

Institution: King's College London		
Unit of Assessment: 27 English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: War's Aftermath: Using History to Change Perceptions of Being European		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2010–2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Professor Lara Feigel	Professor of Modern Literature and Culture	From 2008
Dr Alisa Miller	Post-doctoral Research Associate	Oct 2016 – Feb 2020
Period when the claimed impact occurred: Sep 2013 – Dec 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		

1. Summary of the impact

In comparison to the well-known and often-rehearsed history and culture of the Second World War, the immediate post-war period receives significantly less attention. King's researchers set out to focus attention on the aftermath of the war between 1945 and 1950, arguing that this period remains crucial to shaping our world today, and that through better understanding this pivotal time we can better respond to Brexit and the current crisis of the EU, the refugee crisis and rise of nationalism. Pathways to impact included popularly acclaimed publications, an art exhibition, radio programmes and large-scale public symposiums. We succeeded in:

- shaping debate about European collaboration/movement to include awareness of the past;
- developing and using an affective history to build bridges between artists across Europe: changing artists' and galleries' practice, changing audience perspectives to enable them to use melancholia as a source of political action, changing media perspectives by making a case for melancholia as a force for change; and
- fostering a new sense of European citizenship: influencing activists, influencing audience members and changing media perspectives by articulating a new cultural vision.

2. Underpinning research

Before King's research drew attention to the war's immediate aftermath, literary and historical scholarly attention to the 1940s tended to be focused on the much-studied years of the Second World War. The post-war years received less attention among historians and literary scholars. King's researchers focused on the period 1945–1950 as crucial in shaping the cultural and political climate of the post-war world and as vital to understanding (and therefore shaping) the world we live in today. In particular, King's research has enabled a new understanding of:

The refugee crisis

The refugee crisis facing us now is part of a long history of imperial and capitalist international exploitation and reached a particular intensity following the Second World War. At the end of the war, the boundaries of many nation states were redrawn and new nations were created; anyone who talks now about national self-determination does well to remember how recent many nations are. King's research has shown in particular how the writing of the 1940s helps to make the refugee crisis less abstract, giving vivid portraits both of individual refugees and of the camps of 'displaced persons'. We analysed literary writers like Stephen Spender, Victor Gollancz, Erika and Klaus Mann and Peter de Mendelssohn, who witnessed Europe in the 1940s and found ways to document both the scale of the mass movement and the plight of displaced individuals. We reframed the refugee crisis of the present as intimately connected to the refugee crisis of the immediate post-war years and we highlighted the need to learn from the aftermath of the Second World War [1,3]. In the process, we provided the materials for a measured and informed response to the catastrophist xenophobic scare-story about immigration today.

The beginning of the European community

King's research has shown that the idea of the EU began in the immediate post-war years. Typically, the EU is seen as an economic idea, resulting in the European Coal and Steel community. By looking at cultural figures, we showed that the idea originated earlier and was more ambitious. Focusing on post-war Germany, we showed people looking around at the rubble and thinking that the only way to avoid mass destruction was to collaborate across nations, coming up with new supranational modes of government [5]. We also showed Germany to be a site of collaboration following the war. When the UK, US, Soviet Union and France divided the country and ruled collaboratively in Berlin, they showed that supranational collaboration was possible. Rulers and cultural figures in Germany talked about making this a larger European project [4].

Culture's place in politics

King's researchers have shown culture as crucial to the politics that shaped the post-war world. The political rulers in post-war Germany saw culture as crucial in their vision of democratising and reconstructing Germany. As post-war gave way to Cold War, culture became a weapon in the battle between the US and Soviet Union that took place in Germany. King's researchers showed that concurrently, public intellectuals throughout Europe were calling for a Europe united in cultural as well as economic ways [2,6]. They articulated a positive vision of being European that has been startlingly lacking in debates about Brexit. Reviewing *The Bitter Taste of Victory*, the *LA Review of Books* lauded this "intelligent and moving book" for illuminating this. The reviewer was particularly stimulated by the research produced on Stephen Spender, who argued for a cultural vision of Europe, and suggested that we might learn from this now: "Today the EU is soulless, and unable to rouse the affinities of its citizens. So perhaps Spender was right" [1].

Ambivalence and melancholia

We introduced affect – specifically melancholy – as an overlooked means of nuancing the historical account of European post-war identities. Taking Enzo Traverso's concept of 'left-wing melancholia' as a starting point, King's research has shown melancholia as characteristic among post-war intellectuals and politicians invested in the idea of a united Europe, and as connecting them to those trying to forge an identity as Europeans today. Seeing the paralysis of contemporary politics that results from division, we showed the historical context for these divisions and made space for doubt and melancholia within public debate, suggesting, in line with Traverso, that understanding historical melancholia can galvanise the process of change (see [6] and [1]).

Feigel and co-curator John-Paul Stonard extended this research in the lead-up to the Melancholia exhibition. They saw the writer W. G. Sebald as a key figure in articulating melancholia for the present, taking as a starting point his work on post-war Germany and his suggestion that "describing the dismal plight we face contains the possibility of overcoming it". Sebald's work connected with Traverso's concept of 'left-wing melancholia', showing that melancholia enables us to use the energy enabled by mourning to keep going, remaining progressive in a changing political climate. For Sebald and Traverso (in contrast to Freud), melancholia is a progressive affect. By drawing directly on Sebald, we made the positive case for European identity that we felt was lacking in the debates about Brexit, using affect to remain European even as Europe disintegrated politically and to stress our lineage with thinkers and artists in the past and our connectedness as Europeans within the present.

3. References to the research

1. Feigel, L. (2016). *The Bitter Taste of Victory: In the Ruins of the Reich*. London: Bloomsbury. Listed as an output for REF 2021.
2. Feigel, L. & Morley, E. (eds) (2016). *The Transformative Power of Culture in Occupied Germany*, Special Issue of *Comparative Critical Studies*, 13(2).
3. Feigel, L. & Oliver, E. (eds) (2018). *Narratives of Identity and Nationhood in Occupied Germany*. Special Issue of *German Life and Letters*, 71(2).
4. Feigel, L. (2009). Writing the Foundations of a Better World, The Role of Anglo-German Literary Exchange in the Reconstruction of Germany and the Construction of Europe, 1945–1949. In S. Bru, J. Baetens, B. Hjartarson, P. Nicholls, T. Ørum & H. van den Berg (eds), *Europa! Europa? The Avant-Garde, Modernism and the Fate of a Continent* (pp.229–243). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

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5. Feigel, L. (2016). 'The Sermons in the Stones of Germany Preach Nihilism': 'Outsider Rubble Literature' and the reconstruction of Germany, 1945–1949. *Comparative Critical Studies*, 13(2), 233–253.

6. Feigel L. & Miller, A. (2019). 'This is Something Which We Know, In Our Bones, We Cannot Do': Hopes and Fears for a United Europe in Britain after the Second World War. In I. Haberman (ed.), *The Road to Brexit: A Cultural Perspective on British Attitudes to Europe* (pp.44–68). Manchester: MUP.

4. Details of the impact

Over the last seven years, King's researchers have engaged international artists, writers, activists and diverse publics through literary festivals, radio programmes, newspaper articles and symposiums. We used post-war Germany as a case study, allowing us to see the refugee crisis, the development of an idea of Europe and left-wing melancholia in close up. We then took these findings about the post-war period to illuminate and change the situation in post-war Europe and in particular the UK. During our project, the British voted to leave the EU and the debates about being European became more frequent and more urgent. There was a widescale rise of nationalist feeling and an associated wave of hostility to the refugees who were moving in great numbers across Europe. Using our research, we intervened to change perceptions both of the EU and of the refugee crisis. At a time when the case for staying in the EU tended to be made in economic or political terms, we made a positive case for being European, arguing for a shared cultural identity. We also used the idea of affect – specifically melancholy – to introduce a more complex and nuanced historical account of European post-war identities in the context of the largely economic and/or politically nationalist debates that developed during the Brexit period.

Shaping debate about European collaboration/movement to include awareness of the past

King's research about post-war Germany coincided with a period of urgent debate about Britain's role in Europe and the mass movement of refugees across Europe. We intervened in these debates, changing the perspectives of media professionals by using our new research to remind them that the movement of refugees had its roots in the period of reconstruction after the War. By doing so, we reminded them of why the EU existed in the first place and of what is at stake in leaving it (the breakdown of the peace process begun in 1945). We also reminded people that European nations including Britain have weathered a previous mass movement of populations without losing a sense of national identity or home. We were able to make debates on this subject more nuanced. Reminding people that the EU began partly as a cultural idea (with a notion of a shared culture), we intervened in debates to make a positive case for being European.

We changed the practice of media professionals in the UK and worldwide (specifically in countries with strong links to the EU or the UK, such as India and Australia) to include these perspectives in their debates. These producers made programmes with considerable international reach. Feigel spoke about the reconstruction of Germany and the inception of Europe on Australia's influential *Late Night Live* (267,833 listeners) and on Radio 3's *Private Passions* (250,000 listeners; Feigel chose and discussed pieces of music related to the cultural reconstruction of Germany). The producer of *Private Passions* said: "*Feigel's research brought a new perspective to Radio 3, enabling us to focus on the role of culture in postwar reconstruction and on the roles of cultural figures in Britain and Germany in promoting European integration. This intervention came at a crucial time, following the Brexit vote*". Feigel spoke about the importance of looking back to 1945 as a moment of mass movement and when Britain was committed to being European in order to promote peace on a Radio 3 *New Thinking* 'Free Thinking' podcast about post-war Germany. The producer said: "*we were grateful to Lara Feigel for bringing her research on the reconstruction of Germany into the frame of the debate about Germany now and Europe now. Feigel reminded us that the cooperation between nations in Germany now was crucial in beginning the process of collaboration that led to the inception of the EU. Without her research, we wouldn't have covered this*" [A].

We also used our research to change the perspectives of individual audience members at the 27 talks Feigel gave at literary festivals. These included Cheltenham Literature Festival, Jaipur Literature Festival and Bristol Festival of Ideas. The event chair at Bristol (June 2017, with 150 attendees: writers, general readers, national and international media) reported: "*Lara's new research showed that the occupation of Germany was where all the international cooperation*

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today began. The event changed the tone of debate around this, enabling people to be more questioning and giving us a larger context for the discussion” [B].

Using affect to build bridges between artists across Europe

In the wake of the 2016 Brexit vote, and in the midst of the migrant crisis, King’s researchers used our new research on post-war melancholia to curate an exhibition at Somerset House entitled *Melancholia: A Sebald Variation* (Sept–Dec 2017). This used the bombed cities and the swarming refugees of 1945 as a starting point in making a case for melancholia as a common affect uniting European artists and as a force for change. The exhibition was a collaboration with the CCCB in Barcelona (who had just mounted a Sebald exhibition). From the Barcelona exhibition, we took works by Susan Hiller, Jeremy Wood and the Dutch artist Guido Van der Werve. Alongside these, we assembled works including: German artist Albrecht Dürer’s 1514 *Melencolia*, a major loan from the British Museum that enabled us to exhibit the foundational image of melancholia as a potential force of revelation and change; and British artist Tacita Dean’s *Bless Our Europe*, specially commissioned for the exhibition.

Changing artists’ and galleries’ practice: We used the exhibition to build bridges between artists across Europe, establishing that their work has common roots in the post-war period and its melancholic affect. The exhibition fuelled the artists and collaborative gallery with hopeful energy, enabling them to turn the melancholic past into a source of energy in the present. CCCB commented: *“the King’s exhibition revealed the melancholic theme of the art, and showed this to respond to war’s aftermath. It revealed melancholia itself to have regenerative powers that we can call on now. This is a theme we continue to explore”* [C]. For the artists, the exhibition fostered a new sense of shared European themes and of the relationship between contemporary art and the post-war past. A Turner Prize shortlisted British artist who exhibited wrote: *“the excellent melancholia exhibition allowed me to create a new context for my work and transform public understanding of contemporary painting, opening it to the largest historical and cultural questions in ways that have enriched my practice since.”* An award winning Dutch artist wrote: *“melancholia is an important theme in my work and it meant a lot to see that I have this theme in common with other European artists, and that this takes us back to our common past. It has fuelled a new phase of my work and has made me see the political potential of my work, in using the past to provide resistance in the present.”* [C].

Changing audience perspectives: We enabled the viewers of the exhibition to use melancholia as a source of political action, revealing melancholia as a potentially galvanising force. The exhibition was attended by 6,201 members of the public (artists, curators, writers, students, general visitors, national and international art and general media) and succeeded in making a case for melancholia as a connective force. Attendees commented: *“It made me re-think melancholia as not merely reactionary or defeated acceptance; but rather as the beginning of a possibility of overcoming suffering”*; *“[I] work in health. It provided an example of communication and how to explore loss”* [C].

Changing media perspectives: We used our research to bring new perspectives to print media, making a case for melancholia as a force for change. Feigel published an article in the *Financial Times* (readership 1,000,000; circulation 175,512) arguing for melancholia as *“the only possible honest and enriching response to the human and specifically the European condition”* [C]. Stonard published an article about van der Werve in *The Guardian* (readership: 1,027,000; circulation: 132,831), introducing him to UK readers for the first time, arguing that *“the theme of exile, journeys and historical reminiscence bring Nummer Veertien into the orbit of the writings of W. G. Sebald”* [C]. *The Guardian Review* editor wrote: *“we were delighted to use King’s research to introduce this major artist to the UK and to show how important melancholia is as a force for change.”* The review in *Frieze* (readership: 319,230 (print)) praised *“the exhibition’s examination of itinerancy and loneliness, which ... feels especially resonant in light of the ongoing migrant crisis”* [C].

Culture before politics: fostering a new sense of European citizenship

Following the exhibition, we wanted to ask how to turn left-wing melancholia into political activism and to address the refugee crisis explicitly and connect it to the past. We felt that, as the Brexit process went on, the Remain cause had failed to articulate a positive vision of European identity. King’s research has shown that culture was fundamental to the inception of the EU, so we wanted to use this to make a case for the continued importance of culture in conceptualising European identity. The Idea of Europe (timed to take place a week after the 31 October 2019 deadline to

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leave the EU) brought 12 influential activists and cultural leaders together to use our research to articulate a new (cultural) vision of being European. These included an activist and recent MEP candidate who co-founded DiEM25, the movement for democracy in Europe (70,000 members), bestselling authors and broadcasters from around the world.

Influencing activists: The co-founder of DiEM25 stated that the symposium changed his future approach: *“the symposium and workshop gave me a new context for thinking and a new public to engage with. It galvanised and nuanced my thinking about how an activist European identity can affect current political realities and how literature can play a part in activism. Going forward, I intend to make more of culture in shaping policy within the DiEM25 movement and intend to find ways to make an understanding of postwar ruin and migration accessible to contemporary audiences, reminding European governments that the migration crises have roots in the 1940s and that the countries they rule are recent creations.”* [D]. The day before the symposium we ran a workshop with this activist, aimed at training activists to articulate new narratives around migration and Brexit. One participant, an Afghani human rights attorney who does pro bono work for refugees and had been feeling frustrated by the *“false and useless narratives”* associated with migration and Brexit, wrote that the workshop had strengthened her perception of how writers and literature can influence society and encouraged her to alter her professional practice: *“this is a great way to engage, learn, and teach and I will use what I have learnt to help empower the refugees I work with by teaching them more about the continuity with the postwar refugee crisis.”*

Influencing audience members: The majority of feedback forms received suggested that the perspectives of our international 250-person audience had been changed. One person reported it had *“encouraged me to look beyond Britain and Europe”* when examining ideas of Europe and migration, raising the idea of enacting a more *“poetic approach to migration”*. A Finnish participant wrote that the collaborative discussions – in illuminating the *“interplay”* between *“politics, culture and literature”* – had lead them to the conclusion that *“We need new narratives”* grounded in historical contexts, and that, with respect to their personal and professional practice, *“It definitely challenged me to think where I should head after graduating. I really do feel empowered.”*

Changing the perspectives of media professionals: The symposium was a collaboration with *Granta* magazine (readership: 50,000), who themed their November 2019 issue on Europe to coincide with the conference and co-commissioned four articles from our speakers. *Granta’s* deputy editor reported that their work has been changed by the collaboration: *“The work Feigel and the Beyond Enemy Lines team are doing feels hugely important, and it was exciting for us to be introduced to a new selection of vibrant, young European writers who are now very much on our radar and who we will commission to write for Granta magazine.”* [D] Feigel was asked to write an article in *The Guardian* asking what we can learn from post-war European literature and arguing that Remainers need to be better Europeans by engaging actively with it. This launched a new column commissioned by *The Guardian*, inspired by the symposium (*Notes From*, launched 23 November 2019, reporting on the contemporary literary scene in Europe) [E]. The Director of the European Literature Network wrote that the research underpinning the symposium convinced her that: *“Culture should be at the heart of the Brexit discussion – this is ever clearer to me.”* She felt *“better informed, better equipped to talk to others about European culture and literature”* [D]. The project created lasting changes to media attitudes to Europe.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

A. Media appearances: audience figures (*Private Passions*, *Late Night Live*); testimonials from *Private Passions* producer and ‘Free Thinking’ producer.

B. Testimonial from Bristol Festival of Ideas event chair.

C. Melancholia exhibition: audience feedback; testimonials from the CCCB, Barcelona, artist collaborators, *The Guardian Review* editor; review: ‘Revisiting hell’, *Frieze*; articles coinciding with exhibition: Feigel in the *Financial Times*, Stonard in *The Guardian*.

D. The Idea of Europe symposium and workshop: programme; *Granta* magazine tie-in issue; audience feedback; testimonials from *Granta* Deputy Editor and the co-founder of DiEM25.

E. *The Guardian* column, ‘Notes From’.