The Romance of Decline :
The Historiography of Appeasement
and British National Identity

by

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1 Ever since the 1930s, in the context of Great Britain's secular decline from world power status, the historiography of appeasement has been inextricably intertwined with shifting understandings of British national identity. Baldly stated, the assertion is probably unexceptionable: most historians would agree that historical inquiry is a social process, and within this body of work the significance of decline as a factor influencing interpretation has long been acknowledged. [1] But for most international historians, the role of such cultural factors remains marginal and certainly does not impinge upon the ultimate sovereignty of primary archival sources in determining interpretation. In the discipline at large, these traditional empiricist assumptions are now under sustained challenge from textualist and relativist critiques, problematising the claims of traditional historical methodology to offer access to objective truths, not least through analysis of the ideological tensions at play in particular bodies of historiography and

of the political projects and socio-cultural identities which they have served to ground. In this last respect, moreover, there are many fruitful points of interaction with broader inter-disciplinary work on the 'imagining' of national identity through textual representation, in which the scripting of national historical narratives bulks large.

2 With an eye to this critical theoretical work, it is intended to advance a strong reading of the opening assertion, and to suggest that changing - and competing - conceptions of British national identity have been crucial in the evolution of interpretations of appeasement. On the one hand, shifting perspectives on national identity have critically shaped academic engagement with the subject. On the other hand - though here the claim is somewhat less strong - this writing has helped to disseminate particular conceptions of national identity in the wider social world. (2) This is not to deny that it is still legitimate to regard this historiography in conventional terms as a discourse about some discrete events in the 1930s as refracted through the extant documentary traces. Documentary factors have certainly played a role in facilitating the production of more detailed accounts over time. However, the aim here is to foreground some of the rather more subjective aspects of historians' engagement with appeasement. Arguably, since the archival record can apparently be admitted but still leave room for drastically contrasting, if not contradictory, interpretations, it is necessary to attend much more closely to the assumptions - political, cultural, ideological in a broad sense - which have conditioned how the documents are read. Whatever the merits of traditional perspectives on the historiography of appeasement, it is at least as interesting and valid to think of it as a discourse about British national identity in the present as well as the past.

3 In order to analyse a body of historical writing as voluminous as that on appeasement, some kind of analytical framework is required. (3) From a diachronic perspective, it can plausibly be argued that the historical verdict on British foreign policy in the 1930s has passed through a series of distinct phases: the orthodox critique first elaborated in the war gave way after the 1960s to a more sympathetic revisionist reappraisal which has in turn recently been supplanted by a self-styled counter-revisionist interpretation. Since these phases were not entirely discrete, however, such an analysis downplays the significance of dispute between historians and the coexistence of competing interpretations at any given point. Hence Philip Bell's argument that debates about the origins of the war should be conceptualised synchronically, as revolving around sets of interpretive dichotomies - such as the thesis of an inevitable war versus that of an unnecessary war or arguments as to whether the war was fundamentally about ideology or about power politics - 'which have flourished during the whole period since the 1930s'. (4) In the case of appeasement, such an analysis has merit, given that hostile and sympathetic perspectives have indeed existed side-by-side and since what is centrally at stake in the debate between them is whether policy was the product of individual agency or determined by objective structural constraints. Yet, such an approach is by definition unable to explain why it should be that at certain points in time one interpretation should be dominant and the other marginal. This explanation is best found through an approach combining the diachronic and synchronic, focusing on how ideas about national identity and other broad cultural forces have conditioned the course of historiographical debates.

4 The canonical point of departure for historical writing on appeasement is *Guilty Men* . (5) Conceived and written over a weekend in June 1940 by three radical Beaverbrook journalists - Michael Foot, Peter Howard and

Frank Owen - under the pseudonym 'Cato', this polemical indictment proved immensely popular and has cast a long shadow over subsequent historiography. The book's instant success was due to the vitriolic and accessible tone in which it offered a bewildered public a compelling explanation of the crisis facing Britain at the time of its publication in early July 1940; a point which marked the nadir of Britain's fortunes in the war, after the débâcle of Dunkirk but before the Battle of Britain which marked at least a temporary respite for the nation. These perilous circumstances conditioned the book's savage critique of the appeasers, on whom blame for recent catastrophes was unequivocally laid. Prime Ministers Neville Chamberlain and Stanley Baldwin and their whole political clique, 'blind to the purposes of the criminal new Nazi war power', had consistently misjudged Hitler's intentions, capitulated to his escalating demands by proffering unilateral concessions in the vain hope of preserving peace, and so neglected Britain's armaments as to conduct 'a great empire, supreme in arms and secure in liberty' to 'the edge of national annihilation'. (6) July 1940 lent a terrible retrospective clarity to the events of the 1930s which thus unfold in the pages of *Guilty Men* with the remorseless inevitability of Aeschylean tragedy: there was little point probing for rational motives behind appeasement since it could not but appear as an incomprehensible policy of utter folly, if not cowardice.

5 The form and content of *Guilty Men* can be connected to notions of national identity, with respect both to the preconceived assumptions that shaped the authors' argument and to what the text was avowedly designed to achieve. First, the interpretation of *Guilty Men* is fundamentally premised on the assumption of British strength, greatness and capability. 'Cato' takes it for granted that British policy-makers in the 1930s had the freedom to choose alternative, better, policies - of resistance and confrontation rather than conciliation - had they but the vision, intelligence and

competence to do so: the essence of their culpability lies in the fact that they could and should have acted differently. Second, the authors' intention was to effect change in the real world. Despite Winston Churchill's assumption of the premiership in May 1940, many of the appeasers remained in office, including Chamberlain and Lord Halifax, the Foreign Secretary, and 'Cato' intended to rally the nation through a purging of those responsible for the calamity of 1940. Hence the closing words of the text: 'Let the Guilty Men retire of their own volition and so make an essential contribution to the victory upon which all are implacably resolved'. [7] The logic of *Guilty Men* is to personalise responsibility for the disaster by arraigning certain individuals in order by extension to exculpate the rest of the nation: the corollary of their guilt is our innocence. Thus after the departure of the culpable the mass of the nation - 'a people determined to resist and conquer' - could unite without further recrimination for the supreme effort of conducting total war, a war which given the assumed underlying strength of the country could be prosecuted to victory. [8]

6 In other words, a particular interpretation of appeasement - a negative one stressing personal culpability rather than broader structural or impersonal factors - was required to underpin the future war effort. Thus *Guilty Men* has to be seen as a key text in the broad cultural movement of 1940 that enacted the collectivist and consensual identity that carried Britain through the 'People's War' and beyond. Of course, there was much more to this identity than anti-appeasement: recent work has identified the many diverse fronts on which the British people were mobilised to fight the Second World War as a war against the 1930s. [9] Equally, as collectivism has been eroded in contemporary British politics, the reality of the wartime consensus has been convincingly called into question. But there is good evidence that whatever divisions remained amongst the British, they united during the war in treating appeasement as 'an object of universal

revilement'. (10) *Guilty Men* was thus crucial for providing a reading of the past, linked to a particular characterisation of national identity (a national 'us' which excluded the architects of appeasement), which together offered a workable foundation for the waging of the war ahead.

7 The truth of the interpretation advanced in *Guilty Men* was therefore essentially a product of its political effectiveness. Alternative readings of the 1930s were certainly possible on the basis of the information then in the public domain, but such explanations failed to acquire similar contemporary authority or subsequent influence because they lacked *Guilty Men* 's practical utility. Harold Nicolson's Penguin Special, *Why Britain is at War* , published in November 1939, advanced a cautious defence of the appeasers both implicitly by focusing much more on the iniquities of Adolf Hitler's foreign policy than on the democratic response to it and explicitly by reference to the alleged det ermining influence of structural factors, particularly pacific public opinion. (11) This too was a text for its times, a product of the Phoney War when Britain was at but not really in war and when Chamberlain remained in office as Prime Minister. In these circumstances patriotism, together with Nicolson's own solidly bourgeois temperament and position as a National Government MP, dictated a broadly sympathetic approach seeking to unite the country behind rather than against the appeasers. (Not that Nicol son abstained from all criticism: his pre-publication belief that sections of the book would 'annoy the Government terribly' was partially justified. (12) W. N. Medlicott's scholarly accounts of the origins of the war similarly prefigured revisionist themes in evincing a sensitive perception of Britain's global strategic dilemma and the historical antecedents and determinants of appeasement, even while remaining critical of that policy as a departure from realpolitik. (13) In terms of literary elegance, coherence, logical consistency and scholarly rigour, the works of Nicolson and Medlicott were manifestly superior to

Guilty Men , but in 1940 their interpretations were decisively marginalised. The disasters of Norway and Dunkirk rendered Nicolson's inclusive approach anachronistic and implausible, while Medlicott's treatment - with its Rankean detachment and preoccupation with the arcane subtleties of diplomacy - paled anaemically beside the passionate vigour of *Guilty Men* . Thus 'Cato' effected a closure over other, more complex, explanations of the 1930s; by offering the only account which worked ideologically to provide a national history and present identity in tune with the new realities of 1940 and the exigencies of the 'People's War'.

8 From the outset, therefore, the scripting of a negative interpretation of appeasement followed from preconceived assumptions that Britain was strong and capable. In the immediate post-war period, interpretations refined and developed the essential theses of *Guilty Men* , which seemed only to have been confirmed as the course of the war revealed both the extent of Hitler's ambitions and the wickedness of the Führer's regime. These views were given a judicial imprimatur by the Nuremberg war crimes trials: the indictment of leading Nazis for conspiring to wage an aggressive war - 'planned and prepared for over a long period of time and with no small skill and cunning' (14)- implicitly also condemned those in the democracies who had failed to perceive and foil the conspiracy. A slew of historians working in this climate recapitulated this notion of premeditated German aggression, the corollary of which was to damn appeasement as a product of 'political myopia' (15) and as a policy 'burdened ... with make-believe', a lamentable 'failure of European statesmanship'. (16) These authors did not require documentary evidence to prove the truth of their interpretations, (17) but the evidence which had become available in the form of captured German documents could easily be read as confirming (and thus lending additional authority to) what had now become common sense. The political expediency of the Nuremberg interpretation for all the great powers in the

context of post-war international relations served to further cement its status as self-evident truth. (18)

9 The most emphatic and enduring articulation of this post-war orthodox view was that published in 1948 by Churchill in the first volume of his magisterial history of the Second World War, *The Gathering Storm* . Churchill's narrative scripted the 1930s in Manichean terms as a titanic confrontation between the 'English- speaking peoples' and 'the wicked'. The existence of a Nazi 'programme of aggression, nicely calculated and timed, unfolding stage by stage' was axiomatic: Hitler had advanced through the decade along a 'predetermined deadly course'. The appeasers had failed to perceive this, and as a result of 'a long series of miscalculations, and misjudgements of men and facts' pursued a policy amounting to little more than 'complete surrender ... to the Nazi threat of force'. Appeasement was essentially a policy of one-sided concessions which proved both dishonourable - in that it entailed purchasing peace through betraying small states - and disastrous in that it condemned Britain to fight the war against Germany in the most unfavourable circumstances. For Churchill the past conflict was 'the unnecessary war', and his narrative catalogued the lost opportunities - from the Disarmament Conference of 1932-4 through to the Anglo-Franco-Soviet negotiations of 1939 - at which Hitler could have been stopped. Failure to grasp these openings and to take concerted resolute action inexorably transformed an unnecessary war into an inevitable war, from which Britain was hard-pressed to emerge victorious. (19)

10 *The Gathering Storm* is a complex text that can profitably be read in many different ways. It of course represents a significant chapter in Churchill's almost ceaseless autobiographical self-construction: he was himself a participant in the events about which he wrote, and in vilifying the

appeasers he also magnified his own heroic status, not only as the successor to Chamberlain who saved the nation from the consequences of his folly, but also as the Cassandra of the 1930s whose warnings and calls for resistance to Hitler were consistently ignored. (20) But the text can also be read through the lens of national identity, for it is laden with ideas and anxieties about Britain's role in the world. Churchill's critique of appeasement - like that of 'Cato' - was premised upon an assumption of British strength: policy-makers not only should but could have rearmed more quickly and constructed a coalition to contain Hitler. Though Churchill's account is more sophisticated, the roots of appeasement are thus still located in erroneous individual choices rather than objective structural constraints. Moreover, Churchill positions appeasement in a longer-term context, identifying it as alien to the spirit of 'the wonderful unconscious tradition' of British foreign policy which from at least the Elizabethan age aimed at opposing 'the strongest, most aggressive, most dominating Power on the Continent', thereby to preserve British freedom and 'the liberties of Europe'. On this reading, appeasement was a sad aberration from a traditional policy that had laid the basis for imperial prosperity by combining 'in natural accord' the protection of particular British interests ('our island security' and the growth of a 'widening Empire') with the furthering of the 'grand universal causes' of justice, democracy and freedom. (21) So a particular romanticised (and doubtless to non-English eyes sinister or laughable) notion of British history and identity underpinned Churchill's critique: appeasement was a betrayal of that history which for him 'confirmed the particular genius of the English race and proved its right to be rich, Imperial and the guardian of human freedoms'. (22)

11 As these ideas constructed Churchill's interpretation of appeasement, so he intended that interpretation to influence British identity in the post-

war period. Within his text Churchill stressed his continued fidelity to the conception of Britishness which had informed his original hostility to appeasement - principles 'which I had followed for many years and follow still' (23)- and his explicit allusions to the post-war situation make clear that those ideas entailed policy prescriptions. This is particularly apparent in those passages where Churchill makes his own contribution to the promulgation of a general law of foreign policy based on anti-appeasement, the notion that conciliating dictators was always disastrous and wrong. Repeatedly, Churchill draws parallels between the Nazi threat in the 1930s and the alleged threat from Soviet Russia confronting the west 'in singular resemblance' at the time of writing, explicitly intending that 'the lessons of the past [might] be a guide' to ensure that the democracies did not repeat the mistake of appeasing totalitarianism in the Cold War. (24) Clearly, Churchill felt Britain could and should continue to pursue its traditional foreign policy towards the continent, and take a leading role in opposing the machinations of a Joseph Stalin whom policy- makers were increasingly 'fitting ... to the Hitler model'. (25) By the same token, there was no sign that he had abandoned his belief that the British 'ought to set the life and endurance of the British Empire and the greatness of this Island very high in our duty'. (26) So Churchill's reading of the past, itself dictated by a particular sense of national identity, produced a prescription for present action designed to sustain that identity, as narrating the past elided into scripting the present. It is true that Churchill's account was not devoid of anxieties about the survival of an identity threatened by shifting geo-political realities: it would be no mean feat to negotiate a path through 'the awful unfolding scene of the future'. (27) So while *Guilty Men* had attempted to fashion a new sense of nationhood, Churchill's text was a rather more conservative intervention, designed to protect an identity that was now fragile and threatened. But it was nonetheless premised on a past and present ideal of British national identity rooted in imperial prestige,

world power status and the identification of England with the advancement of universal human values and, indeed, progress.

12 Through the 1950s, Churchill's vision of Britishness became increasingly difficult to sustain, as he was forced to admit when making some hard choices during his final premiership. Decolonisation proceeded apace as Churchill's own faculties diminished and, as Keith Robbins has remarked, there was something particularly poignant about the image of the aged Churchill 'dressed in yet one more strange costume' at the coronation in 1953, 'the indomitable embodiment of a once great empire now struggling, with great spirit and dignity, but in vain, against the ravages of time'. (28) World power status seemed to be slipping away as British autonomy was increasingly circumscribed by dependence on the United States, as was to be humiliatingly demonstrated over Suez in 1956. But Churchill's critical interpretation of appeasement still seemed authoritative and was not subject to any serious challenge during the decade. It 'satisfied everybody and seemed to exhaust all dispute', not least because the 'considerations of present day politics' which had originally conspired to construct the Nuremberg view remained in place, and other issues seemed more urgently to demand historical investigation. (29) So the subject drifted out of scholarly fashion to such an extent that 'research and publication on the history of the 1930s ... seemed to have ceased' (30): 'it was very difficult, if not impossible, to get anything published in England on the subject - at least in learned journals'. (31) The work which did appear followed the familiar narrative: the German documents 'conclusively proved the deliberate intention and plan of Hitler and a few of his leading coadjutors to start a second world war' and thus the appeasers had been wrong to pursue 'conciliation and tolerance to the point of failure to recognise evil, and in evil danger'. (32) Dissenting voices were largely confined to biographies of or memoir accounts by the appeasers

themselves. Thus Samuel Hoare, a senior member of both Baldwin's and Chamberlain's Cabinet, advanced a subtle defence of appeasement as a judicious blend of conciliation and rearmament aiming at 'peace upon reasonable terms ... [but] war in the last resort, when every attempt at peace had failed'. (33) But such accounts, from subjects tainted by Churchill's treatment, were dismissed as shameless, ex parte interventions and failed to detract from the plausibility of the orthodox view.

13 Throughout the 1950s, the amount of documentary material available relating to appeasement steadily increased, but this also tended to confirm rather than challenge established views. The archives of the major powers still remained closed, of course, but publication under Allied auspices of selections from the captured German archives began in *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918 - 1945* (*DGFP*) in 1949, while *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919 - 1939* (*DBFP*) had begun to appear in 1946. (34) It is now recognised that such official documentary collections are the products of a whole host of practical and political contingencies that make them very far from 'objective' sources, and these were no exception. (35) The Allies had decided to take control of the publication of the German documents precisely to avoid a repeat of the *Kriegsschuldfrage* of the 1920s, when the Germans had published their own documents to undermine the victors' interpretation of the origins of the war. Thus it was scarcely surprising that the select documents published reinforced the established Nuremberg interpretation of German (and therefore secondarily the appeasers') war guilt, especially as many of the historians editing them had already published works in this vein. As Lewis Namier, an adviser in the *DGFP* publication, put it in 1953: 'we were determined to do this work on their archives with the utmost impartiality and with impeccable scholarship. But we did not doubt that it would turn out a formidable indictment'. (36)

14 The published British documents also consolidated existing arguments rather than triggering any radical revision. The early volumes focused on the execution rather than formulation of policy and so provided no basis for probing the possible rational motives behind appeasement, leaving in place the existing superficial conclusion that it was misguided and foolish. (37) By the same token, the staggered publication and patchy chronological coverage of these volumes, together with their geographical compartmentalisation of European, Far Eastern, Mediterranean and American affairs precluded the construction of a rounded or dramatically reformulated picture of the problems facing British policy-makers in the 1930s. (38) Thus in reviewing the *DBFP* volumes on the Czech crisis and Munich in 1953, Bernadotte Schmitt concluded that despite

> the difficult circumstances of the time, this record permits no doubt that British diplomacy suffered a defeat comparable only to the loss of the American colonies a century and a half before. That a subsequent British government should, eleven years later, publish this record was an act of high political courage and strengthens ones confidence in the objectivity of the entire publication. (39)

Hence, it was only with the advent of the 1960s that interpretations began to soften when the revisionist defence of appeasement that had already been evident in embryo in pre-1940 and memoir work became plausible and sustainable. This was caused by a concatenation of factors, but chief amongst them was a major shift in understandings of British national identity, as the increasingly obvious fact of Britain's decline in the national present led to reassessments of this key episode in the national past.

15 A. J. P. Taylor's *The Origins of the Second World War* , published in 1961, is often characterised as advancing a pioneering defence of appeasement, but this interpretation is difficult to sustain. True, in denying that Hitler had a programme for aggression Taylor undermined a central tenet of the orthodox critique: 'after all, the British Government could hardly be blamed for not knowing what Hitler's plans were if he did not know them himself'. (40) Equally, he acknowledged that the appeasers were 'men confronted with real problems, doing their best in the circumstances of their time', beset by structural constraints such as pacific public opinion and the waning moral validity of the Versailles settlement. (41) But Taylor had been a confirmed anti-appeaser in the 1930s, and despite his professed desire to allow 'the record, considered in detachment' to govern his conclusions, and his determination 'to understand what happened, not to vindicate or condemn', he remained convinced that that attitude had been justified. (42) Hence his characterisation of appeasement as driven by 'timidity; blindness; [and] moral doubts'; scarcely a revisionist sentiment. (43) Taylor may have redefined appeasement as an active rather than a purely passive policy, but since this elevated Chamberlain's restless determination 'to start something' - which presented Hitler with opportunities he gratefully seized - to the ranks of prime causes of the war, this hardly made appeasement wise, moral or right. (44) While it may therefore be difficult to pin down precisely what Taylor thinks of appeasement in a text so riven with paradoxes and contradiction, it requires some ingenuity to present him simply as a defender of Chamberlain.

16 The idiosyncrasies of Taylor's *Origins* can be linked to various factors - his cavalier scholarship, the fragmentary nature of his sources, even generational experience (45)- but reading the text through the lens of

national identity again proves fruitful. One of Taylor's most notorious epigrams characterised Munich as

> a triumph for all that was best and most enlightened in British life; a triumph for those who had preached equal justice between peoples; a triumph for those who had courageously denounced the harshness and short-sightedness of Versailles. (46)

Richard Bosworth has suggested that these phrases can be interpreted in starkly contrasting ways; read literally they confirm that at Munich British policy secured its professed objectives which were quite in tune with the dominant principles underlying it since 1919; read as sarcasm, they constitute a savage indictment of the betrayal of democratic Czechoslovakia by a 'British Establishment as shamelessly devoted to public plunder as it usually was'. (47) These readings connect with the ambivalence of Taylor's interpretation of appeasement as a whole, and thus to two different characterisations of British national identity. The first betrays a measure of what was to become quintessential revisionist sympathy for the appeasers, struggling to enact an appropriate policy under severe constraints, not the least of which was the contradictory nature of the settlement they were pledged to defend. The second, conversely, harks back to older, leftist variants of the orthodox critique, insisting that policy-makers could and should have acted differently, as Taylor had himself argued in the 1930s. Reference to the intentions or personalities of authors to explain their texts is now terribly démodé, but it is nonetheless tempting to ascribe the tension between these two sentiments to conflicts between the Taylor of the 1960s and the Taylor of the 1930s, or between Taylor the supposedly objective scholar and Taylor the radical activist. Perhaps his ambivalent radicalism - which led him to

crave approval from the Establishment he affected to despise - generated a dilemma, never fully articulated or resolved: should the heroes in this critical episode in the national past be radical dissenting anti-appeasers like himself, or Tory Establishment figures like Chamberlain whom 'the record, considered in detachment' seemed increasingly to vindicate? (48)

17 In preference to the theoretically dubious allure of such explanations, these tensions can be ascribed to a nascent reformulation of conceptions of British national identity. The two perspectives on appeasement delineated above implied quite different views of British power and capability in the 1930s, conditioned by a widespread equivocation at this point in the 1960s about Britain's place in the world. Taylor exemplified this uncertainty, as becomes evident upon developing the implications of the third reading of his Munich passage which Bosworth provides, which construes Taylor as warning against deriving simplistic anti-appeasement messages from the 1930s and urging that 'in the post-Hiroshima world, the ability to sit down and reason together and not write off your present enemy as a madman was crucial to human survival'. (49) Taylor knew that for contemporary Britain nuclear brinkmanship was not a viable option: 'he had become increasingly if sadly aware that England's moment of greatness had gone forever'. (50) Yet the alternative he espoused was ironically still predicated on British influence if not power: 'his exaggerated belief in Britain's central role in world affairs was as evident in the basic assumptions of his CND campaigning - that others would take note of a moral lead by Britain - as it was ... in *The Origins of the Second World War* '. (51) (Other critics have pointed out the fundamentally Anglocentric nature of the text and thus the misleading nature of its expansive title. (52)) Subsequently, Taylor confirmed the accuracy of this diagnosis, remarking of the failure of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament that 'we made one great mistake which ultimately doomed [it] to futility. We thought that

Great Britain was still a great power whose example would affect the rest of the world'. (53) At this point the arch-patriot Taylor remained confused about this issue, but the gradual displacement of one dominant discourse on national identity by another was a major ideological factor conditioning the interpretation of *Origins* .

18 The incoherence of Taylor's interpretation of appeasement means that he can scarcely be labelled a revisionist. But to dwell on the inconsistencies of his account is to miss the essence of his achievement which was destructive rather than creative: by the early 1960s existing interpretations were losing their suasive power, and Taylor's intervention comprehensively unsettled dominant ways of looking at the 1930s in order to open up spaces for new narratives, without itself offering a clearly-articulated re-interpretation. So while his own arguments proved evanescent, *Origins* nonetheless signposted the imminent coalescence of the revisionist view. Absolutely central to this process was growing sensitivity to the contemporary limitations of British power, as the national decline that Taylor had groped to comprehend appeared to gather pace. Where orthodox critics had assumed British strength and policy-makers' freedom of action, revisionists read back into the 1930s a sense of weakness, of a gulf between resources and commitments, which caused them to cast the appeasers in a much more favourable light. As Donald Cameron Watt wrote in 1965, in a fiercely perceptive article predicting the likely contours of the revisionist view, sympathetic accounts of British policy predicated upon Chamberlain's limited room for manoeuvre had 'the ring of truth to men who live in the last stages of the contraction of British world power as we do today'. (54) The elaboration of a new national narrative of decline led to appeasement being reassessed as 'a central episode in a protracted retreat from an untenable "world power" status.

Appeasement, on such an analysis, was neither stupid nor wicked: it was merely inevitable'. (55)

19 Other factors reinforced this change of perspective. During the 1960s the discipline of history itself underwent a profound transformation. The rapid pace of social, economic and cultural change in the post-war world generated new forces and tensions in need of legitimation and explanation, and historians grew disenchanted with the explanatory power of traditional methodologies. So approaches diversified, particularly through rapprochement with the social sciences, and older modes of inquiry 'focused on the agency of individuals and on elements of intentionality' gave ground to those emphasising 'social structures and processes of social change'. (56) In the study of international relations, these trends saw diplomatic history - focused narrowly on politics and a few elite individuals - mutate into an international history attentive to profound and structural forces, the domestic determinants of policy and the role of economic, social and cultural factors. So the shift of focus in the study of appeasement onto the structural factors conditioning policy was of a piece with a broader disciplinary transformation. Changes in the political landscape also contributed. Just as the debacle of Suez had somewhat discredited simplistic Munich analogies, so the rise of détente undermined the hitherto inflexible verities of anti-appeasement. (57) Moreover, the waning of Eurocentrism in a world dominated by superpower bipolarity and decolonisation encouraged scholars to conceive of the origins of the war as a global phenomenon, and thus to take a more synoptic view of the manifold problems confronting British policy-makers. Similarly, growing temporal distance from the war prompted increased consideration of the antecedents of immediate pre-war crises in the policies of previous administrations, thus placing them in deeper, longer-term perspectives. Last, and in a sense least, came the 1967 Public Records Act which by

reducing the closed period for British archives from fifty to thirty years almost instantly permitted access to the complete documentation of the inter-war period. Historians' 'professional ideology', valorising the primary source above all else, dictates that this factor is usually identified as the critical one precipitating the rise of revisionism. (58) But while it was of course important, since it gave historians access to the appeasers' own contemporary perceptions and justifications of their actions, and enabled much more detailed accounts, defences of appeasement along revisionist lines had always been possible, and had been growing increasingly plausible and numerous before the archives opened.

20 The 1960s were therefore a transitional decade. Of course, interpretations did not become uniformly sympathetic at a stroke. In 1967, Christopher Thorne still focused on the 'considerable shortcomings' of British policy- makers, lamenting the fact that 'courage and ability were not abundant in public affairs', but he was fighting an explicit rearguard action against the advance of revisionist views. (59) Even those accounts - such as F. S. Northedge's *The Troubled Giant* - which still criticised Chamberlain for misjudging Hitler's intentions, even for being 'credulous and naive', now acknowledged how 'the country's resources were themselves under intense pressure' and 'how little these limitations on the sinews of policy were understood at the time and how much they have been overlooked since by critics of British policy'. (60) Some authors moved position rapidly, the most conspicuous example being Martin Gilbert's auto-revisionism between his co-authored (with Richard Gott) 1963 critique *The Appeasers* and his 1966 delineation of *The Roots of Appeasement* . (61) Debates in related areas fed into this movement. The orthodox critique of appeasement had to an extent depended upon a particular characterisation of Hitler's policy - as programmatic and coherent - which was increasingly challenged as historians more interested in structure than intention and

ideology began to outline a 'functionalist' alternative. By the end of the decade, revisionist sensibilities were dominant. In 1968 W. N. Medlicott's account of British policy in the period was premised on the notion of incipient imperial over-stretch and advanced a tentative defence of Munich as Chamberlainite realpolitik; moreover, he argued that such was the extent of consensus over the main lines of foreign policy in the 1930s that popular stereotypes drawing sharp distinctions between appeasers and resisters were now impossible to sustain. (62) In the same year, in one of the last major studies published before the opening of the archives, Keith Robbins catalogued the constraints under which Chamberlain had laboured before concluding that Munich had been 'the necessary purgatory through which Englishmen had to pass before the nation could emerge united in 1939'. (63)

21 Through the next two decades international historians worked on the mass of freshly-available documents, exploring in a deluge of monographs and articles the thematic issues newly-prominent in the sub- discipline, to bulk out a revisionist interpretation that fit the now dominant discourse of British decline. Accordingly, appeasement was redefined as a rational and logical response to imperial over-stretch formulated by policy-makers who correctly perceived that the British Empire had inadequate resources to defend sprawling global commitments from the tripartite revisionist challenge of Germany, Italy and Japan. The interests of Britain, as a status quo power deriving prosperity from world trade, dictated the avoidance of war, but more to the point a host of objective constraints precluded the pursuit of any forceful policy. Britain had no dependable allies in Europe or across the Atlantic; the Dominions were chary of continental entanglements; at home, economic weakness and pacific public opinion in an age of mass democracy precluded the pursuit of large-scale rearmament to remedy the military deficiencies that had developed since 1919; the

Versailles settlement was riven by contradictions, vits moral validity irredeemably compromised; fear of the apocalyptic effects of modern warfare combined with the psychological scars left by the Great War further impelled British statesmen away from confrontation. In this context, appeasement was not a product of foolish individual whim, it was 'massively overdetermined', (64) the inevitable product of national decline: 'the appeasers had no choice but to seek negotiations with the revisionists, aiming for general dé tente through the rectification of just grievances if it were achievable, otherwise buying time for rearmament and to create the most propitious circumstances for war'. (65) The phenomenon of appeasement was thus incorporated into a new narrative of national history in which it was quite in keeping with tradition:

> a 'natural' policy for a small island-state gradually losing its place in world affairs, shouldering military and economic burdens which were increasingly too great for it, and developing internally from an oligarchic to a more democratic society in which sentiments in favour of the pacific and rational settlement of disputes were widely held. (66)

Appeasement thus became quintessentially British, rather than a betrayal of the national heritage, as Churchill had styled it thirty years earlier.

22 Any summary of the revisionist view necessarily presents it as rather more monolithic than it was. Although the constraints on policy-makers were now universally foregrounded, there remained significant debate as to precisely how far these had determined policy, as to the wisdom and skill demonstrated in prosecuting policy in particular areas, and indeed as to the general verdict on appeasement and Chamberlain (some authors drawing a distinction between the two). On the fringes of revisionism lay Keith Middlemas who conceded that between 1937 and 1939 Chamberlain,

'aware of Britain's multiple weaknesses and the risks of war', attempted 'to bring commitments and power into alignment' and that he should be commended for this 'realistic acceptance of Britain's diminished estate in relation to the rest of the world'. But despite this, Middlemas still found a great deal to criticise in the formulation, execution and presentation of policy and argued that, particularly in the winter of 1938-1939, Chamberlain pursued a *Diplomacy of Illusion* until external events forced the belated adoption of a coherent policy of deterrence. (67) In the heartland of revisionism, conversely, lay David Dilks, who developed a strong revisionist interpretation of appeasement in which Chamberlain was almost unreservedly defended as a masterly realpolitiker pursuing the best, if not only, policy possible in the difficult circumstances of imperial twilight. Not only was Chamberlain's policy sensible, popular and of long-standing, it was also skilfully executed: at Munich Hitler was out-manoeuvred and put on his word, and subsequently British policy was to 'hope for the best and prepare for the worst'. When Hitler proved in March 1939 that he could not be trusted, Chamberlain's policy became one of deterrence and resistance, and his careful handling of affairs through his whole premiership ensured that war came at the best possible conjuncture with the nation united and prepared. (68)

23 Other discrete viewpoints within the revisionist tradition can also be identified. A significant minority of revisionist scholars emphasised the imperialist dimension of British identity, arguing that Chamberlain's realistic policy was the only one 'which offered any hope of avoiding war - and of saving both lives and the British Empire'. According to this view, Chamberlain understood the limitations of British power far better than his critics, and his strategy of conflict-avoidance was best suited to the long run preservation of British greatness. Indeed, what was flawed about British policy was not Chamberlainite appeasement, but the decision to abandon it

and resort to confrontation that was forced on Chamberlain by his Tory colleagues after Hitler's annexation of Prague. (69) For at least one of these scholars, of course, a defence of Chamberlain was to be but a prelude to a thorough-going attack on Churchill, Chamberlain's most vociferous (and therefore most deluded) contemporary critic, whose over-estimation of national power and determination to confront Hitler eventually led to the sacrifice of British grandeur to colonial nationalists, Washington and socialism. (70) Different national perspectives were also evident, as a signal contribution was made by German historians, coming to the subject with their own preoccupations and traditions, and as some of the most devoted advocates of social science approaches. These scholars produced dense and massively documented structural analyses of the interaction between a huge range of domestic and international determinants of policy, demolishing criticisms of appeasement as 'illusionary and dilettantist' and powerfully contributing to the rise of revisionism. (71)

24 Differences of emphasis and interpretation thus persisted between revisionists at the level of detail. But the new focus on structural constraints and the inexorable logic of decline transformed the terms of the debate, and the cumulative effect of this writing was to consolidate a dominant revisionist sensibility. This was evident in Philip Bell's acclaimed, best-selling synthesis of 1986, and in the mass of works produced towards the end of the 1980s in connection with the fiftieth anniversary of the outbreak of war. (72) Donald Cameron Watt's monumental study of the last year of peace offered a not entirely flattering portrait of appeasement, but nonetheless doubted whether an alternative policy 'would have made any difference'. (73) Gerhard Weinberg, reflecting on the anniversary of the Munich crisis, summarised the revisionist case for the defence, presenting the settlement as a defeat for Hitler and arguing for the essential rationalism, clarity and continuity of Chamberlain's strategy: 'if this Munich

pact were broken, it was agreed, then the next German aggression that was resisted by the victim would bring on war'. (74) Finally, in a book accompanying a major BBC television series, Richard Overy synthesised the findings of two decades of revisionist research and concluded that no real alternative to appeasement had existed given that 'Britain's relative decline and her retreat from global power were evident already in the 1930s'. (75)

25 The factors identified above as precipitating revisionism had a persistent influence over much of the subsequent two decades. The reality of decline seemed to become ever more unquestionable: as one scholar observed, 'the onset of a new recession in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s' accelerated the growth of sympathy for the appeasers, fighting 'to save British society in its contemporary form, and to stabilise the decline in Britain's international position'. (76) Party politics also helped to sustain revisionism. In the post-war period, orthodox critiques had worked politically for both right and left, 'validating the ascendancy in the Conservative party of Churchill's aristocratic paternalism over Chamberlain's Midlands business ethic, and thus help[ing to] support the "one nation" Toryism of Harold Macmillan', while also serving as 'part of a left-wing critique of that patrician class'. (77) However, as the 1960s wore on and circumstances changed, revisionism served similarly diverse political ends. For men of the left such as Taylor, questioning the Cold War truisms of anti-appeasement was a radical gesture. Yet soon a new generation of 'younger Conservative and Tory historians' became the staunchest advocates of revisionism, 'convinced by their instincts and their politics of the injustice done by the Tory critics of the Conservatives of the 1930s' (78) and determined 'to bring the traditional *Guilty Men* of inter-war Conservatism out of the cold into the cosy warmth of the "central" British tradition as established by the Second World War'. (79) Over time,

revisionism continued to prove politically supple: hence in the 1980s, as the New Right Thatcherite project to re-make British identity discussed further below - gathered pace, espousing revisionism could again be construed as a counter-cultural gesture. (80) Coupled with all this was the natural enthusiasm of each new generation of historians to confound the conventional wisdom established by their predecessors, especially on an issue that still had profound resonance with the British public. Although that public remained rather resistant to the rehabilitation of the appeasers, it is nonetheless possible to argue that this scholarship must have had some influence in reinforcing a new sense of British national identity in the wider social world, in naturalising and rationalising a sense of decline. By rewriting appeasement in a heroic rather than shameful register, depicting Britain in the 1930s as in the present pluckily battling against adverse circumstances only finally to emerge victorious, the revisionists salvaged something positive for Britain from the wreck of empire, offering comfort to the nation as it adjusted to its more humble and restricted world role.

26 If the historiography of appeasement had come to a full stop with revisionism, then it would be plausible to argue that in the fullness of time interested and subjective explanations had simply given way to accurate, documented, scholarly and objective ones. But that theory is much harder to sustain in the face of the most recent twist in the historiographical tale that has seen, over the last decade, the emergence of a new critique of appeasement, a self-styled counter-revisionist interpretation that in many ways reaffirms, albeit with refinements, the orthodox critique. Negative interpretations of appeasement, continuing to insist on the primacy of agency and the necessity of moral judgement, never disappeared, and as the cultural and ideological context of research and writing has changed, these views have eventually enjoyed a renaissance.

27 Some of the criticisms levelled against revisionism during its years of dominance were methodological. The archives revealed the appeasers' own estimations of the constraints under which they were operating, and some alleged that the revisionists read these documents too literally, in a sense too sympathetic to the appeasers, simply reproducing rather than analysing their self-justifications. 'Mesmerised by the official memoranda, the forager in the Public Record Office may end up writing official history, perpetuating the Establishment's own reading of its problems and policies', (81) concluding as ministers and officials had 'that nothing different could possibly have been done'. (82) It did not take a postmodernist to point out that while the factual record of British policy could now be reconstructed in greater detail than ever before, the documents could not determine the interpretation of that record, since they could not decisively settle questions of motive, or of the relative influence of different factors and interests in policy-making. The dominant literal reading of the documents reproduced the appeasers' own defence of their policies as rational and logical, even inevitable, in the circumstances of the time, helping to consolidate the pre-existing revisionist perspective. But arguably this begged the critical question: 'were the premises on which their policies were based correct?' (83)

28 So while the revisionist paradigm remained dominant, doubts about the contextual factors hampering the appeasers were constantly raised. On the one hand, it was argued that in many cases Chamberlain referred to alleged constraints 'only as an ex post facto justification of policies he had pursued for other reasons'. (84) A revisionist might contend that 'over Czechoslovakia Chamberlain saw the reluctance of the dominions to fight, and the consequent break up of the commonwealth, as decisive', but while this was certainly what Chamberlain had said in Cabinet, was it actually true? (85) After all, he issued the guarantee to Poland six months later in

the teeth of continued Dominion hostility to continental entanglements: 'he did not consult them, but presented them with a "fait accompli"'. (86) On the other hand, the coercive reality of these 'determinants' was also open to question. For problems to become constraints they had first to be construed as such by the policy-making bureaucracy. But often during this process perceptions of the objective situation were flawed or inaccurate, the constraints magnified or invented by the particular ways 'in which the issues were perceived and tackled' reflecting 'a priori principles and choices'; (87) indeed in some cases it seemed as if the so-called constraints were actively constructed by Chamberlain himself. Thus methodological objections to revisionism shaded into substantive interpretive ones.

29 On each of the key thematic issues elucidated by the revisionists, such alternative readings proved possible. Revisionists made much of the pessimistic prognoses the Chiefs of Staff tendered to Chamberlain throughout the later 1930s, but a trenchant case could be made that this advice was predicated upon a 'worst case analysis', and that delaying confrontation exacerbated rather than ameliorated the British strategic dilemma. (88) On the related issues of economics and rearmament, it was accepted that economic difficulties were bound to limit rearmament to some degree, but the rearmament policy actually adopted depended upon the most conservative and cautious reading possible of the economic situation; revisionists might argue that policy-makers were constrained by economic orthodoxy, but if 'the Government was the prisoner of its own assumptions about the economy and society' were there not also alternative choices, and therefore some culpability to be borne? (89) In the case of potential allies, the preconception that dictated that certain powers could not be relied on to assist in containing Germany arguably became 'a self-confirming conclusion'. (90) 'To be sure, there were special problems in

Great Britain's relations with France, the Soviet Union, and the United States which would not have been easy to surmount. But no serious effort was made ... '. (91) Studies of propaganda also produced grist to the sceptics' mill. Although some research was predicated upon 'the realities of decline', and thus supported the revisionist case, (92) damning evidence against Chamberlain came from work on his government's handling of the press. Far from being a helpless prisoner of pacific public opinion, the government had worked extensively to manage the media, to prevent the open airing of alternatives to appeasement and thus to fashion opinion to its own ends. Such research was doubly damaging. It cast doubt on the reality of the 'determinants' of appeasement, and also undermined Chamberlain's image as a sincere statesmen, occasionally forced to take tough decisions in the national interest, presenting him instead as a power-hungry autocrat, ready to manipulate public and colleagues alike and to use any means necessary to prosecute the policy that he was convinced was right. (93)

30 Through the heyday of revisionism these objections accumulated without displacing the 'authorized version'. (94) Arguments that policy had been poorly conceived or incompetently executed in a particular thematic or geographical area proved susceptible to incorporation into revisionist interpretations; alternatively, they could be disputed or ignored. Revisionism was, after all, a perspective that had arisen in advance of the detailed archival research that subsequently substantiated it; it was an act of faith as much as anything else and so long as the broad cultural forces and assumptions that had engendered it persisted, the edifice could survive the removal of numerous bricks. But towards the end of the 1980s the likely outlines of a comprehensive alternative interpretation could be discerned. Rather than seeing appeasement as a perspicacious response to the Nazi challenge, this view would argue that the assumptions of the

appeasers had been flawed and that their designs had not turned out as they anticipated:

> appeasement, which was intended to conciliate, failed to pacify. Rearmament, which was meant to deter, failed to do so. War, which it was hoped to avoid, broke out on 3 September 1939, and the British Expeditionary Force proved inadequate for its task. [95]

If appeasement were redefined as a failure, then it would no longer be possible to discount its immoral dimension - the fact that it involved 'imposing sacrifices on the publics of countries who had looked to Britain as a model and a protector' [96]- as revisionism had through its preoccupation with structural constraints and realpolitik logic. This view would refocus attention on to personality and ideology, the subjective motives and contingent choices of individual statesmen. The future importance of personality was foreshadowed in Larry Fuchser's sceptical 1983 study of *Neville Chamberlain and Appeasement* (which might have had more impact without its encumbering psycho-historical jargon) [97] while in 1986 Paul Kennedy, to a certain extent recanting his earlier revisionism, argued that it was necessary to re-emphasise

> those very important personal feelings behind appeasement: the contempt and indifference felt by many leading Englishmen towards east-central Europe, the half-fear-half-admiration with which Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy were viewed, the detestation of communism, the apprehensions about future war. [98]

31 It was only in the 1990s that a full-blown counter-revisionist interpretation came into focus, crystallised by the publication in 1993 of R.

A. C. Parker's *Chamberlain and Appeasement* . For Parker, the appeasers were not fools or cowards, but they did fundamentally misunderstand the nature of Nazi expansionism and the menace it represented. Chamberlain in particular always entertained unrealistic hopes that a negotiated compromise agreement simultaneously satisfying Hitler (whom he judged rational and potentially sincere) and protecting British interests was possible. The policy of negotiation and rearmament that Britain pursued through the 1930s was in essence sound and long popular, but as prosecuted by Chamberlain after 1937 it comprised too much conciliation and not enough deterrence. Although decline limited British options, real alternatives to appeasement existed, but Chamberlain consciously rejected both large-scale rearmament and the construction of an anti-fascist coalition as potentially provocative and unnecessary, since limited defensive rearmament would prove sufficient to make Hitler see sense and come to terms. Moreover, Chamberlain clung to appeasement long after it was drained of any realpolitik rationale, and when colleagues and country had abandoned any hope of agreement with Germany. After March 1939, when British policy had supposedly turned towards resistance and deterrence, Chamberlain continued to explore any possible avenue for compromise, even through private channels of dubious constitutional legality, and was only reluctantly dragged into war by his colleagues. Appeasement was not 'a feeble policy of surrender and unlimited retreat', since Chamberlain intended to check German expansion and had a rational (though mistaken) strategy to achieve that goal; but he abandoned the traditional British policy of containing threats through the balance of power, failing to see that Hitler could not be contained by conciliation, and thus left Britain inadequately prepared for war. 'Led by Chamberlain, the government rejected effective deterrence', which 'probably stifled serious chances of preventing the Second World War'. (99)

32 Though its argument may not be entirely innovative, Parker's book is nonetheless a formidable indictment. He is keen to distance himself from the 'posthumous libels' (100) of the Churchillian critique, and tempers his own judgements with revisionist sensitivity to internal and external constraints, but he evinces a basically orthodox sensibility, cogently adapting and synthesising the key criticisms made by anti-revisionist scholars from the 1960s onwards. (101) Chief amongst these is the argument that Chamberlain had a 'fundamental lack of grasp of what the Nazis really stood for': his rationalist worldview meant he could never comprehend Hitler or devise appropriate policies to deal with him. (102) Hence the assertion that the real roots of appeasement lay in Chamberlain's flawed perceptions which led him to choose conciliation 'because he thought it correct': 'he was not the mere puppet of circumstantial constraints' (103) (about whose insuperability Parker is naturally sceptical.) The assertion that March 1939 marked no decisive turning point in Chamberlain's thinking similarly implies that individual convictions rather than objective factors 'must play a central part in ... explanation of British policy', (104) and other counter-revisionists have gone even further, arguing that Chamberlain clung to appeasement until May 1940, thus developing the thrust of earlier critical work. (105) Parker also echoes previous critics in distinguishing between appeasement in general and its Chamberlainite variant, the former being viewed much more positively than the latter. Keith Middlemas had argued that Chamberlain took British policy down a wrong turning in 1937, and later studies contended that other ministers - particularly Halifax - had played a key role after Munich in shifting British policy away from conciliation, even though Chamberlain's conversion was much less complete than theirs. (106) The upshot of all this is that Parker's verdict is in one sense even more critical than that of *Guilty Men* , in that it is Chamberlain almost alone rather than a whole political class that stands indicted:

no one can know what would have happened in Europe if Mr. Chamberlain had been more flexible or if someone else had taken charge, but it is hard to imagine that any other foreign policy could have had a more disastrous outcome. (107)

The favourable response that Parker's book received from reviewers suggested that a thoroughgoing reorientation was afoot. (108) Confirmation comes from the way in which certain scholars have changed their positions in recent years. Sidney Aster - much more willing than Parker to interpret counter-revisionism as a return to the *Guilty Men* critique - has shifted camps dramatically since writing his broadly revisionist 1973 study of *1939* . (109) Even more striking is Brian McKercher's transition from applauding Chamberlainite appeasement as prudent and calculating - Munich as 'cold-blooded realpolitik' - in 1991, to denouncing it in 1996 as an unrealistic and disastrous departure from the British tradition of upholding a balance of power on the continent. (110) Many recent books and essays, while not advancing identical interpretations, nonetheless give credence to the notion of a nascent counter-revisionist school. These include general textbooks produced by scholars on both sides of the Atlantic, (111) and detailed monographs exploring the potential alternatives to Chamberlainite appeasement which were canvassed in the mid-1930s - particularly Robert Vansittart's conception, as Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, of a 'global strategy based on alliance diplomacy' and extended, conventional deterrence - and elucidating how such alternatives were eliminated as Chamberlain established his ascendancy. (112) Other work continues to demolish alleged constraints, for example by arguing that antipathy to communism clouded British governments' perceptions of the national interest and decisively precluded meaningful Anglo-Soviet co-operation to contain Hitler. (113) This emphasis on ideology and subjective contingent choices is further echoed in biographical study of minor

officials, (114) and there is even a left-wing variant of the counter-revisionist approach, harking back to earlier full-blooded socialist critiques of appeasement as a product of the sinister capitalist intrigues of a decadent ruling class. (115) (This is not, of course, to say that revisionist works are now entirely absent, for writing more inclined to defend than condemn can still be found both in general textbooks and detailed studies, but they are now in a minority. (116) Moreover the generally lukewarm reception accorded by scholars to the recent spate of critical biographies of Churchill - which rest in substantial part on revisionist interpretations of appeasement - is telling. (117)) Differences of emphasis therefore remain but nonetheless a powerful counter-revisionist sensibility is emerging.

33 In accordance with the sub-discipline's dominant realist epistemology and empiricist methodology, counter-revisionists have explained all this by reference to documentary factors. Aster, for example, claims that Chamberlain's private papers, neglected by the revisionists, decisively prove the counter-revisionist case. (118) This can hardly be true, however, since many key revisionist texts were constructed using the very same material from Chamberlain's papers that Aster deploys. Parker, conversely, implies that revisionists misinterpreted the available documentation, and that 'the balance of evidence' now points towards counter-revisionist conclusions. (119) This at least has the virtue of making clear that what is actually at stake here is how a more or less given documentary record should be interpreted, but the implication that an entire generation of historians lacked the intelligence and objectivity that permits us to read the documents correctly is extremely Whiggish and implausible. Rather, this case seems to support the general theoretical contention that the agency of 'documents' is limited: interpretations are always under-determined by the evidence, since all texts are susceptible to multiple readings and narratives contain much more than empirically verifiable 'facts'. (120) The

archival record is apparently such as to sustain both sympathetic and critical readings of appeasement: Chamberlain's papers, for example, contain expressions of hardheaded realism and naive idealism, of cautious calculation and foolish optimism (which may or may not reflect the fact that British policy too combined all these traits). [121] The dominant response to the polysemic nature of these source materials is to embark on a quest for the one true interpretation of them, but arguably this begs the more significant question of why it is that different interpretations should arise - or be rendered plausible - at particular conjunctures. The material basis for counter-revisionism had been in place for years before the interpretation was articulated, which suggests that the decisive factors in its emergence were cultural, ideological and external to the evidence.

34 The shift of emphasis within counter-revisionism away from structure and towards agency must be located in the context of broader methodological and theoretical changes in the discipline. In the first place, this rethinking of appeasement is part of a wider trend within the historiography of the origins of the Second World War in which ideology and mentality have recently been accorded greater significance. This is most evident in the case of German foreign policy where strong 'functionalist' interpretations have been marginalised by the emergence of a consensus view accepting the critical importance of Hitler's ideology for determining the course of policy. Just as the rise of 'functionalism' contributed to the emergence of revisionism, so this recent development has strengthened the counter-revisionist case. That this is part of a general interpretive trend can be seen within international history as a whole, where again explanations focusing on objective structures and interests have given ground over the last ten years to ones prioritising cultural relativism, ideology and mentality, and the influence of personality. [122] Finally, all this can be placed within a yet broader disciplinary context. On the one

hand, the turn to culture within history is a result of the articulation of a relativising postmodernism with its emphasis on the discursive and cultural construction of reality. On the other hand, over the last twenty years - the publication of Lawrence Stone's 1979 essay on the revival of narrative being the conventional landmark - the theoretical mainstream has also seen a shift from totalising structural explanations towards ones emphasising contingency, agency and individual experience. [123] Of course, historians have debated the relative importance of structure and agency for decades if not centuries, and critics of revisionism often articulated their discontent by calling for greater attention to mentalities. But judgements as to what constitutes an appropriate balance between those factors are necessarily entirely subjective, and partly determined by the contingencies of disciplinary fashion at any given moment (itself conditioned by broader social and cultural forces). So although there are certain tensions between these various trends, the rise of counter-revisionism (just as with revisionism in the 1960s) can be ascribed in part to changes in the way in which the discipline views the world - the modes of emplotment and types of explanations which practitioners happen to find most plausible - and thus to a certain extent its origins are entirely present-centred and nothing to do with the documents or the past.

35 Counter-revisionism can also be linked to further shifts in conceptions of British national identity. The view of British identity and decline underpinning Parker's interpretation - namely that while there were certain limitations on British power the nation retained room for manoeuvre - is mirrored in recent writing on the theme of decline per se. The revisionist view was premised upon a determinist narrative of British decline that scripted it as an inevitable, continuous, linear slide: 'Victorian grandeur, Edwardian sunset, Georgian decline, and Elizabethan disintegration'. This narrative flourished in general studies in the 1970s and 1980s, arguably

reaching its apogee in Paul Kennedy's *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* which 'turned the tale of Great Britain as a great power into a paradigm: what was true of the British and their power has been true at all states at all times'. But recent work has reconceptualised British decline, arguing that the decrease in British power was relative rather than absolute and that the onset of that process should not be antedated. (124) The result has been the construction of a more nuanced narrative, 'not a history of inexorable decline, but an account of how a major power with intrinsic weaknesses *and* under-utilised potential tried to consolidate and retain its exposed position'. (125) In this paradigm, determinism gives way to an appreciation of the contingency of events and the role of subje ctive policy-choices: how policy-makers played their hand becomes as important as the cards in it and 'certain decisions contributed substantially to the decline and almost resulted in national catastrophe'. (126) A negative interpretation of appeasement, emphasising flawed choices and Chamberlain's 'wishful thinking', thus features as an intrinsic part of this new metanarrative of decline that has also underpinned Parker's re-interpretation. (127)

36 This, of course, simply poses a further question: why have 'declinist pathologies and their underlying "narratives"' become 'decreasingly potent' in the current intellectual climate? (128) What forces have impelled this academic rethinking of decline? While identification of these must remain speculative, they surely include the emergence of a more positive sense of British national identity in the years since Margaret Thatcher initiated the reassertion - at least on a rhetorical level - of national greatness. Recent cultural history work has made clear the extent to which Thatcherism as an ideological project mobilised particular images and representations of the Second World War era. Since the post-war domestic consensus depended upon a negative interpretation of the 1930s, the ground had already been laid for Thatcher's assault on collectivism by revisionist writing in the

1970s challenging the myths of the 'devil's decade', arguing that those same years had been ones of stability and prosperity, and subsequently Thatcherite rhetoric argued that 'what the country needed was a stiff dose of Victorian Values, transplanted from the ... 1930s, when they had, allegedly, last held sway'. (129) As regards appeasement, the modalities of Thatcherite revisionism were somewhat different, since selective appropriation from the myths generated in the Second World War was required. The mythology of 1940 had always contained numerous elements which were in some senses in tension but in others complementary; in particular the populist, democratic and collectivist notion of the 'People's War' and the individualist Churchillian myth of a united nation standing alone against foreign enemies. (130) While Thatcherism reacted harshly against the former, it found much of utility in the latter, an integral element of which was a negative characterisation of appeasement.

37 The Falklands War was a critical moment in the successful consolidation of the Thatcherite New Right hegemonic project. On one level, this was because military victory served as a distraction from domestic troubles, thus contributing to the 1983 General Election triumph. On a more profound level, this was because the rhetoric through which public support for the conflict was mobilised proposed a new basis for national unity and a new sense of national identity. This rhetoric was saturated with references to the Second World War era portrayed in Churchillian terms; the post-war years of consensus - not coincidentally the years when Britain had declined - were a parenthesis, an aberration from those essential British traditions which had been dominant in the war and to which the nation - 'in exile from its authentic self' - was now urged to return. This interpretation replicated Churchill's narrative of British history in which a proud, heroic, resolute and strong nation had repeatedly stood firm against dictators in defence of

democracy. This vision of the national past might have been obscured during the collectivist years, but the war in the Falklands was represented as an ultimately successful quest for the recovery of that enduring identity: as Thatcher put it at the 1982 Conservative party conference, 'Britain found herself again in the South Atlantic and will not look back from the victory she has won'. (131) Thus a new British identity was forged, grounded in right-wing aggressively masculine values (presented as natural and traditional), and articulated through a particular representation of the Second World War. Admittedly, the precise circumstances in which the Falklands conflict came about made it difficult to draw direct parallels with the era of appeasement since in 1982 the guilty men and woman (with the exception of Lord Carrington) remained in office. But 'potentially problematic comparisons with 1938 or with the collapse of Chamberlain's premiership in 1940 were quickly marginalised', and the focus was placed firmly on 1939, the last time Britain had embarked on a good war in defence of democracy and civilisation. 1982 offered an opportunity for the nation to rectify the mistakes of the past and to throw off the legacy of the shabby policies of compromise and retreat that had characterised the post-war years of consensus and decline. (132)

38 Although the Thatcherite re-engineering of Britishness did of course not go uncontested, more positive perspectives on national identity have persisted. As one recent commentator has argued,

> [T]he Falklands War may seem a geographically and historically distant conflict today, but ... it represents a critical space - physical, mythic and narrative - in the shaping of contemporary Britain. The brash, self-confident nationali sm of later 1990s 'Cool Britannia' is built on the bones of what happened in the South Atlantic in the

spring of 1982 and how these events were mediated, experienced and understood back in the United Kingdom. (133)

Explicit in this positive national redefinition was a reaffirmation with a vengeance of the old doctrine of anti-appeasement. (134) This reading of the 1930s was mobilised into service in the nascent Second Cold War, and its truth seemed (at least to dominant conservative commentators) to be confirmed by the events of 1989 -1991 when the West triumphed in that titanic conflict. It did further sterling work during the Gulf War of 1990-1991, when the analogy with the 1930s was much less problematic than in 1982. (135) Subsequently, under the New Labour government in power since 1997, professed aspirations towards an ethical foreign policy (which presumably involves prioritising moral considerations over realpolitik) very quickly dovetailed with continued support for a hard line policy towards Iraq based on the premise that dictators need to be faced down. This same principle was even more in evidence during the 1999 Kosovo crisis, when Tony Blair proved that he was just as willing and able to strike Churchillian poses as his Tory predecessors. (136) While it is problematic on a number of levels to establish direct causal connections between political discourses on British identity and appeasement and the historical discourse on British foreign policy in the 1930s, it is nonetheless striking that the counter-revisionist critique should have emerged in this climate. Indeed, it prompts one to think that while historians may sometimes have only a marginal impact upon public consciousness, it is often very difficult for us to step outside of the dominant ideas of our age.

39 The underlying point of this essay is to argue that historiography is never innocent; rather it is both shaped by broad ideological forces at work within society and has ideological implications, even if these are not always immediately apparent. This point tends to be obscured by the terms in

which we typically conduct our debates. Although the literature on appeasement is replete with references to the role of non- documentary forces and recognition that interpretation changes to 'reflect shifting needs and changing outlooks', (137) these insights are seldom developed. Instead, they are marginalised in prefatory sections or their operation is acknowledged in certain cases but with the implication that there exists some alternative realm of proper historical discourse where they do not pertain. (Typically this occurs when historians analyse the assumptions and prejudices that shaped the views of a previous generation without subjecting their own positi oning to similar scrutiny.) So debates are still predominantly conducted solely in terms of empirical factors, as if all that was at stake was 'the weight of the evidence'. Now, it is of course still legitimate to discriminate between texts according to h ow they negotiate the empirical record, but since there is much more to them than this they can also be engaged fruitfully on numerous other levels. (138) To concentrate exclusively on the empirical dimension obscures the complexity of the constant interactions between past and present within historiography, and the degree to which both interpretations and 'the evidence' alike are subjective ideological constructs, created by historians as they interact with the archival record under the influence of present-centred factors including personal positioning (in terms of race, class, gender, beliefs and their pre-existing interpretations), the current protocols and methodologies of the discipline, and political and social context (including ideas about national identity).

40 Writing on British appeasement cannot be satisfactorily understood solely by reference to documentary factors or without serious consideration of a range of cultural and ideological forces. Ever since its inception in the perceptions and rhetoric of the 1930s, the appeasement debate has revolved around two contrasting viewpoints grounded in two of

the most archetypal forms of narrative emplotment: a negative one emphasising contingency, agency and morality, and a positive one emphasising determinism, structural constraints and realpolitik. (139) The public record of British diplomacy in the 1930s provided sufficient material to support either of these interpretations, and in the light of subsequent archival revelations historians have filled them out in ever-greater detail and nuance rather than supplanting them. (140) Over time, there has been a clear correlation between the dominance of one or the other of them on the one hand, and shifts in discipli nary fashion - that is, the methodological and interpretive concerns which historians bring to bear on the documentary record - and in prevailing conceptions of national identity on the other. So it is problematic to conceive of recent interpretations, ho wever impeccable their scholarship, as simply incarnating empirically derived conclusions. Of course, this does not mean that all historians at any given point have cleaved to precisely the same viewpoint, since dominant discourses can be negotiated in di fferent ways, and there are in any case many other variables at work. Nonetheless, it would still appear that fluctuations in the historical verdict are very closely correlated with changes in the social contexts in which inquiry has occurred, rendering one approach or mode of emplotment more plausible than another, and that it makes little sense to conceive of this writing as making any sort of linear progress towards truth.

41 This piece does not offer a definitive account of the historiography of appeasement, and the lens of national identity is certainly not the only useful one through which to read this body of work. Equally, it is not intended to posit some kind of absolutism of ideology in which no role is left for the empirical in historical writing. Contending that the perspective from which we view the past decisively shapes our interpretations need not lead to hyper-relativist conclusions simply assimilating history to fiction: even

poststructuralists can maintain that history differs from fiction because it deals with real events, and that resistances in the data necessarily constrain our interpretations. (141) Ind eed, the desirable position is one in the midst of current attempts to articulate sustainable positions between the equally untenable extremes of reconstructionism and absolute relativism. This kind of position acknowledges the alterity of the past and th e ethical responsibilities that it may impose on us, yet is nonetheless sensitive to the violence which representation must do it, and constantly interrogates the influence of the social place in which historical knowledge is produced. (142) Rethinking hi story in this way can draw attention to how it has served, inter alia, to articulate ideological interests and construct social identities, as 'a vehicle for locating groups and peoples and giving them a past that suits their present or encourages their sense of a future'. (143) This reading is in any case supported by this narrative of the historiography of appeasement, in which it has served as one means whereby the British and others have conducted an extended meditation on Britain's decline from world power status.

1 D. C. Watt, 'The Historiography of Appeasement', in *Crisis and Controversy: Essays in Honour of A. J. P. Taylor* , ed. A. Sked and C. Cook (London, 1976), p. 113.

2 I am not asserting that writing on this subject, or indeed academic history per se, has been a fundamental determinant of British identity in the post-war period. Though the complicity of professional historiography with nation-building projects over the last two centuries is an established fact, its role as a determinant of national identity now should not be over-stated. On the other hand, all representations of the past have ideological implications, and academic history does play some role in enculturating at least some segments of the population into the nation; in addition, some of the works which I discuss here had a more profound and extensive public impact than the generality of historical works. On these general issues, see *Writing National Histories. Western Europe since 1800* , ed. S. Berger, M. Donovan and K. Passmore (London, 1999)

3 This treatment is limited chiefly to writings by British scholars, though reference is also made to works by American, Canadian and some continental European historians.

4 P. M. H. Bell, *The Origins of the Second World War in Europe* (London, 2nd ed., 1997), p. 46-7.

5 'Cato' [Michael Foot, Peter Howard, Frank Owen], *Guilty Men* (London, paperback ed., 1998). This Penguin edition contains a facsimile reprint of the original text and a useful new introduction by John Stevenson.

6 Ibid., pp. 19, 29.

7 Ibid., p. 125.

8 Ibid., pp. 124-5.

9 J. Baxendale and C. Pawling, *Narrating the Thirties. A Decade in the Making: 1930 to the Present* (London, 1996), pp. 116-39.

10 J. Harris, 'Great Britain: the People's War?', in *Allies at War. The Soviet, American and British Experience, 1939-1945* , ed. D. Reynolds, W. Kimball and A. O. Chubarian (London, 1994), pp. 233-59, quotation at p. 245.

11 H. Nicolson, *Why Britain is at War* (Harmondsworth, 1939).

12 Nicolson diary entry, 12 October 1939, in *Harold Nicolson. Diaries and Letters, 1939-1945,* ed. N. Nicolson (London, paper ed., 1970), p. 35.

13 W. N. Medlicott, *British Foreign Policy since Versailles* (London, 1940) and *The Origins of the Second Great War* (London, 1940).

14 Quotation from opening statement of chief American prosecutor, 21 November 1945, in *The Trial of German Major War Criminals by the International Military Tribunal Sitting at Nuremberg, Germany. Opening Speeches of the Chief Prosecutors* (London, 1946), p. 7.

15 J. W. Wheeler-Bennett, *Munich. Prologue to Tragedy* (London, rev. ed., 1963 [1948]), p. 437.

16 L. B. Namier, *Diplomatic Prelude. 1938 - 1939* (London, 1948), pp. xi, ix.

17 Ibid., p. 4: 'For who wants to read documents? And what are they to prove? Is evidence needed to show that Hitler was a gangster who broke his word whenever it suited him? that the British Government winked and blinked, and hoped against hope for appeasement?'

18 A. J. P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War* (London, 2nd ed., 1964), pp. 33-7. See also M. Marrus, *The Nuremberg War Crimes Trial 1945-46* (Boston, 1997).

19 W. S. Churchill, *The Second World War* . I: *The Gathering Storm* (London, paperback ed., 1985), pp. xvii, 244, 148, 292, 273, xiv.

20 On Churchill as a historian, see J. Ramsden, '"That Will Depend on Who Writes the History": Winston Churchill as His Own Historian' (London, 1997), or the edited version of the same lecture in *More Adventures with Britannia* , ed. Wm. R. Louis (Austin, 1998), pp. 241-54.

21 Churchill, *Gathering Storm* , pp. 186-90. These quotations are taken from a speech by Churchill from March 1936 in which he laid down the principles that should govern British policy towards Europe. Note also the assumption of British power: 'I know of nothing which has occurred to alter or weaken the justice, wisdom, valour, and prudence upon which our ancestors acted. … I know of nothing which makes me feel that we might not, or cannot, march along the same road.'

22 J. H. Plumb, 'The Historian', in *Churchill: Four Faces and the Man* , ed. A. J. P. Taylor (London, 1969), p. 122. Churchill's rhetoric during the war was always saturated with similar visions of British history and identity. See, for example, J. Charmley, *Churchill: The End of Glory* (London, 1993), pp. 410-2, 418. Jarring conflations of England with Britain are pervasive in this body of historiography and have, to a certain extent, had to be reproduced here.

23 Churchill, *Gathering Storm* , p. 186.

24 Ibid., pp. 38, 229. See also p. 190. The broader context within which this rhetorical strategy developed is ably explored in Abbott Gleason,

Totalitarianism. The Inner History of the Cold War (New York, 1995), especially pp. 72-88.

25 D. C. Watt, '1939 Revisited: on Theories of the Origins of Wars', *International Affairs* , 65 (1989), p. 690.

26 Churchill, *Gathering Storm* , p. 188. Churchill's advocacy of continued post-war co-operation with the United States was also intended to help preserve Britain's great power status: D. Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance, 1937-41* (London, 1981), p. 1.

27 Churchill, *Gathering Storm* , p. xiv.

28 K. Robbins, *Churchill* (London, 1992), pp. 164-5. On Churchill's growing awareness of British decline, see p. 170.

29 Taylor, *Origins* , pp. 31-6.

30 D. C. Watt, 'Appeasement. The Rise of a Revisionist School?', *The Political Quarterly* , 36 (1965), p. 198.

31 D. C. Watt, 'Setting the Scene', in *1939. A Retrospect Forty Years After* , ed. R. Douglas (London, 1983), p. 7.

32 P. A. Reynolds, *British Foreign Policy in the Inter-War Years* (London, 1954), pp. 164-7.

33 Viscount Templewood, *Nine Troubled Years* (London, 1954), pp. 383-4.

34 For full details see *British Foreign Policy 1918-1945. A Guide to Research and Research Materials* , ed. S. Aster (Wilmington, rev. ed., 1991), pp. 96-8.

35 *Forging the Collective Memory. Government and International Historians through Two World Wars* , ed. K. Wilson (Providence, 1996).

36 Quoted in D. C. Watt, 'British Historians, the War Guilt Issue, and Post-War Germanophobia: a Documentary Note', *The Historical Journal* , 36 (1993), p. 181.

37 T. D. Williams, 'The Historiography of World War II', in *The Origins of the Second World War* , ed. E. M. Robertson (London, 1971), pp. 42-9, 61. Williams, in this essay first published in 1958, argues that one implication of the editorial principles at work was to present the Foreign Office, as opposed to diplomats abroad and other policy-makers in London, in a relatively good light as sceptical about appeasement. The collection might also reflect an old- fashioned conception of the history of international relations as essentially explicable through diplomacy, though a study of the published British collection on the origins of the First World War has argued that the editors did attempt to publish non-Foreign Office papers but were frustrated by bureaucratic politics and official obsession with secrecy: K. Wilson, 'The Imbalance in *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898-1914'* , in *Forging the Collective Memory* , ed. Wilson, pp. 230-64.

38 K. Robbins, *Appeasement* (Oxford, 2nd ed., 1997), pp. 3-4.

39 B. E. Schmitt, 'Munich', *Journal of Modern History* , 25 (1953), p. 180.

40 D. Marquand, quoted in *The Origins of the Second World War. A. J. P. Taylor and his Critics* , ed. W. R. Louis (New York, 1972), p. 68.

41 Taylor, *Origins* , pp. 25-6, 52.

42 Ibid., p. 40; A. J. P. Taylor, *A Personal History* (London, 1983), pp. 298-9.

43 Taylor, *Origins* , p. 9. Equally, in discussing rearmament and economics, Taylor identifies flawed choices rather than objective constraints as the key operative factors; see pp. 152-5.

44 Ibid., pp. 172-4; P. Kennedy and T. Imlay, 'Appeasement', in *The Origins of the Second World War Reconsidered. A. J. P. Taylor and the Historians* , ed. G. Martel (London, 2nd ed., 1999), pp. 117-9 (a slightly revised version of the piece originally written by Kennedy alone for the 1986 first edition).

45 D. C. Watt, 'Some Aspects of A. J. P. Taylor's Work as Diplomatic Historian', *Journal of Modern History* , 49 (1977), pp. 26-7.

46 Taylor, *Origins* , p. 235.

47 R. J. B. Bosworth, *Explaining Auschwitz and Hiroshima. History Writing and the Second World War, 1945-1990* (London, 1993), p. 42.

48 On Taylor's heroes, see C. Wrigley, 'A. J. P. Taylor: a Nonconforming Radical Historian of Europe', *Contemporary European History* , 3 (1994), pp. 74-5.

49 Bosworth, *Explaining Auschwitz* , pp. 42-3; A. Sisman, *A. J. P. Taylor. A Biography* (London, 1994), pp. 288-9

50 Bosworth, *Explaining Auschwitz* , p. 42; Sisman, *Taylor* , pp. 275-6.

51 Wrigley, 'Nonconforming Radical', p. 75.

52 E. Ingram, 'A Patriot for Me', in *Origins Reconsidered* , ed. Martel, pp. 250-2.

53 Taylor, *Personal History* , p. 291.

54 Watt, 'Revisionist School', p. 209.

55 Robbins, *Appeasement* , p. 5.

56 G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century* (Hanover, 1997), p. 3.

57 Watt, 'Historiography of Appeasement', p. 111. Watt argues that appeasement analogies were much less discredited in the United States than in Great Britain. This is confirmed by the very orthodox views expressed in *The Meaning of Munich Fifty Years Later* , ed. K. Jensen and D. Wurmser (Washington, 1990). D. Chuter, 'Munich, or the Blood of Others', in *Haunted by History. Myths in International Relations* , ed. C. Buffet and B. Heuser (Providence, 1998), pp. 65-79 argues that the Munich myth is 'the most powerful and influential political myth of the second half of the twentieth century', and that it is only now perhaps beginning to lose its force. During the recent Kosovo crisis, both British and American policy-makers extensively deployed Second World War era analogies, portraying opponents of NATO intervention as latter-day appeasers and drawing on a very orthodox reading of the 'lessons' of Munich. (See, for example, M. Dobbs, 'Pitfalls of Pendulum Diplomacy', *Washington Post* , 16 May 1999, p. B01.) The success of this strategy would seem to suggest that the myth has lost none of its potency.

58 Baxendale and Pawling, *Narrating the Thirties* , p. 153.

59 C. Thorne, *The Approach of War, 1938-1939* (New York, 1967), pp. xiii-xiv, 22.

60 F. S. Northedge, *The Troubled Giant. Britain among the Great Powers, 1916-1939* (London, 1966), pp. 483, 628. The hysterical reaction which Northedge's book provoked from Lord Avon [Anthony Eden] - whose

personal investment in the orthodox version of appeasement was unsurpassed - is telling: P. Beck, 'Politicians Versus Historians: Lord Avon's "Appeasement Battle" Against "Lamentably, Appeasement- Minded" Historians', *Twentieth Century British History* , 9 (1998), pp. 396-419.

61 A. Crozier, *The Causes of the Second World War* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 233-4.

62 W. N. Medlicott, *British Foreign Policy since Versailles, 1919-1963* (London, 1968), pp. xiii-xix, 192-6 (though note the scepticism about too glib an invocation of decline at pp. 325-32) and 'Britain and Germany: the Search for Agreement, 1930-37', in *Retreat from Power. Studies in Britain's Foreign Policy of the Twentieth Century* . I: *1906-1939* , ed. D. Dilks, pp. 78-101 (in substance the 1968 Creighton Lecture).

63 K. Robbins, *Munich 1938* (London, 1968), p. 355.

64 P. W. Schroeder, 'Munich and the British Tradition', *The Historical Journal* , 19 (1976), p. 242.

65 P. Finney, 'Introduction', in *The Origins of the Second World War* , ed. P. Finney (London, 1997), p. 14. In what follows I have drawn in part on my earlier very brief discussion of this historiography at pp. 12-17.

66 P. Kennedy, *The Realities Behind Diplomacy. ground Influences on British External Policy, 1865-1980* (London, 1981), p. 301.

67 K. Middlemas, *Diplomacy of Illusion. The British Government and Germany, 1937-39* (London, 1972), pp. 411, 453.

68 For example, D. Dilks, 'Appeasement Revisited', *University of Leeds Review* , 15 (1972), pp. 28-56 and '"We Must Hope for the Best and Prepare

for the Worst": The Prime Minister, the Cabinet and Hitler's Germany, 1937-1939', *Proceedings of the British Academy* , 73 (1987), pp. 309-52.

69 M. Cowling, *The Impact of Hitler. British Politics and British Policy, 1933-1940* (Cambridge, 1975); J. Charmley, *Chamberlain and the Lost Peace* (London, paperback ed., 1991), quote at p. 212. There is a useful discussion of this view in Crozier, *Causes* , pp. 234-43.

70 Charmley, *End of Glory* .

71 P. Kennedy, 'The Logic of Appeasement', *Times Literary Supplement* , 28 May 1982, pp. 585-6. Quotation from B-J. Wendt, '"Economic Appeasement" - a Crisis Strategy', in *The Fascist Challenge and the Policy of Appeasement* , ed. W. Mommsen and L. Kettenacker (London, 1983), p. 171. Obviously, I am not suggesting that these German historians - nor the American and Canadian ones discussed elsewhere in my text - were positioned in precisely the same way as British historians with regard to dominant political and cultural discourses on national identity in Britain. Indeed, differences of national perspective in writing on particular aspects of the origins of the war are often striking: for example, non-French historians writing on the fall of France were, for several post-war decades, always rather sceptical about the interpretive paradigm of 'decadence' which dominated French historiography. On the other hand, I would argue that non-British historians writing on Britain must be operating with some kind of overarching (if perhaps implicit) understanding of British identity, and in many cases this approximates to that of British colleagues and contributes to convergences of opinion. Nor should this surprise us, given that these authors are presumably conversant with developments in British political and cultural debates and given that they can be seen to form a kind of

coherent community with British historians of the subject, sharing ideas, research findings and assumptions.

72 Bell, *Origins* . The 1997 second edition is slightly less sympathetic to appeasement than the original 1986 text.

73 D. C. Watt, How War Came. The Immediate Origins of the Second World War, 1938-1939 (London, 1989), p. 610, 624.

74 G. Weinberg, 'Munich after Fifty Years', *Foreign Affairs* , 67 (1988), p. 175..

75 R. Overy with A. Wheatcroft, *The Road to War* (London, 1989), p. 103.

76 M. Smith, *British Air Strategy between the Wars* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 307-8, 321.

77 Baxendale and Pawling, *Narrating the Thirties* , p. 152.

78 Watt, 'Historiography of Appeasement', pp. 120-3.

79 R. Skidelsky, 'Going to War with Germany. Between Revisionism and Orthodoxy', *Encounter* , 39 (1972), p. 58.

80 My evidence for this assertion is anecdotal, drawn from my own experience as an undergraduate international historian in the 1980s.

81 A. Adamthwaite, *The Making of the Second World War* (London, 1977), p. 21.

82 Skidelsky, 'Going to War', p. 58.

83 J. A. S. Grenville, 'Contemporary Trends in the Study of the British "Appeasement" Policies of the 1930s', *Internationales Jahrbuch für Geschichts- und Geographie-Unterricht,* 17 (1976), pp. 236-7, 241.

84 L. Fuchser, *Neville Chamberlain and Appeasement. A Study in the Politics of Appeasement* (New York, 1983), p. 197.

85 R. Ovendale, *'Appeasement' and the English Speaking World. Britain, the United States, the Dominions, and the Policy of 'Appeasement', 1937-1939* (Cardiff, 1975), p. 319. To be fair, Ovendale states that in general, 'dominion opinion only confirmed Chamberlain on a course of action on which he had already decided'.

86 Grenville, 'Contemporary Trends', p. 238.

87 A. Adamthwaite, 'War Origins Again', *Journal of Modern History* , 56 (1984), p. 106.

88 W. Murray, *The Change in the European Balance of Power, 1938-1939* (Princeton, 1984).

89 B. Bond, review of G. C. Peden, *British Rearmament and the Treasury, 1932-1939* (Edinburgh, 1979), in *Journal of Strategic Studies* , 2 (1979), p. 363.

90 Adamthwaite, 'War Origins Again', p. 110.

91 W. Rock, 'Commentary: the Munich Crisis Revisited', *The International History Review* , 11 (1989), p. 680. For another critique of the isolationism of British policy in the 1930s, see P. Ludlow, 'Britain and the Third Reich', in *The Challenge of the Third Reich* , ed. H. Bull (Oxford, 1986), pp. 141-62.

Revisionists like Cowling and Charmley, ironically, argued that British policy was insufficiently isolationist.

92 P. M. Taylor, *The Projection of Britain: British Overseas Publicity and Propaganda 1919-1939* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 298.

93 R. Cockett, *Twilight of Truth. Chamberlain, Appeasement and the Manipulation of the Press* (London, 1989).

94 Adamthwaite, 'War Origins Again', p. 106.

95 S. Aster, '"Guilty Men": the Case of Neville Chamberlain', in *Paths to War. New Essays on the Origins of the Second World War* , ed. R. Boyce and E. M. Robertson (London, 1989), p. 263.

96 D. C. Watt, 'Chamberlain's Ambassadors', in *Diplomacy and World Power. Studies in British Foreign Policy, 1890-1950* , ed. M. Dockrill and B. McKercher (Cambridge, 1996), p. 169. It would take a very substantial piece to catalogue Watt's contribution over many decades to this historiography, or to track the shifting nuances of his position. Though here critical, elsewhere he has demolished the Churchillian anti-appeasement case in a rather revisionist manner: D. C. Watt, 'Churchill and Appeasement', in *Churchill* , ed. R. Blake and W. R. Louis (Oxford, 1994), pp. 199-214.

97 Fuchser, *Chamberlain and Appeasement* .

98 Kennedy and Imlay, 'Appeasement', in *Origins Reconsidered* , ed. Martel, p. 128. Kennedy's conclusion in this piece argues that both orthodox and revisionist views contain elements of truth; while this represents a laudable embrace of historiographical pluralism, it seems a difficult position to sustain from an empiricist perspective, given that the two views are in many respects flatly contradictory.

99 R. A. C. Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement. British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War* (London, 1993). Quotes at pp. 345, 347.

100 Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement* , p. 10.

101 It is obviously futile to seek to locate all scholars in one particular pigeonhole; clearly there is some overlap between scholars one might label sceptical revisionists (such as Keith Middlemas) and counter-revisionists: both accept the existence of certain constraints on policy, but also see reason to criticise Chamberlain for flawed decisions.

102 Grenville, 'Contemporary Trends', pp. 242-3.

103 Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement* , p. 364.

104 Kennedy and Imlay, 'Appeasement', in *Origins Reconsidered* , ed. Martel, p. 129.

105 Aster, '"Guilty Men"', in *Paths to War* , ed. Boyce and Robertson, pp. 256-63; Grenville, 'Contemporary Trends', pp. 244-7; P. Ludlow, 'The Unwinding of Appeasement', in *Das 'Andere Deutschland' im Zweiten Weltkrieg* , ed. L. Kettenacker (Stuttgart, 1977), pp. 9-47.

106 Middlemas, *Diplomacy of Illusion* . Halifax, once viewed as one of Chamberlain's most loyal myrmidons, has been steadily rehabilitated and is now regarded as a key figure in forcing British policy towards resistance against Chamberlain's wishes in 1938-1939: see A. Roberts, *'The Holy Fox'. A Life of Lord Halifax* (London, 1991).

107 Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement* , p. 11.

108 For example, M. Pugh, 'The Courting of Hitler', *Times Literary Supplement* , 31 December 1993, p. 24.

109 Aster, '"Guilty Men"', in *Paths to War* , ed. Boyce and Robertson and *1939. The Making of the Second World War* (London, 1973).

110 B. McKercher, '"Our Most Dangerous Enemy": Great Britain Pre-eminent in the 1930s', *The International History Review* , 13 (1991), pp. 751-83 (especially pp. 753-4, 777-80; quote at p. 779) and 'Old Diplomacy and New: the Foreign Office and Foreign Policy, 1919-1939', in *Diplomacy and World Power* , ed. Dockrill and McKercher, pp. 79-114.

111 R. J. Q. Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-39* (London, 1993); F. McDonough, *Neville Chamberlain, Appeasement and the British Road to War* (Manchester, 1998).

112 M. L. Roi, *Alternative to Appeasement. Sir Robert Vansittart and Alliance Diplomacy, 1934-1937* (Westport, 1997), quote at p. 175; G. Post, Jr., *Dilemmas of Appeasement. British Deterrence and Defense, 1934-1937* (Ithaca, 1993); J. Ruggiero, *Neville Chamberlain and British Rearmament. Pride, Prejudice and Politics* (Westport. 1999). The evolution of Chamberlain's thinking on foreign affairs is analysed from a similarly critical perspective in Erik Goldstein, 'Neville Chamberlain, the British Official Mind and the Munich Crisis', *Diplomacy and Statecraft* , 10 (1999), pp. 276-92.

113 M. J. Carley, *1939. The Alliance That Never Was and the Coming of World War II* (Chicago, 1999). This book has been the subject of a stimulating debate on the internet discussion list H-DIPLO: see http://www.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showlist.cgi?lists=H-Diplo.

114 L. Michie, *Portrait of an Appeaser: Robert Hadow, First Secretary in the British Foreign Office, 1931-1939* (Westport, 1996).

115 S. Newton, *Profits of Peace. The Political Economy of Anglo-German Appeasement* (Oxford, 1996).

116 For example, P. Doerr, *British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939* (Manchester, 1998); J. Maiolo, *The Royal Navy and Nazi Germany, 1933-1939. A Study in Appeasement and the Origins of the Second World War* (London, 1998). Maiolo's study is primarily concerned to defend British naval policy rather than appeasement per se, though his argument that naval policy was based on 'realistic strategic incentives' has broad revisionist implications. He somewhat muddies the waters, however, as regards the usual historiographical relationship between decline and appeasement, since he sees his sympathetic study as contributing to a discourse emphasising the contingent nature of decline (pp. 1-4).

117 E. H. H. Green, 'Churchill Reappraised', *Parliamentary History* , 13 (1994), pp. 338-50; J. Charmley, 'The Price of Victory', *Times Literary Supplement* , 13 May 1994, p. 8.

118 Aster, '"Guilty Men"', in *Paths to War* , ed. Boyce and Robertson, pp. 240-1.

119 Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement* , pp. 347, 364-5.

120 Cf. P. Finney, 'Ethics, Historical Relativism and Holocaust Denial', *Rethinking History* , 2 (1998), pp. 359-69.

121 Kennedy and Imlay, 'Appeasement', in *Origins Reconsidered* , ed. Martel, p. 120.

122 A fairly random sample of publications supporting these points might include: *On Cultural Ground. Essays in International History* , ed. R. Johnson (Chicago, 1994); B. Heuser, *Nuclear Mentalities? Strategies and Beliefs in Britain, France and the FRG* (London, 1998); *Personalities, War and Diplomacy: Essays in International History* , ed. T. G. Otte and C. A. Pagedas (London, 1997); M. P. Leffler, 'The Cold War: What Do "We Now Know"?', *American Historical Review* , 104 (1999), pp. 501-24. Concern with similar issues is given a rather more postmodern orientation in F. Costigliola, 'The Nuclear Family: Tropes of Gender and Pathology in the Western Alliance', *Diplomatic History* , 21 (1997), pp. 163-83.

123 Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century* , pp. 97-147.

124 G. Martel, 'The Meaning of Power: Rethinking the Decline and Fall of Great Britain', *The International History Review* , 13 (1991), pp. 662-94, quotes at pp. 663, 668. This essay is part of a special issue devoted to rethinking British decline and also containing McKercher, '"Our Most Dangerous Enemy"'. See also J. McDermott, 'A Century of British Decline', *The International History Review* , 12 (1990), pp. 111-24.

125 D. Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled. British Policy and World Power in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1991), p. 34.

126 W. Murray, 'The Collapse of Empire: British Strategy, 1919-1945', in *The Making of Strategy. Rulers, States and War* , ed. W. Murray, M. Knox and A. Bernstein (Cambridge, 1994), p. 393.

127 J. Young, *Britain and the World in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1997), p. 120.

128 R. English and M. Kenny, 'British Decline or the Politics of Declinism?', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* , 1 (1999), p. 263.

129 Baxendale and Pawling, *Narrating the Thirties* , pp. 161-7, quote at p. 167.

130 Baxendale and Pawling, *Narrating the Thirties* , pp. 127-9. One sense in which these myths were in fact complementary was that they both had a negative attitude towards appeasement.

131 K. Foster, *Fighting Fictions. War, Narrative and National Identity* (London, 1999), pp. 22-42, quotes at pp. 25, 27.

132 L. Noakes, *War and the British. Gender, Memory and National Identity, 1939-1991* (London, 1998), pp. 103-112, quotes at pp. 109-10.

133 Foster, *Fighting Fictions* , p. 2.

134 Thatcher's famous apology to Czech President Vaclav Havel for British policy at Munich offers further evidence for this.

135 See, for example, A. Danchev, 'The Anschluss', *Review of International Studies* , 20 (1994), pp. 97-106.

136 On Blair's adaptation of an erstwhile Tory discourse on Englishness, see S. Breese, 'In Search of Englishness; In Search of Votes', in *History and Heritage. Consuming the past in Contemporary Culture* , ed. J. Arnold, K. Davis and S. Ditchfield (Shaftesbury, 1998), pp. 155-67.

137 Skidelsky, 'Going to War', p, 56.

138 For a demonstration of this, see D. Campbell, *National Deconstruction. Violence, Identity and Justice in Bosnia* (Minneapolis, 1998), pp. 33-81.

139 This article has not essayed a detailed narratological analysis of these texts, but it is tempting to see revisionism and orthodoxy/counter-revisionism as examples respectively of romantic and tragic emplotment. These are characterised by Alun Munslow (glossing Hayden White) thus: 'A romance ε would be identified by the power of the historical agent/hero as ultimately superior to [adverse] circumstances, questing with ultimate success, seeking and achieving redemption or transcendence. ε In tragedic emplotments the hero strives to beat the odds and fails, eventually being thwarted by fate or their own fatal personality flaws. The end result is usually death (actual or metaphoric)' (Munslow, *The Routledge Companion to Historical Studies* (London, 2000), p. 83).

140 That the appeasement debate has revolved around familiar oppositions almost since its inception is also implied in W. Wark, 'Appeasement Revisited', *The International History Review* , 13 (1995), pp. 545-62. For stimulating reflections on how historians are constrained by the narratives of previous interpreters, see K. Platt, 'History and Despotism, or: Hayden White vs. Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great', *Rethinking History* , 3 (1999), pp. 247-69.

141 S. Pitt, 'Representing Otherness', *Rethinking History* , 2 (1998), p. 400.

142 T. Wandel, 'Michel De Certeau's Place in History' , *Rethinking History* , 4 (2000), pp. 55-76.

143 M. Bentley, 'Approaches to Modernity: Western Historiography since the Enlightenment', in *Companion to Historiography* , ed. M. Bentley (London, 1997