to analyze the historical phenomenon—and the historiographical legacy—of the declinism that was coursing through British culture and politics in the early 1960s.²³

"Suicide of a Nation?" advanced a searing critique of contemporary Britain. Koestler divided the essays into three main parts: "Cold Class War," "Island & Mainland," and "Towards a New Society?" The question marks at the end of the volume title and the third section were significant: Britain's "suicide" may have been imminent, but it was not inevitable; and the "new society" might be elusive, but it was still within reach. As the volume unfolded, it quickly became clear that the responsibility for the crisis lay on both Right and Left: the Right because the political establishment remained staffed by antiquated gentleman, and the Left because Britain's economy was hobbled by work-averse, communist-infested trade unions. Instead of a meritocracy, Britain was a "mediocracy," and rather than being run by professionals and experts, it was being run into the ground by amateurs and class warriors.²⁴ The result was that Britain's share of world trade had plummeted since 1951, and its volume of exports and industrial production were not rising as quickly as those of select European peers.²⁵ The essays demanded that education, industry, and government be modernized by purging them of the dilettantes who bore responsibility for these failures and replacing them with experts equipped with training and instincts more appropriate to the modern world.²⁶ The British educational system, riddled with problems of caste and class, was subjected to particularly harsh criticism, but therein also lay hope for a new society that would turn its back on the amateurism and class warfare of the present in order to foster a new elite of entrepreneurial professionals in the future.²⁷ "Suicide of a Nation?" amounted to a liberal critique of both Left and Right in contemporary Britain, and it endorsed instead a more modern, scientific, technological, and professional society.

In his introductory and concluding essays, Koestler articulated these arguments with particular zeal. Defining the terms of analysis

from the outset, he insisted that Britain's decline was economic, not imperial, and that its causes were cultural, not structural. He had chosen the term "suicide" because, far from succumbing to the inevitable adjustments of a former imperial power, Britain was dying by its own hand: "What ails Britain is not the loss of Empire, but the loss of incentive."²⁸ Britain's elites had sat idly by as the nation's economic productivity came to be surpassed by America in the 1880s, Canada before the First World War, and much of Western Europe after 1945. Where other observers might have acknowledged Britain's increasing economic output and material abundance, Koestler saw only dire straits: "We fail to realize the full extent of the country's economic decline in the long-term perspective over the last century, and its alarming acceleration in the course of the last few years."²⁹ The trends, the culprits, and the prescriptions were all plain, and the only remaining question was whether Britain would prove willing to take the necessary steps to arrest its own ongoing decline. The polemical intention behind "Suicide of a Nation?" was to send Britain down that path willy-nilly.

Muggeridge expressed his arguments every bit as forcefully as Koestler. He began by painting a grim portrait of a country in decay: "Each time I return to England from abroad the country seems a little more run down than when I went away; its streets a little shabbier, its railway carriages and restaurants a little dingier; the editorial pretensions of its newspapers a little emptier, and the vainglorious rhetoric of its politicians a little more fatuous."³⁰ The gentlemanly Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, was an absurdity, a "decomposing" figure of the "flavour of moth balls," who "conveyed the impression of an ageing and eccentric clergyman who had been induced to play the part of a Prime Minister . . . by a village amateur dramatic society."³¹ Yet Macmillan was the leader mid-twentieth-century Britain deserved, "antique," "meandering," and "aimless."³² He resembled that most inept of leaders, Don Quixote, his manners and instincts out of place in the world in which he found himself: "As in Cervantes' masterpiece," Muggeridge explained, "one feels today that things are out of sync."³³ A nation in decay, shoddy next to its international peers, incompetently run by outmoded amateurs—small wonder that the historian Dominic Sandbrook, in his recent history of the 1960s, brackets Muggeridge and Koestler as representatives of the "withering attack" unleashed by "Suicide of a Nation?" on the backwardness of contemporary Britain.³⁴

Despite their similarities of tone and structure, however, Koestler and Muggeridge were actually discussing very different things. The structures of their critiques were broadly similar: the nation's politi-

cal leaders were outmoded incompetents who were not up to the job of running a great country, with the result that Britain was forced to endure a humiliating fall in its world position. Yet their actual assessments of Britain's decline—when it began, what it entailed, and what could correct it—stood completely in opposition to each other. Where Koestler saw a nation that had frittered away the esteem and position it had enjoyed as recently as 1945, Muggeridge saw a nation that had become poorer and weaker under every government since 1916.³⁵ Where Koestler saw an economy in a state of paralysis, Muggeridge saw a nation spiritually impoverished by material affluence.³⁶ Where Koestler prioritized educational reform to ensure equal opportunity, Muggeridge recoiled against the prospect of comprehensive schools.³⁷ And where Koestler endorsed a program of scientific and technological modernization, Muggeridge reserved his sharpest barbs for New Towns, television aerials, and the mindless worship of mathematics and science.³⁸ To Koestler, national decline was a recent economic crisis that modern technology could reverse; to Muggeridge, however, national decline was an ongoing moral crisis that those very measures would only exacerbate.

Koestler certainly recognized the gulf separating Muggeridge from himself, and he was not about to allow his party to be spoiled by this unruly guest. He branded Muggeridge's contribution an "an-tribution," an unhelpful distraction from the matter at hand, and bracketed it apart from the rest of the issue in a "Prelude" (subtitled "Blind Man's Buff").³⁹ He dismissed Muggeridge's analysis as "a lashing-out at all and sundry with impartial gusto," and explained that he included it only to illustrate the misguided thinking that was itself part of the problem in contemporary Britain.⁴⁰ Koestler's severe treatment of Muggeridge makes clear that he intended "Suicide of a Nation?" to be something other than a dispassionate rumination on the state of England, and that its ostensible analysis of a nation in decline actually advanced a more substantive program of technocratic modernization. Since Muggeridge disagreed fundamentally with the desirability of that program, his acceptance of a broad narrative of decline counted for little in Koestler's eyes—and he was dealt with accordingly.

The relative dispensability of decline, especially when compared to the much more important commitment to technocratic modernization, becomes even plainer in Koestler's treatment of Henry Fairlie's contribution. The only other dissenting voice in the issue, Fairlie rejected calls for using managerial expertise to combat economic decline. Instead of experts and management, he valued individualism and liberty—both of which he viewed as threatened by

programs that traveled under seemingly benign labels such as “dynamism,” “efficiency,” and “greatness.”⁴¹ In the guise of attacks upon amateurs, Fairlie detected the politics of managers—and he knew another word for these managers: “The voice of the *manager* then, now the voice of the *technocrat*, proclaiming, as does every opponent of free institutions, that freed from the necessity to consult ordinary people, he could run their lives for them far more efficiently and beneficently than they can themselves. It is time that, against their evil doctrine, we re-asserted our right to be inefficient.”⁴² An unlikely rallying cry at any time, the “right to be inefficient” struck an especially discordant note at the height of the technocratic moment, one not echoed elsewhere in the volume.

Fairlie differed from Muggeridge by rejecting the very concept of decline, but this fundamental difference regarding the state of England did not derail Koestler’s parallel treatment of them both. As with Muggeridge, Koestler branded Fairlie’s contribution an “an-tribution,” and he consigned it to the same ignominious “Prelude.” Koestler’s decision to group both dissenters together, and to place them at the beginning of the issue, represented an effort to depict their perspectives as typical of the views finally being left behind by more realistic critiques.⁴³ Koestler cast Fairlie’s rejection of declinist hysteria as “a proud, sulky retreat from the crowd’s ignoble strife,” and he explained that Fairlie and Muggeridge signified “the opposite poles in between which we must try to wend our way.”⁴⁴ In his concluding postscript, Koestler seemed almost driven to distraction by Fairlie’s dissonant essay: he cited Fairlie no less than four times, nearly apologizing the last time (“I hate picking again at Mr. Fairlie, but . . .”).⁴⁵ Fairlie disputed so many of Koestler’s fundamental premises—about the need for modernization, the example of the French, the significance of social class—that his argument emerged as the antithesis to that of the volume itself. Yet despite those fundamental differences, Koestler presented Fairlie as the counterpart to Muggeridge: one depicted a nation in decline, the other rejected a narrative of decline, and together they figured as extremes to be avoided on the path being beaten toward Britain’s shiny new future.

THE EMERGENCE OF DECLINE AS A POLITICAL ISSUE rendered the concept available to Malcolm Muggeridge and his critique of utilitarian materialism no less than to Koestler and his celebration of technocratic modernization. While at first glance the prominence of decline in both accounts might be thought to point to a shared experience of a real phenomenon, the range of experiences co-

existing within that category suggests that decline is better understood less as a shared *experience* than as a shared *resource*.

This lecture began with an agnostic reluctance to prioritize narratives of economic decline, but it has worked its way toward a position more like the atheistic denial of the existence of any phenomenon answering to decline at all. That is, while some defenders of decline have answered challenges to the fact of economic decline by pointing to the persistence of discussions about it, the slippery case for decline in “Suicide of a Nation?” has rendered the content of those discussions similarly difficult to pin down. Explaining and analyzing those discussions—that is, explaining and analyzing declinism—thus emerges as a historical problem in its own right, and the distinction between the economic phenomenon (which may or may not have happened) and the cultural discussion (which undeniably did happen) is significant because it demands that the latter be explained without being reduced to the inevitable expression of the former. One ironic result of this analysis is that the agnostic ambition to direct attention away from decline has led to the need to pay continuing attention to the phenomenon of declinism.

How, then, has declinism—that is, how have discussions and arguments about decline—functioned in British history, politics, and culture? This essay has suggested one answer to that important question. In their arguments about British society and culture in “Suicide of a Nation?” both Arthur Koestler and Malcolm Muggeridge articulated and harnessed broader anxieties about national decline. The fact that two such very different critiques may both be understood to fall under the rubric of “decline” testifies not to their derivation from shared experiences, but rather to the problems inherent in a concept stretched so thin as to include them both. Historians looking back should not attempt to shoehorn those arguments into a single category, but rather to rummage around inside that capacious category itself. In this analysis, “decline” functions not as a common response to a real economic development, but as a common label available to be applied to diverse experiences, arguments, and agendas. It functions, that is, as a powerful weapon, one put to diverse—even competing—ends in the cultural politics of modern Britain.

I am grateful to Wm. Roger Louis, and to Christine Johnson, Steven Miles, Nancy Reynolds, Corinna Treitel, Lori Watt, and Matt Wisnioski, for their comments on an earlier draft of this lecture.

1. Christopher Booker et al., *Private Eye's Romantic England: The Last Days of Macmillan* [sic] (London, 1963), p. 31.
2. Arthur Koestler et al., "Suicide of a Nation?" *Encounter*, July 1963.
3. Koestler, ed., *Suicide of a Nation? An Enquiry into the State of Britain Today* (London, 1963; Vintage, 1994).
4. Martin Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850–1980* (1981; Cambridge, 2004), p. xiii; Jim Tomlinson, *The Politics of Decline: Understanding Post-War Britain* (Harlow, 2001), pp. 23–25; David Edgerton, *Warfare State: Britain, 1920–1970* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 191–92, 203.
5. My thinking about decline (as well as my title) follows David Hollinger's analysis of science in "Science as a Weapon in Kulturkämpfe in the United States during and after World War II," *Isis*, 86 (1995), pp. 440–54; my focus on cultural politics builds on the analysis of Ian Budge, "Relative Decline as a Political Issue: Ideological Motivations of the Politico-Economic Debate in Post-War Britain," *Contemporary Record*, 7 (Summer 1993), pp. 1–23, and Tomlinson, *Politics of Decline*.
6. See A. N. Wilson, *After the Victorians: The Decline of Britain in the World* (New York, 2005); Marcus Collins, "The Fall of the English Gentleman: The National Character in Decline, c. 1918–1970," *Historical Research*, 75 (Feb. 2002), pp. 90–111. On the history, meanings, and realities of the concept, see Peter Clarke and Clive Trebilcock, eds., *Understanding Decline: Perceptions and Realities of British Economic Performance* (Cambridge, 1997).
7. Wiener, *English Culture and Decline*, p. 3.
8. For a survey of the debate, see Richard English and Michael Kenny, eds., *Rethinking British Decline* (London, 2000), especially the introductory chapter by Andrew Gamble and the concluding assessment by English and Kenny.
9. Barry Supple makes the distinction between relative and absolute decline clear: "Relative decline and absolute growth can and do co-exist. British national income has certainly grown; but over the last quarter century or so that of other leading economies has grown faster" (Supple, "Fear of Failing: Economic History and the Decline of Britain," in Clarke and Trebilcock, eds., *Understanding Decline*, p. 10).
10. Tomlinson, *Politics of Decline*; Edgerton, *Warfare State*.
11. Harold Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880* (London, 1989); Lawrence Black and Hugh Pemberton, eds., *An Affluent Society? Britain's Post-War "Golden Age" Revisited* (Aldershot, 2004), especially Black and Pemberton, "Introduction: The Uses (and Abuses) of Affluence," pp. 1–13.
12. Interview with Wiener in English and Kenny, eds., *Rethinking British Decline*, pp. 25–36, quotation on p. 31.
13. Becky Conekin, "The Autobiography of a Nation": *The 1951 Festival of Britain* (New York, 2003). Ross McKibbin links the festival and the coronation in *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918–1951* (New York, 1998), p. 535.
14. Kenneth Morgan, *The People's Peace: British History, 1945–1989* (New York, 1990). Macmillan is popularly believed to have uttered this phrase in response to a heckler, but Morgan points out that he was actually issuing a warning about inflation (p. 176).
15. This paragraph paraphrases the arguments of Jim Tomlinson, "Inventing 'Decline': The Falling Behind of the British Economy in the Post-War Years," *Economic History Review*, 49 (1996), pp. 731–57.

16. See also Jim Tomlinson, "Conservative Modernization, 1960–64: Too Little, Too Late?" *Contemporary British History*, 11 (Autumn 1997), pp. 18–38.
17. Andrew Shonfield, *British Economic Policy since the War* (Baltimore, 1958); Michael Shanks, *The Stagnant Society: A Warning* (Baltimore, 1961); Bryan Magee, *The New Radicalism* (New York, 1962); Anthony Sampson, *Anatomy of Britain* (London, 1962); Perry Anderson, "Origins of the Present Crisis," *New Left Review*, no. 23 (Jan.–Feb. 1964), pp. 26–53. Tomlinson discusses the "culture of decline" in *Politics of Decline*, pp. 21–26.
18. Booker et al., *Private Eye's Romantic England*, p. 31. The vogue of decline is evident even in the book's subtitle, *The Last Days of Macmillan*, which evokes a comparison between Britain and the Roman Empire.
19. Tomlinson, *Politics of Decline*, p. 21.
20. Tomlinson, "Conservative Modernization, 1960–64."
21. On the "technocratic moment" of 1959–64, see Edgerton, *Warfare State*, chap. 5.
22. On *Encounter*, see Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York, 2000); Hugh Wilford, "'Unwitting Assets' British Intellectuals and the Congress for Cultural Freedom," *Twentieth-Century British History*, 11 (2000), pp. 42–60.
23. Wiener, *English Culture and Decline*, p. xiii.
24. Goronwy Rees, "Amateurs and Gentleman, or The Cult of Incompetence," pp. 20–25; Michael Shanks, "The Comforts of Stagnation," pp. 30–38; Andrew Shonfield, "The Plaintive Treble," pp. 39–44; Austen Albu, "Taboo on Expertise," pp. 45–50; Aidan Crawley, "'A Red Under Every Bed?'" pp. 50–55; John Cole, "The Price of Obsturacy: Crises in the Trade Unions," pp. 56–64.
25. These trends were illustrated by a series of charts, pp. 26–29. My intent here is to present, rather than critique, the case for economic decline, but it must be said that these charts are highly selective—and often misleading—indicators of economic performance. For instance, there seems little reason for alarm in the fact that Britain's *share* of world trade decreased as the economies of its competitors developed between 1899 and 1962 (a period when its *volume* of trade continued to increase); a second chart shows that Britain's volume of exports increased significantly between 1954 and 1962, and while those numbers are dwarfed by those of its competitors, those competitors are made to consist not of comparable European states but rather of the conglomerations of the EEC and EFTA; and the more rapidly rising indices of industrial production of select European rivals neglects to take into account the fact that when the index was pegged in 1953, the recovering post-war economies of continental Europe were beginning from a point considerably behind that of Britain. What these charts do not reveal, for instance, is the not insignificant fact that in 1963 absolute standards of living in Britain remained the highest in Europe (Tomlinson, "Inventing 'Decline,'" p. 753). The economic case against decline is presented in more detail, and with far greater dexterity than I can manage, in Tomlinson, "Inventing 'Decline,'" Clarke and Trebilcock, eds., *Understanding Decline*; and David Edgerton, *Science, Technology, and the British Industrial "Decline," 1870–1970* (Cambridge, 1996).
26. These points are especially prominent in the two contributions by Koestler: "Introduction: The Lion and the Ostrich," pp. 5–8, and "Postscript: The Manager and the Muses," pp. 113–17.
27. Elizabeth Young, "Against the Stream," pp. 105–07; John Vaizey, "The Tragedy of Being Clever," pp. 107–10.
28. Koestler, "Introduction," p. 8.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

30. Malcolm Muggeridge, "England, Whose England?" p. 14.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., p. 15.
34. Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles* (London, 2005), p. 509.
35. Koestler, "Introduction," p. 6; Muggeridge, "England, Whose England?" p. 14.
36. Koestler, "Introduction," p. 7 (and passim); Muggeridge, "England, Whose England?" p. 17.
37. Koestler, "Postscript," p. 117; Muggeridge, "England, Whose England?" p. 17.
38. Koestler, "Postscript," p. 115; Muggeridge, "England, Whose England?" p. 17.
39. Koestler, "Prelude," p. 9.
40. Ibid.
41. Henry Fairlie, "On the Comforts of Anger," p. 10.
42. Ibid., p. 11; emphasis added.
43. I am grateful to Nancy Reynolds for bringing this point to my attention.
44. Koestler, "Prelude," p. 9.
45. Koestler, "Postscript," pp. 113, 114, 116 (quotation on p. 116).

A Glance Back at Fifty Years in the British Book Trade

GRAHAM GREENE

Readers of *Adventures with Britannia* may be interested to know that I have an odd connection with Texas. My uncle Graham Greene founded the Anglo-Texan Society in 1953. He and a friend were on a train journey, and in their compartment there were a couple of pretty Texan girls. Not knowing how to approach them, they wrote a letter to *The Times*, suggesting the need for Anglo-Texan relations to be strengthened by the formation of a society. This jape got out of hand, and the first function, a barbeque, was attended by 1,500 guests. The society flourished, and arranged for a brass plaque to be erected at the corner of 3 St. James Place in London to mark the location of the Texas Legation in Great Britain during the final years of the Republic of Texas, 1842–45. The plaque, unveiled by Governor Price Daniel, Sr., is now the only monument to the existence of the Anglo-Texan Society.

In this lecture I will give some impressions of my fifty years in the book business through the books with which I have been involved—and also of national and international book-trade politics.

I left Oxford at twenty-one, and within a few weeks found myself flying to Dublin to take up a trainee post as a banker with Guinness and Mahon. My grandfather was Chairman of the holding company in London. This was a privileged start, but I still can't remember how I came to accept this destiny, since throughout my childhood I had