

“This fabulous flotsam”: Michael Moorcock’s Urban Anthropology in “London under London”

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Michael Moorcock is often described as “one of the most prolific and varied writers working in Britain” (Malcolm 146). His success as a writer and editor of science fiction and fantasy literature is well established, but he is also the author of two novels about London, Mother London (1988) and King of the City (2000). Hardly known, Mother London by Michael Moorcock, offers itself to a variety of approaches that have been widely discussed in the context of studies on English literature during the Thatcher years, post-modernism, and psycho-geography. The novel resonates with the author’s own childhood in war-time London without being autobiographical. It tells the story of three Londoners who were traumatised during the Blitz. The following article focuses on the mysteries of subterranean London that represents the hidden and unconscious identities of its inhabitants in the post-war period.

Keywords

Subterranean London; underground; nostalgia; Blitz; trauma; war generation; Michael Moorcock; Peter Ackroyd; Iain Sinclair

David Mummery, Josef Kiss, and Mary Gasalee suffer from what they had to go through during the war in the city they belong to, a city that accompanied them throughout their lives. Michael Moorcock offers no “redemption for the traumatized city”, as Luckhurst claims, but rather investigates in *Mother London*, as Groes holds against him, “the post-war inability of Londoners to make themselves heard” (55). Everything they had become was linked to London, the city that neither protected them nor helped them to cope with what they had experienced when they were young. All three are “absorbed” (52) by London. Moorcock “re-imagines London as a web of linked fragments and identities, brought into vibrant being by the babel of London’s voices. It attempts to encompass London in all its massive diversity” (Baker).

London is like a mother they love and although the memories of even the most terrifying war years shaped their entire lives, their memories are

full of nostalgia: “It’s nostalgia as much as anything, it really is. I loved it” (Crosthwaite 236). David Mummery’s statement in *Mother London* has been repeatedly quoted:

The bombs brought me security, sexuality, escape and adventure. We children of the Blitz are not to be pitied. We are to be envied. We are to be congratulated because we survived; so if you must pity someone then pity the relations of the dead and the parents of my dead contemporaries, my friends; but we were happier than any generation before or since. We were allowed to play in a wider world. (*ML* 172, Crosthwaite 236)

This double vision of the war years has also been observed by Sebastian Groes: “what should also be noted is that the author recuperates these repressed voices precisely by positing the novelist and his writerly practice as an activity that presents voice as space” (55). Moorcock’s novel keeps coming back to a very specific time and place in the history of London: the Blitz (the bombing raids of September 1940 until May 1941) and the V-1 flying bomb and V-2 rocket Blitz of June 1944 until March 1945. Moorcock tells the story of this historical period from the perspective of the post-war lives of three protagonists. Everything we learn about the war is remembered and goes through the very individual and subjective filter of these three traumatised characters. The war experiences also form the literary representation of what sociologists would call a collective memory of the people. This belongs to a particular generation with very specific memories of shared experiences that were strong and devastating enough to give them common life narratives. It blurs the boundaries between the private and the public. Crosthwaite defines this generational belonging as “the capacity of aerial bombardment to unravel unified modes of consciousness” (236, see also 234) and Ganteau speaks of *Mother London* as “a choral narrative” which emphasised “the relations among the group” and “is a novel about individual as much as collective trauma” (117).

Although everything the three characters have become reenacts the years of their war childhood, Moorcock tells stories that belong to the historical period from the war to the mid-1980s. These roughly 40 years are not coincidentally associated with the lives of three characters, who belong to Moorcock’s generation, but emerge as a period that in the analysis of Moorcock’s novel has some common features, distinctive characteristics that make this era recognisable and to a certain degree even unique. While the 1960s and the 70s are presented as a dialectic swing

to “the city’s counter-cultural heyday” (Crosthwaite 237), the devastation of the Thatcher years resonate with the earlier trauma of destruction and mutilation Mother London had to go through. Ganteau finds in this a structure characteristic of a traumatic narrative that returns to a “moment of origin”:

[This] may be interpreted as allowing for the evocation of trauma, individual and collective, as if the trauma of the Thatcher years were a secondary moment in which the original effraction, that of wartime trauma, were re-activated, according to the most basic laws of *Nachträglichkeit* [sic!]. (Ganteau 121)

Moorcock introduces us to the three main characters talking about the traces the war left in their adult lives, the continuous presence of an inescapable absence as is manifested in the 14-year-long coma of Mary Gasalee or the hallucinations of Josef Kiss, who sees “crazed horsemen”, “naked giants”, and the “beasts of the apocalypse” (*ML* 246, Crosthwaite 238). This psychological condition modifies the realistic narration and suggests a perception of reality that is subjective and inseparably linked to the characters’ trauma: “He groaned, less sure of reality than he had ever been, for this air-raid was itself unimaginable” (*ML* 246).

The urban lives of the three protagonists represent the psychological condition of this generation of Londoners who suffer from survivors’ guilt. Their lives are intertwined with London’s cityscape that came to represent their trauma. Whilst the psychological disorders in the troubled biographies of David, Joseph, and Mary are represented by the omnipresence of those war years in their material and physical lives, the city is attributed a metaphorical equivalent of the protagonists subconscious. To this effect, London’s subterranean realm and its inhabitants are explored. The subterranean world is as undeniably present as the spaces that are occupied by war memories in post-war London. Nevertheless, the war memories are immaterial and unreal if it comes to their visible presence. The metropolis has grown over the ruins of the war as biographies have emerged from the war memories that still sustain them and to which they keep returning.

Various aspects of traumatic narratives have been explored in *Mother London*. Crosthwaite shows how Moorcock uses the stream of consciousness technique to expose the three protagonists’ schizophrenia, “a response to the experience and the legacy of the Blitz” (*ML* 241). Ganteau writes

on the notion of relation, understood in various ways, be it the relation between the two critical and theoretical fields of trauma and ethics, or the relation between an image of the same and possibilities of otherness that trauma and ethics systematically posit and perform, in psychological, temporal or spatial terms. (109)

Ganteau argues that Moorcock refuses “autonomy (of the subject and of the text)” and is committed to “various versions of alterity” (109). Moorcock’s novel discusses and reimagines what Alastair Bonnet calls “the forgotten nooks and crannies of ordinary landscapes. It seeks to re-enchant and re-mythologise prosaic geographies” (46). Bonnet, who merely mentions Moorcock in an earlier article, but focuses on Sinclair (2009, 54), gives the psycho-geography of London a political twist, claiming “that contemporary British psycho-geography should be understood as a site of struggle over the politics of loss within the radical imagination” (2009, 46). British radicalism either deplores, in a nostalgic sense, the dominance of industrial modernity or suppresses this nostalgia and becomes open up to new “forms of creative praxis” (2009, 46).

Reading Moorcock’s *Mother London*, the emphasis is shifted from the psychological condition of the individual that re-mythologises the prosaic geography as part of the generational collective. The cityscape of subterranean London represents the city’s Other, which is explored by Mummery. I am not arguing with Bonnet that Moorcock actually is suggesting any creative social or political practices to evade nostalgia. Trauma and nostalgia are psychological reactions that shape individual identities, but are accessed through stories told on the basis of generational, i.e., collective life narratives. Historical disasters such as the Blitz would remain without any appropriate narrative representation in the individual were it not for collective life scripts these individuals relate to in the construction of their specific individual identities. Having said this, it is also clear throughout the novel that the “three central characters not only focalise the narrative but are exemplary figures in their creative relationships to London” (Baker).

While among specific ethnic groups this might be a diasporic identity based on collective life scripts and collective identities, the collective narratives of certain generational cohorts of people (in the sense of Karl Mannheim) share distinct, often traumatic, experiences such as war. While the politics of identity moved from the recognition of collective identities in the 1980s (Charles

Taylor) to the acknowledgement of individual choice (K. Anthony Appiah), the politics of memory in analogy have been informed by the collective identities of distinct groups such as victims and perpetrators in an ethnic or national context. While the legitimacy of this perspective is obvious, the downsides have also been widely recognised for a long time. For some groups of people, this specific contextualisation is too exclusive to do justice to some groups of victims. Moorcock claims that the generation of the Blitz and the Battle of Britain never received the recognition they deserved because Britain won the war and created a myth of endurance.

In his novel, Moorcock tells the life stories of three different individuals that are interwoven in such a way as to construct the identity of a traumatised war-time generation. Moorcock opens a discourse on the consequences and effects of the myths about the war that denied his generation its own voice. The generational perspective structures the double vision of the presence of war in its absence. It creates a generational space, a specific psycho-geography of London’s cityscape that, similar to other novels about London, “arouses interest in its dark and obscure aspects” and “fuses the present and the past, as recording the first necessitates excavating the latter” (Chalupský 2014, 11).

One of the ways to open the war-time space that is still inhabited by the victims of the Blitz is to remember the specific stories of children and their experience of air raids. At the very beginning of the novel, Moorcock has David Mummery write down that his childhood was “happiest during the War years. By day with friends they hunted for shrapnel and the wreckage of combat planes; we explored ruined houses and burnt out factories, left between black and joists and swaying walls about chasms three or four stories high” (*ML* 21). This unusual view on war devastation and everyday threats to their lives presents Mummery’s generation as a distinct group of people who grew up during the bombing campaign. Because of their young age, they did not know better and accepted war as part of their lives, turning the memories of the past into nostalgic feelings of this war time generation. Mummery writes about these memories: “Some of these have yet to be made coherent; some are still in his mind. Some he has considered inventing” (6). To children, the war even seems to have been adventurous at times:

The V2 moves with steady grace [...] will fall on the suburb where David Mummery, almost five years old, plays with his toy soldiers. Forty-seven feet long and carrying two thousand pounds of explosive, this sophisticated

machine, the combined genius and labour of amoral scientists, serf technicians and slave workers, is about to bring a miracle into my life. (*ML* 6, italics in original)

Later in the novel, he comments on the destruction of his school in a way that is reminiscent of the final scene in John Boorman's film *Hope and Glory* (released in 1987, about the time Moorcock finished his book): "One weekend in 1945 a lucky V-2 rocket destroyed the school, freeing me to return to my ruins and my adventures" (23). This event is repeated by Moorcock much later in the novel: "Then one Saturday the next VI hit my school in Robin Hood Lane, and while no children were hurt I was allowed to stay at home for the rest of the War and have ever since remained grateful to the Germans" (*ML* 347-8). These child's recollections mix with gruesome visions of mangled flesh Josef Kiss had witnessed after a V-2 attack:

If you had ever tried to drag the mangled, bloody mess, that looked like the muck a butcher discards, from its mother's arms so that she could be carried off to have her legs amputated, you'd have some idea what I meant. It wasn't their wealth or empty sentiment or their deep shelters we hated, it was their disgusting failure of imagination. Mr Kiss paused to finish his tea, took control of himself, apologetic. (*ML* 387-8)

All three protagonists are driven by feelings of nostalgia, but also memories of the life-threatening havocs of war. Mummery "desires almost painfully to be back near his canal and his old women, with his personal nostalgia" (*ML* 7). "Josef Kiss grows silky with nostalgia", when he thinks of the Battersea to Hammersmith swimming race before the War (*ML* 271) and Mummery finds him often "in a nostalgic reminiscent mood, frequently talking about London before the War" (*ML* 341). Mary Gasalee is revived by "reflecting that the dreamlike quality of a good fair makes her nostalgic for the world she lost" (*ML* 361) This generational nostalgia that sustains David, Josef and Mary and helps them to cope with their trauma is contrasted with a conservative and sentimental nostalgia, Mummery observes in his fellow Englishmen.

Mummery despises "the current wave of nostalgic illusion" (*ML* 168-9) that makes people conservative in a backward sense instead of independent and aware of the social injustices of class society. He quotes his Uncle Jim, a disillusioned Tory radical who deplores sentimentalism in England and Europe: "Still suffering from the follies and ambitions of the nineteenth century, Europe

also possesses an unhealthy nostalgia for the period. America is not quite so badly contaminated by their malaise” (*ML* 483).

Nostalgic illusion is a form of denial. Being on rest and recuperation, Mary Gasalee’s husband was killed during an air raid visiting his family. Escaping their home with her new-born baby, Mary Gasalee falls into a coma from which she wakes up 15 years later:

Auxiliary Firemen had said it was a miracle, but sometimes, when asked to state her own or her daughter’s birthday she would automatically give the date of the night her husband was killed, when she emerged from the incendiary’s debris, Monday 30 December 1940. In her own mind Mary Gasalee had actually been born again in 1955 at the age of almost 31. That summer enough of her memory had returned for her doctors to believe a relapse into coma would be unlikely and eventually they let her go into a baffling world building itself great white towers. (*ML* 33)

When young David survived a V-2 attack, he saw dense smoke drifting in “the shape of a boy” and he had “the idea it was my own goals breaking free of my body and trying to find a way of reaching heaven” (*ML* 412). The near-death experience of the child depicts the schizophrenic trauma he suffers. This subjective perception of the mortal threats in times of war blurs the boundaries between reality and the narratives that helped the youth to cope with the immediate impact of what had to be endured. Under the pressure of the Blitz, myths were created which helped people to survive once they had got “used to the idea of being killed” (*ML* 412). A psychology of its own evolves from the cityscape which Mummery tries to explore in his writings, “memorials to legendary London” discovered by the “urban anthropologist” (*ML* 5) he believes himself to be exploring “London under London” (*ML* 344).

Joseph Kiss saved many people during the war and neutralised unexploded bombs. Ganteau finds all significant criteria of “traumatic realism” in the representation of Josef’s ambivalent memories of the Blitz. It is “dominated by poetic modalities such as hyperbole, intensification, saturation, anachronism and fragmentation – devices that are supposed to be mimetic of traumatic effects and that problematise the conventions of transparent mimesis in a hyperbolic fashion” (111). Josef intensifies and problematises the most ordinary everyday activities that take on the quality of liberating decisions:

Josef Kiss picked up his own glass, briefly defeated by the sight of so much remaining beer. “Once more the mysteries of London’s coincidences are solved and clarified. The ordinary explanation is always a welcome antidote to ambiguity.” He replaced the glass on the damp mat, drew a breath, then took his drink back to his face for a single, manful swallow. (*ML* 43)

Moorcock associates this individual ambiguity with the collective response to the postwar period. While Josef Kiss and many other radicals had hoped for socialist improvements and, when it failed, were content “to assume the posture of High Tory since radicalism was so universally approved of in London” (*ML* 60). According to Bonnett it is this understanding of radicalism that could not respond to nostalgia in a creative way and fulfill the anticipation of a “better future” (2009, 60).

Josef Kiss finds the creative force that might forfeit nostalgia and help controlling trauma in London:

This pleasant and unremarkable vision comes to him frequently. It is as if the rest of the nation is perpetually in motion on the city’s periphery, as if London is the hub around which all else revolves, the ordering, civilising, progressive force which influences first the Home Counties, then the entire nation, ultimately the Empire and through the Empire the Globe itself [...] The golden age of cities has achieved its absolute fulfilment. (*ML* 221)

London is the centre of imaginative powers that helps defeating trauma by making nostalgia “a creative force”. While discontentment with modernity reaffirms trauma and nostalgia, London – in the words of Alastair Bonnett – “rips us from some basic assumptions, not just about progress and change, but what it is to be a happy, optimistic and ‘well-balanced citizen’” (2011, 2).

In Mummery’s language, the city is an animated place where the greater part of what can be experienced in present day London lies in the absence of the historical – or rather legendary – past. This presence of the historical absence finds its spatial analogon in the topography of the city:

Mummery imagines the city streets to be dry riverbeds ready to be filled from subterranean sources. From behind the glass he watches his Londoners. This fabulous flotsam. They come from Undergrounds and subways (their ditches and their burrows) flowing over pavements to where myriad transports wait to divert them to a thousand nearby destinations. (*ML* 7)

The urban crowd forms something “only describable in terms of music or abstract physics” (*ML* 7). Behind each of the city’s inhabitants stand many more Londoners who are related to one another by the fact that they used the same roads, waterways, sewers, and so on “between every possible kind of intersection” (*ML* 7). The character focaliser sees Londoners as an anonymous crowd floating from subterranean London to the surface and back, representing the flow of time in a topography of memory.

Mummery associates this presence of all the absent and bygone war experiences and lost inhabitants of the city with the “surge of legendary subterraneans” (*ML* 18). He mentions the subterraneans only once at the beginning, coming back to their story much later in the novel. When the stories of people hidden in the past are brought back to the reader’s attention, these former celebrities of the Metropolis, such as the mistress of Charles II, Nell Gwynn, are still part of the urban folklore in the name of a pub. London, we read, keeps her secrets in “unacknowledged catacombs, uncharted rivers, a wealth of subterranean mysteries deeper even than the Bones of her dinosaurs” (*ML* 72). While the London crowd appears anonymous, both the character focaliser and the city have individual biographies. The entrance to subterranean London opens an access to this individual world of discovery and revelation.

Mummery writes about “the city’s ‘lost’ tube lines whose maps exist only in Masonic libraries” (*ML* 343). Although Mummery’s emphasis is on older tunnels, some of them running under the river, the fictitious author’s obsession, his loss of self-control, working day and night on his book, turns the city’s underground into a representation of the hidden and unconscious. The healing of Mummery’s hurt self in the process of writing about London takes him to imaginary places. The traces of magic realism help to represent Mummery’s individual and internal focalisation of London. Stories about the unused metro stations of London and hidden rivers have occupied the imagination of readers for a long time. As Ganteau explains:

In such evocations, traumatised space becomes a modality of traumatised time, when strata upon strata accumulate to give temporal depth to the traumatised geography, connecting the present with some occurrence of the recent or remote past. (121)

What Mummery writes goes a step further and takes the story beyond traumatic realism (see Ganteau 122) into the fantastic. The three friends “are all to

some extent telepathic”, as Baker points out. Josef Kiss is “a stage magician, telepath and Falstaffian celebrant of life” and Mary Gasalee “more explicitly re-imagines London. ‘Dreaming’ in a self-willed coma, she walks the streets of a magically transformed London” (Baker). Mummery feels connected to an alternative subterranean psycho-geography:

I discovered evidence that London was interlaced with connecting tunnels, home of a forgotten troglodytic race that had gone underground at the time of the Great Fire, whose ranks had been added to periodically by thieves, vagabonds and escaped prisoners, receiving many fresh recruits during the Blitz and so many of us sought the safety of the tubes. Others had hinted of a London under London in a variety of texts from as far back as Chaucer. Eventually I grew determined to look for this race myself. (*ML* 344)

Ganteau regards Mummery’s exploration of the “the huge vaults of the fleet sewers” (*ML* 344) as the discovery of “a world as various, as wonderful and as mysterious as anything on the surface, yet more peaceful, comforting in its strange isolation” (*ML* 344).

This meaning is distinctively different from the Victorian rendering of the Fleet sewers, which can be found until Arnold Bennett’s *Riceyman Steps* (1923). The puncture of the Fleet sewer by the Metropolitan in 1862 sees “the technologically innovative railway and the perilously antiquated River Fleet as mighty opposites: the freedom of movement promised by the modern and the messy accumulation of human traces that constitutes the historical” (Ashford 20; see also Pike 112). In Moorcock’s novel the underground Fleet does not stand for a “messy” past. The explorer of the underground hears in the “slightly phosphorescent foam and mist [...] the grunting and squealing of feeding pigs” (*ML* 344). According to a legend this pig colony has been there since the fleet was roofed in the 18th century (for the history of the Fleet, see Piper 255-262). Every night descending into the tube stations, the narrator discovers a new counter world which is thriving underground. He finds “the frozen ghosts of metropolitan platforms” and “two skeletons, both children” (*ML* 344). Although he cannot trace the Secret Nation of the subterranean race, which he compares to Amazonian jungle dwellers, he manages to deliver various presents to them without actually making contact. In September 1964, he comes to see the “shadowy, black-clad figures” emerge from the tunnel depths, vanishing as soon as he approaches them. Step-by-step, the explorer of the underground wins the trust of the subterraneans. Similar to

“other primitive tribes lacking previous contact with civilization” they expect him to bring along “the ephemera of over-ground society: pin-up magazines, records, comics” (*ML* 345).

One day, the narrator follows the subterraneans, but instead of disappearing into the deeper reaches of where they came from, they ascend to the surface: “As I made forays into their world, so they made forays into mine!” (*ML* 346), he concludes. The narrator finds here “an obvious and simple explanation for so many London legends and folktales of cobbolds and gnomes creeping at night from the sewers to steal food and carry off children!” The liminality of the city’s streets and tunnels provides the psycho-geography of London, i.e. the way the collective history of urban society and the individual memories of urban citizens shape the ugly spots in London, as we learn from a protagonist in *Mother London*: “All the rubble. Farringdon Road was flooded. Jerry hit the storm drains and sewers. It was like every lost and old river had come back. It wasn’t nearly so bad where we were, but they bombed St Anne’s, Soho. The ugliest spire in London and now only the spire’s left of it!” (*ML* 299)

Moorcock makes it clear that “the ugly heaps of rubble”, Arthur Mee describes *London. Heart of the Empire, Wonder of the World* (1948), quoted in *Mother London* (375-6) turned into “idiotic urban ugliness near the Church Yard and Paddington Green, made famous by Polly Perkins, of course, it has horrors of every type around it. Motorways, grey blocks of flats, hooligans. You should think of living there. I would. It’s convenient and very cheap” (339). The ugliness of the city represents the continuity of the damage and mutilations that were done. On the one hand, it represents the hurt minds of those traumatised during the war. On the other hand, the mutilations of post-war London still form the minds of people walking the streets of London.

In Moorcock’s novel the psycho-geography of London is “the boredom, alienation and oblivion of city life that prevented desire from being articulated”. Independently of Moorcock’s literary assessment, Steve Pile summarises these psychological aspects of modern London in the following words: “A new formulation of city life would have to attend to the fragments, the pasts, the ghosts, the magic of the city” (14). That is what Moorcock also tries to do in his novel: The forays from one world to another depict not only the intricacies between past and present, the collective and the individual, but also those between the surface of physical life and its psychological depths. Usually, legends and folktales tell and explain the psychological collapses that force individual experiences to be hidden away. Moorcock situates the images of trauma in “London under London”. His alter ego, the narrator

David Mummery, learns that the two worlds are not separate from each other but that the populations of both the underground and the surface city try to connect, always moving into the realm of the other, but never really making contact, always representing the subconscious of the war generation. By exploring the subterraneans, Mummery puts himself into an old tradition of stories about underground London.

Peter Ackroyd, who refers to Moorcock in *London: The Biography* (2000), draws the reader's attention to

recent accounts of the honest flushers and gangers who are gainfully employed to clear the sewers of soft mud and grit. A newspaper account of 1960 reports, of a Piccadilly sewer which drained into the Tyburn, that "it was like crossing the Styx. The fog had followed us down from the streets and swirled above the discoloured and strong-smelling river like the stream of Hades." So the descent conjures up mythological imagery. Eric Newby descended into the sewer of the Fleet and "seen fitfully by the light of miners' lanterns and special lamps, it was like one of the prisons designed by Piranesi." Again the imagery of the prison emerges. One sewerman told an interested guest below: "You should see some of 'em under the City. They're medieval. They don't show 'em to visitors." In that medieval spirit we read then of a "cavernous chamber ... with pillars, arches, and buttresses, like a cathedral undercroft." It is a strange city beneath the ground. (162)

The images Ackroyd recalls of this "strange city beneath the ground" (162) take readers "to the levels of the old primeval swamp which once was London; beneath Victoria Underground Station some fossils, fifty million years old, were uncovered" (163). The "peculiar sensation and atmosphere which the Underground evokes" created "accounts of ghosts, or presences, in the subterranean depths" (163). Ackroyd's assessment, which includes a fascinating history of the covered rivers such as the Fleet and the Tyburn, falls just short of turning into fiction itself. It follows a narrative pattern that is familiar from his novel *Hawksmoor* (1985), where "the magical and the mysterious prevail over the rational and the coherent" (Chalupský 2011, 175). Moorcock's "legendary subterraneans" are reminiscent of not only H.G. Wells's Morlocks, of course, but also of Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Vril, the Power of the Coming Race* (1871) on the history of a "subterranean population" (47). From these novels a direct

link can be made with Ben Aaronovitch’s “secret subterranean race” (288) which we encounter in *Whispers Underground* (2012).

While all these novels create imaginary counter-worlds to the buzzing life of London’s streets, Moorcock explores underground London as a place that offers a psychological representation for the presence of past events in the minds of survivors. Mary and Josef Kiss belong to them. They have found a way to each other. When they walk in the mist of a pearly London night, they might not be looking for “the road to the Land of Dreams”, as Mary with “lighthearted irony” (*ML* 493), remarks. What subterranean London is to Mummery, the mist is to Mary and Josef Kiss. Walking together, they free themselves from what appears to be the mist of silence and repression: “Josef Kiss lets her guide him through a mist which disperses as they reach the other side and he feels they have actually crossed to a new world as fantastic, as complex and as eccentric as the one they leave” (*ML* 493). The snowed in streets of London present a “shadow city waiting to take on any shape or character they wish. In one another’s arms they stand at the crossroads, content to await whatever transport comes their way” (*ML* 493). Mary and Josef Kiss have found a way into a new life, while Mummery’s writing efforts take him below the surface and deeper into the topography of London’s collective memory.

Exploring the underground, Mummery is mapping his life as part of London’s post-war history. The world of the subterranean race evokes the traumatised past of the Blitz that has been denied and ignored. It attributes to Mummery’s trauma a specific generational place. On his urban excursions Mummery explores the topography of his own mind. The underground evokes past trauma and represents a place of belonging. This paradox is manifest in the double vision of the subterranean race. On the one hand it is a fiction, even by the standards of Mummery’s world. On the other hand, Mummery discovered that the subterranean race actually exists. Thus Mummery attributes place and time to his trauma and that of his generation.

Mummery looks at his post-war fellow Londoners from the perspective of an “urban anthropologist”:

I have seen half my generation dead or ruined; lost in an increasingly alien world of Low Tones and imperial ghosts; of shameful and wasteful military adventures, of grocery-shop philosophies, the same that made the last Empire of the French the wretched sham, the miserable, cruel, self-serving society it was. (*ML* 165)

As someone who belongs to the war generation, Mummery identifies with the subterranean race that does not dare to make contact with those on the surface, the generation after the war, the survivors of the war (made by the war), but never made contact with their omnipresent past.

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