Introduction

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I

> A book is being written about the Prime Minister's time in office. Apparently, it is going to be out by Christmas. Is that the release date or the title?
>
> —Keir Starmer to Liz Truss at Prime Minister's Questions, 19 October 2022.

On 20 October 2022, Liz Truss, who had taken office as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom only six weeks earlier, announced her resignation. One consequence of the abrupt end of her short premiership was that an instant biography, the one alluded to by Labour leader Keir Starmer, had to be hastily rewritten. Authored by journalists Harry Cole and James Heale, the book was indeed, like Truss, out by Christmas.[1] Because of the peculiar circumstances, it undoubtedly attracted more attention than such a work might otherwise have done; *Out of the Blue*, as it was titled, was named *Sunday Times* Politics Book of the Year. Yet even as British politics descended into chaos, the book's publication represented a strand of continuity. Throughout the many vicissitudes of Britain's political system, political writing in a wide range of forms has been important to the national conversation. This has remained the case even in the era of social media, with printed publications retaining a surprisingly important and complex role.

This book addresses how, in the United Kingdom since the late nineteenth century, conventions and expectations surrounding writing have affected the composition, production, and reception of political texts. The persistence of long-form political writing, through the advent of TV and radio, and then through the internet age, is a phenomenon that cannot be taken for granted and needs to be explained. Furthermore, specific genres cannot be considered in isolation. Rather, they should be seen as part of a constellation of diverse types of writing.

[1] Harry Cole and James Heale, *Out of the Blue: The Inside Story of the Unexpected Rise and Rapid Fall of Liz Truss* (London, 2022).

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Thus, they need to be examined not only individually – as has already been done successfully by a number of scholars – but in relation to one another. Through a systematic exploration of how genres have functioned in the age of mass politics, we show that the acts of writing and publishing have been so fundamental and intrinsic to the political process that, hidden in plain sight, they are in danger of being overlooked. We argue that particular genres of writing facilitated different ways of 'doing politics'. Focusing on genres of writing is a means of elucidating the structure of the UK's political DNA.

Politicians and other political actors are constantly writing, or causing words to be written. Publics and audiences are constantly consuming (whether aurally or visually) the words that the political actors produce. The book's fundamental purpose is to explore the multifarious reasons why, in modern Britain, people have written about politics and (in many cases) have published the results. Our claim, explored by the various authors throughout the book, is that the issue of genre is tied up with that of how politics itself should be conceived. We take it as axiomatic that the category of 'the political' extends beyond high politics to include broad questions of class, race, gender, sexuality, and religion. Yet we are interested in elite-level politics too – even though we think that traditions of British political writing and publishing have reinforced problematic, Westminster-centric visions of what politics is.

In recent years, the study of rhetoric and cultures of public speaking has burgeoned as a field and has yielded important insights into British political history.[2] We believe that genre can be an equally useful frame for analysis, and that scholars of modern Britain can learn from those working in other periods and disciplines. As Mark Salber Phillips has written:

> It was not very long ago that genre-study was generally understood as an attempt to discover distinct and enduring formal characteristics beneath the fluctuations of literary history. More recently, however, these assumptions about the unity and fixity of genres have been discarded in favor of approaches emphasizing precisely the opposite qualities of instability, mixture, and historical specificity. Reconsidered in this light, genre-study emerges as a prime avenue for exploring historical change.[3]

[2] Key contributions include: Alan Finlayson and James Martin, '"It Ain't What You Say…": British Political Studies and the Analysis of Speech and Rhetoric', *British Politics*, 3 (2008), pp. 445–64; Jon Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics from Hogarth to Blair* (Cambridge, 2009); Christopher Reid, *Imprison'd Wranglers: The Rhetorical Culture of the House of Commons 1760–1800* (Cambridge, 2013); Richard Toye, 'The Rhetorical Culture of the House of Commons after 1918', *History*, 99 (2014), pp. 270–98.; Judi Atkins, Alan Finlayson, James R. Martin, and Nick Turnbull (eds.), *Rhetoric in British Politics and Society* (Basingstoke, 2014).

[3] Mark Salber Phillips, *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740–1820* (Princeton, 2000), p. 20.

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The concept that we use – 'genres of political writing' – occurs quite frequently in studies of early modern political thought. Notably, Machiavelli, in his cynical treatise *The Prince*, has been seen as subverting the genre of the *Speculum Principis* (The 'Mirror of the Prince') – the type of advice manual which explained to rulers how to rule wisely and virtuously. Indeed, Machiavelli more or less announced this, presenting himself as realistic where others were idealistic. Robert Hariman, while acknowledging the break with genre, suggests that something more complex was going on. Machiavelli was attacking not only his predecessors' idealism but also their textuality. He claimed that his avoidance of their ornate phrases and his use of straightforward language was proof of his ability to see the world as it really was and hence of the authority of his text. Thus, Machiavelli marks a paradigm shift towards modernity, presenting the true form of political writing as one based not on the authority of literary style but on unadorned observation, objectivity, knowledge, and common sense.[4]

A common way of looking at political writing is to consider content, for example, what does a given text or set of texts reveal about Labour, Liberal, or Conservative ideology? This is an entirely legitimate approach. However, as with Machiavelli, an understanding of content can be enriched by looking at choices about form and style. It is important to avoid assuming that the form that political publishing and writing has taken in the UK is 'normal', even if those who worked within it often did themselves take its features for granted. Indeed, England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland have all had distinct literary cultures, and, amongst other themes, the book explores ways in which these cultures promoted or impeded nationalism (or gave distinctive expression to other issues).

The impact of foreign authors, texts, and arguments on domestic social and political movements is well known. For example, Sheila Fitzpatrick has recently noted that the writing of Soviet dissidents became 'a significant subgenre of non-fiction publishing in the US and UK throughout the 1970s'.[5] But it is still worth emphasising the transnational potential of political writing and cultures of print in modern Britain. Imperial systems and networks could facilitate the expansion of movements and organisations across the world, aided by the translation of texts and the prominence of the English language, and

[4] Robert Hariman, 'Composing Modernity in Machiavelli's *Prince*', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 50 (1989), pp. 3–29.
[5] Sheila Fitzpatrick, 'Disturbers of the Peace', *London Review of Books*, 24 October 2024.

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sometimes resulting in the establishment of local publishing houses.[6] In fact, the British Empire was a 'global space of circulation'.[7] As Matheus Cardoso-da-Silva has shown, the Left Book Club (1936–48) integrated 'circuits created by Communist networks' in the Black Atlantic and 'connected British intellectuals to various international causes, such as the struggle for independence of the colonies in Africa, the Caribbean and Asia'.[8] This two-way flow of ideas and texts in the Black Atlantic would have a profound impact on intellectuals such as Stuart Hall in post-war Britain. Not only did the Jamaican-born Hall move from the 'periphery' to the 'metropole', but he had to work through what he termed the 'makings of a diasporic self'. This meant keeping 'in contact with Caribbean writing and thought' while using his own 'displacements' to make a major contribution to an emerging New Left in Britain.[9]

The field of political history has often been presented as a set of binary choices – between the study of 'high politics' and 'history from below', between 'traditional' sources such as Hansard and government records, and 'unconventional' or 'cultural' ones such as songbooks and feature films. There is a growing recognition, however, that these approaches are by no means mutually exclusive.[10] To explore genres of political writing is to explore the nexuses between different groups of writers (who were not necessarily 'elite') and readers (who were not necessarily 'ordinary'). In the United Kingdom in our period, some of these relationships were very much top-down – as when political leaders (or former leaders) published books with big conglomerates. But members of the public also had agency, which they might express by patronising minority publishers and bookshops, by writing to authors, or even by turning their hands to alternative publishing themselves. Today, the reading public can speak truth to power via online commentary. 'Truss's image as a mediocre chancer does not improve with this vaguely bluewashing account', wrote

[6] Lori Lee Oates, 'Imperial Occulture: The Theosophical Society and Transnational Cultures of Print', *The International History Review*, 43 (2021), pp. 815–35.

[7] Matheus Cardoso-da-Silva, 'The Left Book Club and Its Associates: The Transnational Circulation of Socialist Ideas in an Atlantic Network', in David Featherstone and Christian Høgsbjerg (eds.), *The Red and the Black: The Russian Revolution and the Black Atlantic* (Manchester, 2021), p. 203.

[8] Ibid., p. 208.

[9] Stuart Hall with Bill Schwarz, *Familiar Stranger: A Life between Two Islands* (London, 2017), pp. 164, 171, 227–70. For a broader account of Caribbean thinkers who not only came to but 'wrote back' to Britain, see Bill Schwarz (ed.), *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain* (Manchester, 2003).

[10] David M. Craig, '"High Politics" and "New Political History"', *The Historical Journal*, 53 (2010), pp. 453–75.

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one Amazon reviewer of *Out of the Blue*. 'Her journey through life seems dull and self-serving every step of the way.'[11]

The book encompasses cultures of writing, publishing, and reading at all levels of society. We consider genres across two vectors of categorisation. First, form: whether a work is a book, pamphlet, leaflet, etc. (The boundaries are sometimes fuzzy, but not normally to the point of causing real confusion.) Second, content: whether a work is memoir, fiction, satire, polemic, polemical satire, etc. Here there is much more scope for ambiguity and debate, and any given work could potentially be said to belong to multiple genres simultaneously. We are not interested merely in the author as lone creator, but in writing, publishing, and distribution as networks and collective processes, which involve secretaries, postal workers, literary agents, editors, printers, booksellers, and even street-corner vendor-activists. Jonathan Rose's classic investigation of *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (2001) showed that it was possible to say more about ordinary readers' reception of texts than has often been thought.[12] Building on Rose's insights, this book casts light on popular political writing and dissemination too. Arguably, the millions of people who wrote to MPs and other officials – including the 100,000 who wrote to Enoch Powell after his 1968 'rivers of blood' speech – were themselves authors in an influential, if mainly private genre.[13]

The book is principally concerned with print, though of course electronic media are relevant to the questions that we address. They have been often very important in the reception of political writing, and of course, many political-literary figures (e.g., George Orwell) have written for radio or TV.[14] But taking print as our central point of concern allows political writing to be investigated as part of an ecosystem that includes writing, editing, publishing, and distribution. Periodicals were not merely receptacles for articles; they actively commissioned them (as publishers did with books) and inspired writers to produce material to submit to them.[15] As James Smith has shown in his work on MI5 surveillance of British writers, 'A radical literary magazine was not of concern because of the aesthetic manifesto it issued, but because of how

[11] 'LesVince', two-star review, 29 November 2023, www.amazon.co.uk/Out-Blue-inside-story-unexpected/dp/0008605785/ref=monarch_sidesheet (consulted 18 Dec. 2023).
[12] Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, 2001).
[13] Amy Whipple, 'Revisiting the "Rivers of Blood" Controversy: Letters to Enoch Powell', *Journal of British Studies*, 48 (2009), pp. 717–35; Kit Kowol and Richard Toye, '"I would love to think my letter may get through the network": The management of British MPs' postbags and politician-voter relations in the democratic age', in press.
[14] W. J. West (ed.), *George Orwell: The War Broadcasts* (London, 1985).
[15] Peter Marks, *George Orwell the Essayist: Literature, Politics and the Periodical Culture* (London, 2011), p. 5.

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the funders, editors, contributors, distributors, and subscribers might be linked together as part of a suspected Party-controlled front.'[16] What concerned yesterday's security service analysts should also concern today's scholarly ones – that is, the relationships between individual writers, publishing networks, and wider political movements.

These relationships need to be considered in the context of changes in the United Kingdom's constitution and political system, together with shifting interpretations of 'Britishness' as the Empire declined and broke up.[17] The first part of the twentieth century saw the abolition of the veto power of the House of Lords as well as far-reaching extensions of the electoral franchise (including to women). Mass politics was accompanied by the rise of the mass press, as well as by a flood of print – in the form of pamphlets and posters – of the kind that proliferated during the Edwardian Tariff Reform debates.[18] Often bold and brash, and sometimes unscrupulous in its claims, this type of material prompted fears in some quarters that voters were vulnerable to psychological manipulation.[19] However, more highfalutin publications continued to have an influence. This was the case even as, in the interwar years, the conditions were created for the emergence of a more rigid two-party system in which intellectual independence by ministers and MPs was increasingly subordinated to Cabinet or party discipline. By the 1930s, traditional heavyweight periodicals such as *The Nineteenth Century and After* were in decline, but by no means defunct.[20] This was, instead, the 'age of the weeklies', such as *The New Statesman and Nation*, *Time and Tide*, and *Tribune*. The fact that such papers were predominantly on the Left contributed to Conservatives' sense that they were being intellectually outgunned by the socialists.[21]

[16] James Smith, *British Writers and MI5 Surveillance, 1930–1960* (Cambridge, 2013), p. 156.

[17] Stuart Ward, United Kingdom: *A Global History of the End of Britain* (Cambridge, 2023).

[18] James Thompson, '"Pictorial Lies"? Posters and Politics in Britain c.1880–1914', *Past & Present*, 197 (2007), pp. 177–210; David Thackeray, *Conservatism for the Democratic Age: Conservative Cultures and the Challenge of Mass Politics in Early Twentieth Century England* (Manchester, 2013), p. 60. H. G. Wells's novel, *The History of Mr. Polly* (London, 1910), p. 261, offers satirical comment on the proliferation of tracts on the 'fiscal question' (i.e., free trade versus protectionism). On the broad question of Free Trade culture, see, Frank Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption, and Civil Society in Modern Britain* (Oxford, 2008).

[19] Graham Wallas, *Human Nature in Politics* (London, 1908); James Thompson, *British Political Culture and the Idea of 'Public Opinion', 1867–1914* (Cambridge, 2013), chapter 3.

[20] Gary Love, 'The Periodical Press and the Intellectual Culture of Conservatism in Interwar Britain', *The Historical Journal*, 57 (2014), pp. 1027–56.

[21] Clarisse Berthezène, 'Creating Conservative Fabians: The Conservative Party, Political Education and the Founding of Ashridge College', *Past & Present*, 182 (2004), pp. 211–40.

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That feeling was reinforced by the success of the Left Book Club and the birth of Penguin Books in the same decade. Penguin not only made high-quality fiction cheap and accessible but also produced a long-running series of topical 'Specials', not all of which were by left-wing authors, but which tended to accentuate the growing hegemony of progressive thought.[22] Though the nature and extent of the 1939–45 'swing to the Left' is hotly debated, it is nonetheless clear that the war provided fertile ground for radical publishing, building on the marketing innovations of the interwar years.[23] The pamphlet *Guilty Men* was only the most celebrated of Victor Gollancz's eye-catching, bestselling series of 'Victory Books', a coruscating set of denunciations of the increasingly discredited Tory elite.[24] Conservative counterblasts were too few and too late to have much effect.[25] However, F. A. Hayek's *Road to Serfdom* (1944), an attack on economic collectivism, gained immediate popular attention as well as much longer-term influence.[26] Though the content of these various works has been extensively discussed, it is important not to miss a point that transcends the fate of specific ideologies. That is, print remained a vital medium for debate at a time when radio (and then early television) was monopolised by the BBC and largely eschewed political controversy.

The first two post-war decades marked the high point of the Labour versus Conservative two-party system, which was then, from the late 1960s, threatened by the rise of Welsh and Scottish nationalism and the resurgence of the Liberals. Although the decline of the public meeting, the triumph of TV politics, and the rise of neoliberalism went hand in hand, the onset of the Thatcher revolution did not have any obvious negative impact on the UK's thriving political print culture. On the one

[22] Dean Blackburn, *Penguin Books and Political Change: Britain's Meritocratic Moment, 1937–1988* (Manchester, 2020).

[23] Steven Fielding, 'What Did "The People" Want? The Meaning of the 1945 General Election', *The Historical Journal*, 35 (1992), pp. 623–39; Laura Beers, 'Labour's Britain, Fight For it Now!', *The Historical Journal*, 52 (2009), pp. 667–95; Jonathan Roscoe, '"The Age of Shouting Had Arrived'": Victor Gollancz, Stanley Morison, and the Reimagining of Marketing at Victor Gollancz, Ltd and the Left Book Club', *LOGOS*, 29 (2018), pp. 9–25.

[24] Ruth Dudley Edwards, *Victor Gollancz: A Biography* (London, 1987), p. 317; Sheila Hodges, *Gollancz: The Story of a Publishing House, 1928–1978* (London, 1978), pp. 153–54.

[25] Andrew Thorpe, 'Myth and Counter-Myth in Second World War British Politics', in Chris Williams and Andrew Edwards (eds.), *The Art of the Possible: Politics and Governance in Modern British History, 1885–1997: Essays in Memory of Duncan Tanner* (Manchester, 2015), pp. 121–42, at 133.

[26] Melissa Lane, 'The Genesis and Reception of *The Road to Serfdom*', in Robert Leeson (ed.), *Hayek: A Collaborative Biography, Part 1: Influences from Mises to Bartley* (London, 2013), pp. 43–60, at 52.

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hand, established forms such as biography and memoir burgeoned further. The ultimately successful battle to overcome official secrecy by publishing Richard Crossman's frank and revealing Cabinet diaries became a 1970s *cause célèbre*, shifting expectations around freedom of information. On the other hand, countercultural alternatives boomed, through the growth of community publishing, relying initially on mimeograph machines, before they were replaced by the ubiquity of the photocopier, and finally the advent of the word-processor.[27] The 1980s witnessed a 'zine explosion' with many titles connected to the growth of the Green movement.[28] This is not to say that form and content always went hand in hand. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND)'s periodical *Sanity*, published from the 1960s, bore the hallmarks of professionalism. This perhaps reflected the organisation's dual identity, based on 'a Britishness that was internationally progressive but domestically conservative'.[29]

Meanwhile, Stuart Hall popularised the term 'Thatcherism' in an article published in *Marxism Today* (MT).[30] Though its centrality to the debates of the time is sometimes overstated, this previously obscure organ of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) gained considerable influence, in part due to editor Martin Jacques's attention to promotional strategy and to accessibility of language, style, and format.[31] Some of the most iconic books of the decade were the green-spined volumes produced by feminist publishers Virago, founded in 1973.[32] (One of the best known is *The Iron Ladies: Why Do Women Vote Tory?* (1987) by MT contributor Beatrix Campbell.) The Right, of course, had publishing successes too. Milton and Rose Friedman's free-market manifesto *Free To Choose* (1980) appeared with Penguin, which also

[27] James Baker and David Geiringer, 'Space, Text and Selfhood: Encounters with the Personal Computer in the Mass Observation Project Archive, 1991–2004', *Contemporary British History*, 33 (2019), pp. 293–312.

[28] Chris Atton, *Alternative Media* (London, 2002), p. 80.

[29] Jodi Burkett, 'Re-defining British Morality: "Britishness" and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament 1958–68', *Twentieth Century British History*, 21 (2010), pp. 184–205, at 185.

[30] Stuart Hall, 'The Great Moving Right Show', *Marxism Today*, January 1979.

[31] Herbert Pimlott, 'Write Out of the Margins: Accessibility, Editorship and House Style in *Marxism Today*, 1957–91', *Journalism Studies*, 7 (2006), pp. 782–806. For a qualification of the journal's centrality, see Colm Murphy, 'The Forgotten Rival of *Marxism Today*: The British Labour Party's *New Socialist* and the Business of Political Culture in the Late Twentieth Century', *The English Historical Review*, 138 (2023), pp. 871–97.

[32] For a full history of Virago, see Catherine Riley, *The Virago Story: Assessing the Impact of a Feminist Publishing Phenomenon* (Oxford, 2018). On Virago's articulations of its independence and how it became embedded in networks of male entrepreneurial knowledge, see D.-M. Withers, 'Enterprising Women: Independence, Finance and Virago Press, c.1976–93', *Twentieth Century British History*, 31, 4 (2020), pp. 479–502.

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published George Gilder's *The Spirit of Enterprise* (1985). But Penguin's political titles were still, for the most part, authored by Left or centrist figures, including Social Democratic Party (SDP) founders Shirley Williams and David Owen.[33] In 1995, the surprise success of Will Hutton's *The State We're In* (published by Jonathan Cape) helped establish the New Labour *zeitgeist* if not the party's detailed policy direction.

II

The present book builds on foundations laid by many previous scholars. For example, beyond those contributions mentioned above, *The Oxford Handbook of British Politics* contains a section on 'Modes of Political Writing' featuring chapters on 'Political Journalism', 'Biography', and 'the Novel'.[34] Scholars such as Stefan Collini have also explored 'modes of writing which attempt to attract and persuade' through 'tone or "voice", rather than of insistent propositional statement'.[35] But our principal aim is to combine regard for mode, style, and genre – of which political actors and writers were often highly conscious – with attention to the mechanics and economics of how texts were written, reproduced, and distributed. We thus advocate attention to the material properties of political publications, in line with work in other fields on the non-textual properties of books.[36] This focus on the material aspects of political writing and publishing echoes the 'material turn' in modern British history. As Margot Finn has explained, 'Since at least the 1980s, historians have increasingly turned to material objects as primary sources that can illuminate aspects of the past which are obscured if we attend to textual evidence alone.'[37] As Frank Trentmann has argued, 'the material' should be 'recognized as a conduit of political processes that helps shape

[33] Blackburn, *Penguin Books and Political Change*, p. 224.

[34] Matthew Flinders, Andrew Gamble, Colin Hay, and Michael Kenny (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of British Politics* (Oxford, 2009). The chapters are, respectively, by Peter Riddell (pp. 172–86), David Marquand (pp. 187–200), and Bernard Crick (pp. 201–18).

[35] Stefan Collini, *Common Writing: Essays on Literary Culture and Public Debate* (Oxford, 2016), p. 2.

[36] Jeffrey Todd Knight, '"Furnished" for Action: Renaissance Books as Furniture', *Book History*, 12 (2009), pp. 37–73; Claire Battershill, 'Writers' Rooms: Theories of Contemporary Authorship in Portraits of Creative Spaces', *Authorship*, 3 (2014), pp. 1–14; Rowan Watson, 'Some Non-textual Uses of Books', in Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose (eds.), *A Companion to the History of the Book* (Chichester, 2020), pp. 645–60.

[37] Margot C. Finn, 'Material Turns in British History: 1. Loot', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 28 (2018), p. 6.

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(and not just reflect) political identities, concerns, and fields of action'.[38] This can be seen, for example, in the study of practices such as scrapbooking by political activists.[39]

As is shown throughout our volume, books, pamphlets, leaflets, and so forth are physical objects on which aesthetic care and technical skill have often been lavished – and which serve a semiotic function even if not actually read. For purchasers, they may represent a significant investment. 'Apart from their contents it should be emphasised that these books are not flimsy or paper-covered', boasted a 1939 advert for the Labour Book Service. 'They are well-bound in firm covers tastefully coloured, well-printed on good paper, and are meant to last.'[40] Books, or collections of books, could be a point of pride for their owners or custodians. To display them could be to make a statement. Books also have an aroma and can give out a Proustian thrill. The feminist historian Lesley Orr may have been writing ironically, satirically, or metaphorically when she observed that *The Red Paper On Scotland* 'smells of 1975'. But she went on to comment that when she took it down from the shelf, she was 'transported back very precisely' to her first year as an Edinburgh politics student. 'I know exactly what I was wearing and who I was with when we first flicked through the 368 pages of miniscule Times Roman.'[41]

The textual and material aspects of political publications are profoundly influenced by the economic ones and the conditions of production. The Cold War offers some good examples. As John Callaghan and Ben Harker have argued, 'Perhaps even more than the milieu of that broader labour movement, the culture of Communism in Britain bore the imprint of a strong autodidact tradition; for CPGB bibliographer Dave Cope, the party's "belief in the written word was immeasurable".' Local branches of the CPGB had their own literature secretaries, there were Communist-run bookshops in major British cities, and the CPGB operated a number of publishing houses, including Martin Lawrence, Lawrence & Wishart, and Modern Books. The latter circulated material from the Communist International. There was also a wide range of

[38] Frank Trentmann, 'Materiality in the Future of History: Things, Practices, and Politics', *Journal of British Studies*, 48, 2 (2009), p. 307.

[39] Cherish Watton, 'Suffrage Scrapbooks and Emotional Histories of Women's Activism', *Women's History Review*, 31 (2022), pp. 1028–46.

[40] 'Points About the Labour Book Service', 21 July 1939, Attlee Papers (Bodleian), MS.CRA.32.

[41] Lesley Orr, 'Reflections on Revisiting The Red Paper on Scotland', 16 May 2022, https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2022/05/16/reflections-on-revisiting-the-red-paper-on-scotland/ (consulted 18 December 2023).

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Communist periodicals designed to appeal to different types of readers and, of course, a newspaper, the *Daily Worker*. Renamed the *Morning Star* in 1966, the paper was meant to project 'a Communist voice' beyond the party membership. However, it appears that its financial survival depended on bulk-buying from the Soviet Union.[42]

This background is helpful for understanding the history of the 'cultural Cold War', which centred on the CIA's establishment of the Congress for Cultural Freedom in 1950 and its covert funding of various publications. Perhaps the Agency's most important intervention was its funding of and influence over the direction of the heavyweight Anglo-American journal *Encounter*.[43] But as Hugh Wilford has shown, when news broke of *Encounter*'s covert sponsorship in 1967, some of its British contributors, on both Left and Right, did not seem to be all that surprised. Wilford argues that 'the magazine's British collaborators clearly felt very little sense of having been duped or betrayed' and that 'to put it perhaps rather crudely, British intellectuals used *Encounter* as much as it used them'.[44] We can see from these examples how both the US and the Soviet Union had strong interests in funding the promotion of ideas in modern Britain. Political writing and publishing were key components of these broad political strategies.

A further example, which shows how the economics of political writing and publishing could be central to building a movement, derives from Michael Crick's 1984 exposé of the Trotskyite group Militant. Crick revealed that the group's 'internal motto was "The Three Ps – Premises, press and professionals"' and argued that 'of the three the press is perhaps the most important because of its financial advantages'. Funded by donations from high-ranking members, Militant acquired its own press in 1971, and its newspaper quickly grew into an eight-page weekly. By 1984, the group had 'three big presses in its London offices', which meant it was able to be fully independent, lower the costs of its own publications, and make money from commercial printing for others. Crick claimed that 'the income of Militant is almost as high as that of the Liberal party and about the same as the SDP's', which meant it was no

[42] John Callaghan and Ben Harker, *British Communism: A Documentary Reader* (Manchester, 2011), pp. 11–12. On the relationship between working-class writers and some of these publishers, see Chris Hilliard, 'Producers by Hand and Brain: Working-Class Writers and Left-Wing Publishers in 1930s Britain', *The Journal of Modern History*, 78 (March 2006), pp. 37–64.

[43] John Callaghan, *Cold War, Crisis and Conflict: The CPGB 1951–68* (London, 2003), p. 91.

[44] Hugh Wilfrod, *The CIA, the British Left and the Cold War* (London, 2003), pp. 288–90.

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ordinary Labour party pressure group.[45] Political writing and publishing thus not only served to promote the group's ideas but also played a fundamental role in maintaining its political independence and capacity for disruption. This case exemplified the impact of publishing well beyond that of specific texts.

The histories of feminist, queer, and black activism are rich fields for thinking about the relationship between the textual and material dimensions of British politics. As Leila Kassir and Richard Espley have suggested in their edited volume on queer publishing, 'it has often been between the covers of books that struggles for acceptance, liberation and repression have been waged'.[46] This took place not only in terms of campaigning advocacy but also in terms of textual innovations. The most well-known example of this is Peter Wildeblood's autobiographical defence against his prosecution and imprisonment for homosexual offences in his book *Against the Law* (published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson in 1955 and then as a Penguin paperback ahead of the publication of the Wolfenden report in 1957). As Chris Waters has argued, 'Wildeblood contested many established definitions of "the homosexual" and articulated a relatively new kind of selfhood'. He argued on behalf of 'a respectable homosexual selfhood' and his 'coming out narrative' did much to challenge the hypocrisy of the laws of the day.[47] However, the question of whether 'queer writing' itself constitutes a genre must be approached with caution. Jeanette Winterson, for example, has objected to the designation of her 1985 debut *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* as a 'lesbian novel': 'I've never understood why straight fiction is supposed to be for everyone, but anything with a gay character or that includes gay experience is only for queers.'[48]

Yet whether or not an author identifies with an 'identity genre' is a personal (and political) matter. Many of those in the British Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) who were perceived by outsiders as 'feminist writers' were more than happy to see themselves as such. And there were distinct genre conventions. As Margaretta Jolly has argued, there was 'a general feminist mode of testimonial narrative, manifest in diaries, letters, anthologies, memoirs and photographs throughout the WLM's

[45] Michael Crick, *Militant* (London, 1984), pp. 126–30.
[46] Leila Kassir and Richard Espley (eds.), *Queer Between the Covers: Histories of Queer Publishing and Publishing Queer Voices* (London, 2021), p. 1.
[47] Becky Conekin, Frank Mort, and Chris Waters (eds.), *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain 1945–1964* (London, 1999), pp. 136–50.
[48] Interview on Jeanette Winterson's official website, archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20130831051353/www.jeanettewinterson.com/pages/content/index.asp?PageID=50

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heyday'.[49] This mode was directly related to the movement's goal to 'politicize the personal' partly through 'consciousness raising' and the fact that the WLM was 'a network of loosely related lobbying groups and communities rather than any singular organised campaign'.[50] The emphasis on the personal and the local meant that the WLM relied very heavily on political writing and publishing to publicise its ideas and connect activists across the country. Newsletters like *Shrew* and *WIRES* were essential organs, as were the numerous feminist periodicals and presses that came into existence and served as 'activist hubs'.[51] Natalie Thomlinson has shown how 'feminist periodicals created spaces within which feminist theories could be articulated and disseminated'. She also argues that 'periodicals gave abstract movements material form; in some sense, they made movements by providing a focal point for debate and allowed for movements to be understood as coherent entities'.[52]

One key text, which tried to innovate both in terms of the way it was constructed and the arguments it offered, was *Beyond the Fragments* (1979).[53] Its authors, Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Segal, and Hilary Wainwright, in the spirit of Second Wave Feminism, collaborated but each wrote their separate essays offering their own experiences and perspectives on how feminism could be used to reinvigorate the politics of the left. Beginning life as a pamphlet, it was soon reworked and published as a book. It was a direct call for the greater recognition and stronger coordination of the fragmented groups of the left at the grass-roots level, including feminist, gay and lesbian, black and anti-racist, and environmentalist activists. As Dennis Dworkin has noted, it caused furore: '*Beyond the Fragments* … advocated a strategy that recognized the centrality of the Labour Party, argued for the necessity of reinventing it, was aware of the structural obstacles impeding this goal, and in the end insisted that reinvention must come from a political formation on the outside.'[54] Furthermore, as Diarmaid Kelliher has argued, 'Black and

[49] Margaretta Jolly, *Sisterhood and After: An Oral History of the UK Women's Liberation Movement, 1968–present* (Oxford, 2019), p. 42.

[50] Ibid., pp. 8 and 41. See also, Sarah Crook, 'The Women's Liberation Movement, Activism and Therapy at the Grassroots, 1968–1985', *Women's History Review*, 27, 7 (2018), pp. 1152–54.

[51] Jolly, *Sisterhood and After*, pp. 96–99. For an overview, see Florence Binard, 'The British Women's Liberation Movement in the 1970s: Redefining the Personal and the Political', *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique*, 22, Hors série (2017), pp. 1–17.

[52] Natalie Thomlinson, 'Second-Wave Black Feminist Periodicals in Britain', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 27, 4 (2017), pp. 433–34.

[53] Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Segal, and Hilary Wainwright, *Beyond the Fragments: Feminism and the Making of Socialism* (London, 1979).

[54] Dennis Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies* (Durham, NC, 1997), p. 252.

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feminist solidarity during the miners' strike can be understood as part of this project'.[55] Although the most ambitious goals of the book were not achieved at the time, it has proven influential in the UK and abroad up to the present day.[56]

In his book *Thinking Black*, Rob Waters has shown how different forms of political writing and publishing contributed to anti-racist protest and struggle. Waters has drawn attention to the networks of activists and intellectuals involved in and centred around the Race Today Collective, *Black Liberator*, the Institute of Race Relations, and the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. At the same time, he has argued that 'a revolution in thought came from the energies of the wider formation of which [Stuart] Hall and [Paul] Gilroy were a part, and how it animated a political culture'.[57] In other words, thought, disseminated through political writing and publishing, and action, were interconnected. Black feminist communities also used their own periodicals and publications to contribute to this culture, which, as Thomlinson has shown, had a profound impact on modern feminism in the long term.[58]

Lucy Delap has demonstrated how the material and communitarian aspects of bookselling were central to creating a sense of space and place for British feminism, as they were for other radical and countercultural movements (anarchist, black, Left, and so on). Radical bookshops 'provided distinctive material sites, often undercapitalized but politically important, which helped to focus radical political commitments within their communities'. These bookshops thrived in the 1970s and 1980s partly because they were publicly funded by the Arts Council, Development Agencies, and local government (particularly the Greater London Council [GLC]). But they came under increasing pressure from a combination of Thatcherite local government cuts, the abolition of the GLC, and new commercial demands in Britain during the 1980s and 1990s. For example, as feminist publishing became more mainstream, retail spaces changed in ways that made it challenging for independent bookshops to

[55] Diarmaid Kelliher, *Making Cultures of Solidarity: London and the 1984–5 Miners' Strike* (London, 2021), p. 113.

[56] Michael Newman, *Socialism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2020), pp. 100–102. An academic conference titled 'Beyond the Fragments; 45 Years On' was held at the People's History Museum in Manchester on 28 June 2024 to discuss the book and its impact.

[57] Rob Waters, *Thinking Black: Britain, 1964–1985* (Oakland, 2019), pp. 3–4 and 165–208. See also Jack Webb, 'Readers, Writers, and Riots: Race, Print Culture, and the Public in Liverpool 8 in the Early 1980s', *Journal of British Studies*, 62 (2023), pp. 906–31.

[58] Thomlinson, 'Second-Wave Black Feminist Periodicals in Britain', p. 444. On the lack of attention paid to black British writing, see James Procter (ed.), *Writing Black Britain 1948–1998* (Manchester, 2000), pp. 1–12.

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afford rising rents. Chain bookshops also introduced aggressive discounting practices and forced the abandonment of the Net Book Agreement (NBA) in 1997, which had set minimum prices for books since 1900. The rise of internet retail then ensured that most of London's radical bookshops confronted closure at the dawn of the new millennium.[59]

Graham McKerrow's personal account of the attempts by Customs and Excise to censor and thereby effectively ruin the Gay's the Word bookshop in 1984 is indicative of the era's countervailing trends. A major and ultimately successful defence campaign was organised, which relied on support from 'the community, the publishing industry, civil libertarians, politicians and others'. While the bookshop 'stocked its politics on its shelves', it provided a vital space for a whole range of gay and lesbian campaign groups to meet. In McKerrow's view, 'Gay's the Word became a key part of a growing political movement and of the LBTQ+ literary world, locally and internationally. It formed part of an eco-system of cooperation and exchange that enabled our emerging community to communicate and organise in new and more effective ways about an array of pertinent social and political subjects.'[60]

As Stephen Brooke has written, 'Groups born of the social movements in the 1960s contributed a new dynamism to politics at the local level, whether from the Women's Liberation Movement, gay and lesbian rights groups, or organizations representing ethnic minorities.'[61] They also show how the processes of writing and publishing were integral to these new ways of organising and campaigning politically. While the existing scholarly literature documents plenty of specific examples, an overview of why political writing is important is still needed. Although this book is not comprehensive, we hope that it will succeed in drawing more attention to the potential of the subject in relation to modern British political history and political culture more generally. The emphasis here is not only on writers and their readers, but also on how political writing and publishing have been collective experiences. This meant people getting together to discuss, to write, to use machines, to publish, to promote, and to network.

[59] Lucy Delap, 'Feminist Bookshops, Reading Cultures and the Women's Liberation Movement in Great Britain, c. 1974–2000', *History Workshop Journal*, 81 (2016), pp. 171–96, at 172, 174–75, 190–91.

[60] Graham McKerrow, 'Saving Gay's the Word: The Campaign to Protect a Bookshop and the Right to Import Queer Literature', in Kassir and Espley (eds.), Queer between the Covers, pp. 92–116. This was not just a London story. For an account of the In Other Words bookshop in Plymouth, see Alan Butler, 'Performing LGBT Pride in Plymouth 1950 – 2012', PhD Thesis, University of Plymouth (2016), pp. 117–22.

[61] Stephen Brooke, *London, 1984: Conflict and Change in the Radical City* (Oxford, 2024), p. 32.

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III

The importance of the book display – a neglected but arresting aspect of genre in the age of mass politics – is evoked in Chapter 1. This considers three interrelated genres of political writing that have been particularly prominent since 1900. These are memoirs, diaries, and biographies; their covers send out messages about politics, whether exhibited at home, piled high at signings, or relegated to the bargain bin. Toye addresses the question of why these three types of work have become an accepted, and largely unquestioned, part of the British political and publishing landscape. At the surface level, it seems quite understandable that prime ministers, cabinet ministers, and a number of relatively colourful junior ministers, advisers, and backbench MPs should have dominated. But at the same time, the ascendancy of Westminster in the priorities of publishers reinforces a particular elitist, London-centric, and largely white male-centric, view of what politics is about.

Something similar could be said about novels in the parliamentary genre – a different mode of storytelling about politics which Benjamin Disraeli and Anthony Trollope are credited with originating. Chapter 2 looks at the post-1945 period, a time when parliamentary fiction was alleged to have descended from high literature into 'unutterable trash'. Considering authors such as Maurice Edelman, Jeffrey Archer, Michael Dobbs, and Edwina Currie, the chapter shows that in the 1990s there was a distinct genre shift driven by female authors. The celebration of male heroes was replaced by critique and by a wider attack on Parliament and the practices of masculine-dominated politics. In line with wider movements of opinion which challenged the character of democracy at this time, the newly feminised genre turned the original function of the parliamentary novel upside down.

Chapter 3 considers another mode of elite writing: the political obituary. This is a very noteworthy genre of political writing, and one which is in many ways characteristically British, yet it has been reflected upon little. Farr shows that what might be assumed to be a traditional and unchanging genre has in fact been shaped by a combination of societal change and a series of editorial contingencies. He identifies an 'obituarial turn', starting in the 1970s, in which obituaries became simultaneously more prominent, regular, and frank. These brief lives, delivered with the impress of 'papers of record', increasingly privileged anecdote, peccadillo, and scandal. The turn widened the ambit of those who were considered to 'deserve' an obituary and provided new opportunities for the burnishing and tarnishing of political reputations.

Obituaries gained power from their apparent authoritativeness. This was a function or construct which was not equally accessible to all, not

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even to all members of the privileged classes. But it could be struggled for and sometimes won. Chapter 4 explores the use of writing, and the manipulation of genre, by an elite woman to establish her authority and expertise. The woman concerned was Beatrice Webb, née Potter (1858–1943). The chapter examines her first publications as a tyro social investigator prior to her marriage to Sidney Webb, who was not only but also her life partner but her intellectual companion. McCarthy draws on Beatrice's remarkable diary to reveal the angst and passion that lay behind her austere, humourless public image. Showing how Webb sought public appreciation for her ideas through the exploration of genre, the chapter also explores how Beatrice's authorial identity altered with the publication of her renowned autobiography, *My Apprenticeship* (1926). Explaining this deepens our understanding not only of Webb herself but of the links between gender, authorship, and expertise.

Chapter 5 focuses on another socialist intellectual, to investigate how poetry fitted within British socialist culture in the first part of the twentieth century. Best known for his many works on socialism, history, economics, and politics, G. D. H. Cole (1889–1959) was also a published poet. Griffiths considers Cole's verse a different mode of writing, and sometimes even of singing, about politics. Cole wanted not only to use poetry to express political ideas but also to weave it into the tapestry of political life. He engaged with two discrete but interlinked genres: on the one hand, literary poetry, and on the other, satirical poetry written for entertainment and inspiration, as seen in *The Bolo Book* (1921). By parodying hymns and other well-known songs, Cole drew on an established genre tradition, and reworked it for his own purposes.

An emphasis on performance was something which Left had in common with Right. In Chapter 6, Julie V. Gottlieb and Liam Liburd examine literature and propaganda as vital elements in the gestural politics of British fascism. They focus on the texts generated by two key fascist organisations, the British Fascisti (1923–35) and the British Union of Fascists (1932–40). Analysis of the evolving modes, styles, literary elements, structures, graphics, and aesthetics of fascist publications naturally illuminates the development of the policies and theories of those organisations. It also illustrates how fascist writers gained insights from and aped the techniques and genres of their political rivals and adversaries. Gottlieb and Liburd emphasise that fascism must be viewed in the context of the ways it was disseminated and distributed. Newspapers were physical objects and consumer items sold on street corners and at meetings; songs were sung on marches as a crucial feature of fascist spectacle. Writing existed not merely to be read but to be acted out on the political stage.

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Chapter 7 digs into the Conservative party's view of writing and publishing, focusing on erudite articles, books, and pamphlets (a genre of political writing that British fascists had struggled to exploit in terms of influencing mainstream right opinion in Britain during the 1930s). The chapter shows that the 1940s marked a crucial period when Conservatives debated the significance of political writing, leading to the establishment of the Conservative Political Centre (CPC). Acting as the party's in-house publisher, the CPC aimed to position the Conservatives as intellectual rivals to the Fabian Society and the Labour party. The 1950s witnessed a flourishing era for Conservative writing, but also centralised control, aligning with R. A. Butler's 'octopus plan' for party education. The succeeding decades saw a decline as Tory publications faced new challenges and market pressures. The Heath years saw an embrace of a more 'technocratic' and 'market-oriented' approach, diminishing the CPC's role. This trend persisted into the Thatcher years, where the reliance on external think-tanks narrowed the scope of Conservative literary ambition.

Chapter 8 looks, by contrast, at a most unconservative genre – the self-made, self-published, and self-distributed punk fanzines of the 1970s and 1980s. Fanzines – alternative, low-tech publications – had formerly been produced with care, with the aim of providing information to fellow 'fans' with shared cultural interests. The birth of British punk led to new zines such as *Sniffin' Glue* and *London's Outrage*, which were knocked out with speed and irreverence. As the mainstream media indulged moral panic over the Sex Pistols, fanzine authors not only reviewed records and gigs but wrestled with ideas, on themes ranging from race and gender to commodification and anarchy and gender relations. Worley argues that fanzines provided a zone for teenagers and youth to experiment with ideology and, in so doing, to develop a unique genre of writing shaped by punk's impulses of creative destruction.

Chapter 9 looks at another form of grassroots publication – coalfield women's writing during and immediately after the 1984–85 miners' strike. Many books and pamphlets describing women's strike activism appeared, part of the contemporary boom in community publishing. Their contents, in line with the long tradition of working-class writing, included memoir, group histories, photos, and poems. Thomlinson explores the moral economy of this literature, showing how women drew on their personal experiences and emotions to present themselves as 'ordinary' and authentic, and thus as legitimate political actors. These genre techniques were not unique to these women, but rather were methods by which subaltern leftist writers of this period established and legitimised their political credentials.

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The coalfield women were marginalised at the time but have latterly been celebrated. By contrast, Ulster's 'Progressive bookmen', had a significant place in Northern Irish literary culture from the 1930s until the outbreak of the Troubles, but were then submerged and forgotten. Focusing on Louis MacNeice (1907–63), John Boyd (1912–2002), W. R. 'Bertie' Rodgers (1909–69), and John Hewitt (1907–87), Chapter 10 shows how writers who saw themselves as 'Irish' had no hesitation in engaging with British institutions such as the Left Book Club and the Workers' Educational Association (WEA). Genre was inflected by national identity. These men were Protestants but opposed the Ulster Unionist establishment, their discussions often fuelled by alcohol, they worked through union halls, WEA lectures, and BBC studios to explore their own multilayered identities and promote their political concerns. Parr reminds us of the richness and complexity of the political-literary heritage of Northern Ireland, a part of the United Kingdom that is often reduced to stereotypes of narrow-mindedness and bigotry.

Chapter 11 is also subversive of myth. One of the beloved legends of today's Scotland is that the devolved parliament owes its birth to the creative efforts of artists and writers, such as Alasdair Gray's 'national' novel *Lanark* (1981). Though there is an element of truth to this tale, Hames argues that the focus should be shifted to magazines and periodicals which assimilated Gray's vision into their own sense of purpose. The body of writing he explores includes the genres of literary fiction, philosophy, and journalism, such as the works of the political theorist Tom Nairn and the *Red Paper on Scotland* (edited by Gordon Brown). A dense network of magazines, campaign groups and SNP and Labour Party factions served as the training-grounds for devolved Scotland's future elite. Much of the contemporary Scottish political landscape can be linked to the writing, editing, and publishing endeavours of the decades leading up to the establishment of Holyrood.

Giving a further perspective on the question of influence, Lise Butler, Jane Elliott, and Jon Lawrence explore how social scientists, from the 1960s to the 1980s, used the weekly *New Society* as a means of reframing policy debates. The magazine was specifically intended to 'bridge the gap between thinkers and policy makers', and this required the academics who wrote for it to tailor style and content to their audience. Butler, Elliott, and Lawrence focus on three key contributors: the planner Peter Hall, and the sociologists Ann Oakley and Ray Pahl. Drawing on extensive interview records, Chapter 12 considers how these individuals approached the practice of writing, and how they adapted from the academic mode of writing to a more accessible genre. The case studies

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reveal the techniques the thinkers concerned deployed in their efforts at popularisation and show how their articles fitted into the *New Society* format, which involved the widespread use of illustrations.

Chapter 13 moves in a more theoretical direction, asking how we can best understand and assess performances and the production of authorial identities in the genre of social criticism. Focusing on George Orwell, Virginia Woolf, and E. P. Thompson, the chapter notes that society's critics often adopt identities as self-conscious dissidents. They claim to be articulating the viewpoint of the 'outsider', in order to stress a kind of virtuous isolation, but this should be regarded as a sophisticated rhetorical move rather than as the articulation of a simple, true identity. By training his lens on aspects of the critics' writing that might, on the surface, appear to be purely decorative, Collini shows how the techniques of literary criticism can form valuable additions to the toolbox of the analyst of political writing.

Collectively, the chapters show the importance of political writing and publishing to political movements and their activism. Different forms of political writing were vital not only for documenting the variety of lived experience but for the shaping of political identities. The case studies brought together here represent, not the complete history of all the relevant genres, but rather a series of 'core samples' which allow us to investigate the peculiar features of a series of political strata.[62] In the light of recent calls for disciplinary renewal, we hope they will suggest to political geologists some promising directions for future explorations.[63]

[62] For the 'core sample' approach, see Lawrence Black, *Redefining British Politics: Culture, Consumerism and Participation, 1954–70* (Basingstoke, 2010), pp. 2–3.

[63] Colm Murphy, 'Introduction: The Future of British Political History', *The Political Quarterly*, 94 (2023), pp. 201–7.

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